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Albatross



Wingspan

Albatrosses are HUGE! This picture shows a boy next to a Royal albatross (it is drawn to scale).

The boy is 1.5 metres from fingertip to fingertip (and 1.5 metres tall). His weight is 30 kilograms. The Royal albatross (at the top) is 3.5 metres from wingtip to wingtip, and weighs 8 kilograms. The Antipodean or Wandering albatross is 3.2 metres from wingtip to wingtip.

Fact Box

- Albatrosses are the largest seabirds in the world.
- Twenty two species live on the islands around NZ.
- Albatrosses spend most of their lives at sea. They only come to land to make their nests.
- The biggest of all, the Royal albatross, flies right around the southern oceans, past South America and back to New Zealand!
- Fishing kills tens of thousands of albatrosses every year.
- Albatrosses need protection. So many are being killed that many albatross species are heading for extinction.

Tube noses

Albatrosses eat fish and squid and drink sea water. You would die if you only had sea water to drink because it's so salty. The albatross lives on seawater and gets rid of the salt in drips from its 'tube-nose', which makes it look like the bird is crying.

Albatrosses are part of the 'tube-nose' family of seabirds. Petrels and shearwaters are tube-nose seabirds, but gannets and seagulls are not.

Nesting and breeding

An albatross can live day and night at sea, feeding on fish and sleeping on the water. But there is something the albatross cannot do at sea – they can't make a nest and breed there.

Albatrosses usually return to nest where they were hatched. A pair will usually stay together for life. Albatrosses don't breed until they are about 10 years old, and some can still have babies at the grand old age of sixty.

It's hard getting airborne when you're so big. That's why albatrosses choose nest sites on cliff edges. They can take off on the wind that rises as it hits the cliff.

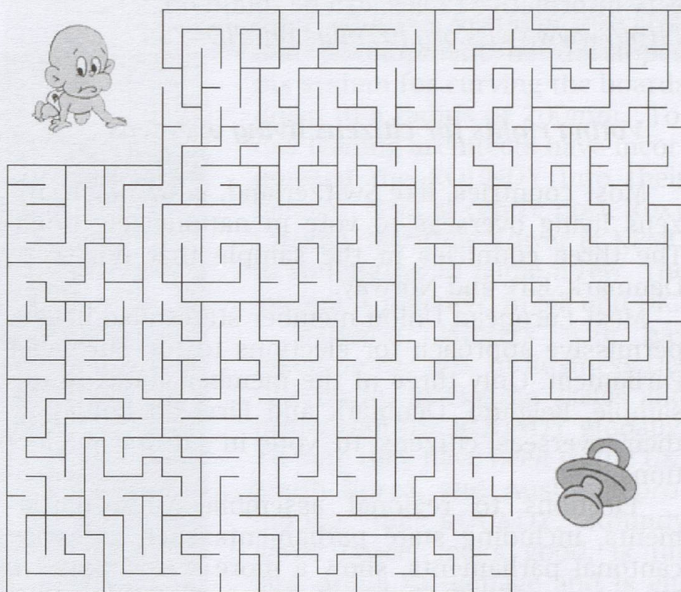
Their nest sites seem grim to us. They have no shelter and are exposed to wind and rain. Albatrosses would have nested on cliffs around New Zealand before people and pests came here. Now they can only safely nest on pest-free offshore islands where people rarely go.

Albatrosses only lay one egg, usually in November. The incubation period is very long. Royal albatrosses sit on their eggs for between 78 and 81 days. When chicks are born they are fed by both their parents for 7 to 8 months. That's a long time to look after a chick. No wonder albatrosses only breed once every two years.

Soaring the seas...

Because albatrosses depend on the wind to fly and sailors depend on the wind to sail, the albatross became a good omen to sailors. The albatross features in a poem about what happened to a sailor when he killed an albatross. The poem is called 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' by S.T. Coleridge.

Help the baby find his dummy



Jokes

- What kind of screen brings things into the house instead of keeping them out?
A television screen.
- What room has no walls, no doors, no windows and no floors?
The mushroom.

Mathematical puzzle

Fill in the numbers 1 to 9, using each number once. Each side of the triangle should add up to the same sum, and the sum should be as small as possible.

