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ALBATROSSES

By W. L. N. Tickell

2000. Pica Press, East Sussex. 448 pp., many colour plates, line drawings and maps. 250 × 193 mm. Hard cover. US\$60.

In a comprehensive sweep of albatross topics, from the earliest references to the great birds in historical accounts of ocean exploration to the most recent advances in ecological research, *Albatrosses* by W. L. N. Tickell is a smorgasbord of all things albatross.

Chapter 1 sets the scene with explanations of the origins of names applied to albatrosses: gooney, sooty, alcatraz and mollymawk and other such complimentary and otherwise terms. Albatross taxonomy, currently a subject of considerable debate, is discussed and the basis of the different points of view explained. Tickell has a bet both ways, avoiding the question of rank by using English common names in lists of terminal taxa and summarising the number of species and/or subspecies they represent, depending on which approach one favours.

Chapter 2 describes the general similarities and differences between albatrosses and their closest relatives, the petrels, in their geological history, morphology and ecology, and provides a succinct review of the main characteristics of the group. This chapter deals with common topics that might otherwise have to be repeated in later chapters.

The main body of the book examines albatrosses from a geographic perspective, providing detailed information on the albatross groups based on the oceans they inhabit: the southern albatrosses of the Southern Ocean (Chapters 3–7), the Galapagos Albatross of the Equatorial Pacific Ocean (Chapters 8–9) and the northern albatrosses of the North Pacific Ocean (Chapters 10–12). These chapters are replete with maps, tables and diagrams. Within each ocean system, geographic and historic descriptions of albatross breeding islands provide the context for the subsequent chapters on the albatross groups that breed on them. These later chapters on taxa groupings cover topics on distribution, numbers, breeding, food, parasites and disease, predators and conservation. The discussions on taxa groupings inevitably lead to some duplication, such as the maps of southern ocean islands which are repeated for each breeding species.

Chapters 13–16 are comparative treatments of moult, flight, behaviour and ecology. Like the previous chapters, these chapters, although at times more technical, are easily followed. The history of research on moult (Chapter 13) and flight (Chapter 14) is outlined and the state of current knowledge assessed. The chapter on behaviour (Chapter 15) uses extensive diagrams to illustrate the behavioural repertoires of the albatross groups and the text is a thorough treatment of the present understanding of albatross behaviour. Effort has been made to canvass all available sources of information. For example, postures and actions of Steller's

Albatross, for which there has been no study of behaviour, are illustrated from film sequences.

Breeding, population dynamics, foraging and feeding, energetics and the environmental impacts of albatross populations are compared in the ecology chapter (Chapter 16). The development of research in these fields is succinctly outlined. Of particular note are the advances in research on population dynamics and foraging and feeding ecology in recent years, some of which has been instigated in response to the expansion of fisheries. Chapter 16 elucidates the ways in which these studies have been aided by innovation in satellite tracking and physiological and environmental sensors.

In Chapter 17 human impacts on albatrosses are examined from their inclusion in the diet of island people and sea-farers to their loss as bycatch in fisheries and exposure to pollutants. The chapter concludes with information on national and international conservation efforts.

Albatrosses is an authoritative, thoroughly referenced and easy-to-read account of albatross biology. But *Albatrosses* is also much more than a biology text. Interspersed throughout the book, fascinating historical accounts place advances in albatross study in the wider context of scientific and geographic exploration. The full-colour photographic section contains quality portraits by a number of photographers that could easily grace a coffee-table publication. Even the literary mind is stimulated when, in the final chapter (Chapter 18), the role of the albatross as mariner's muse is examined in an anthology of verse.

This is a book that both albatross specialists and others like me who are confined, in the main, to an armchair appreciation of albatrosses will return to again and again. I highly recommend it.

Amanda Freeman
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