

winds which threatened to bowl me over—even through snow almost waist deep. I maintained my visits regularly. I grew attached to the birds and my companions used to state cheerfully that the day would come when I would not return to the camp, and the resultant search party would find me broodily squatting on a nest and being offered ancient fish or squid by a motherly albatross!

At first the chicks offered no problems and, once the parents' confidence had been obtained, were withdrawn from the nest and placed on ordinary household scales when being weighed. Later, when the guard-period of six weeks after hatching was over and the chicks grew heavier and stronger, a piece of sack and a strong spring balance had to be used.

Almost an Accident

At this stage, too, the chicks had a will of their own and, partly to prevent them losing their dinners, but more to prevent them exercising their powerful beaks on my person, I would slip a strong rubber band round the beak. Then came the day when I nearly met with a serious accident. Whether I failed to put the band on properly; whether it slipped, or whether the chick managed to get it off, I will never know. But suddenly, whilst reading the scales, I was seized in the region of the eye by the 30-pound chick. The hook of the beak entered over the ridge of

bone below the eye, fortunately missing the eye itself. With tears and blood streaming down my cheek I had to prise the chick's beak gently open, replace the chick on the nest, keep my temper, staunch the flow of blood and then continue with the job. I never failed after that to make sure the ring round the beak was securely placed and that the rubber was not perished.

Although the visits for weighing and measuring were made weekly, two visits a day had to be made at the time the eggs were laid, in order to ascertain the exact half-day in which the egg of the mated pair under observation appeared. This had to be followed at a later date by visits twice daily when the eggs were hatching. This gave me the exact incubation period, a duration of rather more than eleven weeks—which must be the longest incubation period known to birds.

Knowledge Gained

All birds were ringed and this kept an adequate check on the albatrosses using the area I called my "Royal colony." It



DOWNY BIRD: Royal Albatross Chick

helped to solve many questions of albatross behaviour and to dispel satisfactorily some of the erroneous conjectures of the past. For instance, it used to be claimed that the albatrosses left their chick to fast for several months and when they returned later in the year chased it off the nest before they bred again. Actually the chick is fed right to the last, the parents even being known to return and search for it after it had flown.

The albatrosses which successfully rear a chick only nest every second

year. Should the egg be lost or the chick die at an early stage then the parents will breed again the following year. Another claim which was proved false was that the birds return year after year to the same nest. Certainly the majority of the birds on Campbell Island returned to the same area but in no case was the old nest ever known to be used again.

The return of mated pairs was eagerly looked for each season and they were greeted as old friends when they did. Would the mated pair of a certain nest turn up again after their year's holiday? Had one of the birds, or both, died in the meantime? Had they chosen another locality? These and many more questions were duly answered by intensive study.

Just as the personalities of different human beings differ, so do those of individual albatrosses. The majority of the birds I studied became very tame; just a few never conquered their dislike of being handled, and always resisted.

Late in the year, approximately nine months after hatching, the now fully fledged chicks take off, somewhat unsteadily, to obtain their own living at sea. Many had to be rescued from crash landings in scrub or deep valleys. In such positions they are unable to take off again, and perish unless taken and liberated in the harbours.

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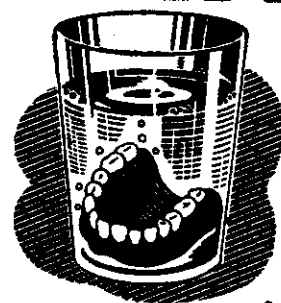
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