

itself. As I am something of an iconoclast, with more faith in the book of Nature, it was with considerable excitement that I watched the chick as he reached the age of three months. Was I to be the first human being to witness this amazing desertion? For 16 consecutive days at the crucial stage, I remained constantly at the nest from daylight until dark. Sand was placed all around the nest so that the movements of the parents could be checked when I was absent.

The first upset came when I noticed that the chick at the three to four-monthly period was not even fat, weighing only 12lbs.; subsequently he attained 22½lbs. Gradually, while watching day after day, I became aware that not only was the chick not going to be deserted, but that he was actually being fed more frequently. From twice a week the rate rose to five times a week and did not revert to the twice-weekly interval until shortly before the chick flew. The reason for the increased feeding was obvious; it coincided with the growing of the feathers, when apparently more and not less food is required. And so the book of Nature proved the more accurate. Subsequently, it was found that the chick was never deserted by the parents; in fact, he deserted them, for one day on their arrival to feed him, the parents found that their babe was no longer waiting for them.

#### Year's Holiday for Parent Birds

The departure of the chick occurred only two weeks before the new breeding season was due to commence, which meant that, as Albatrosses were thought to breed annually, the two parents under discussion would have only two weeks' rest before once more commencing their 11½ months' breeding cycle. Nature, however, has ordered otherwise. Albatross parents successful in rearing a chick take a year's holiday, so that the birds breeding in the new season are different birds altogether. In other words, Royal Albatrosses breed every second year. This procedure has been rigidly followed by every set of parents responsible for the rearing of the 15 chicks which have left the breeding grounds to date, so that apparently there is no variation in this rule.

The question of the age to which Albatrosses live has yet to be determined, but they are certainly long-lived. Three of the 15 young reared returned to the breeding area. So far not one has bred, and it appears that they do not breed until they are about 10 years old. This is most remarkable, and the fact also suggests that the birds live to a great age.

A final word concerns what I call the unemployed birds—that is to say, birds which in any given season for a variety of reasons are not breeding. It is on these birds that the future development of the colony depends. They are timid, not used to the presence of people, and are not anchored to a fixed spot as are the breeding birds. Undue movement or disturbance of any kind among them tends to keep them away from the breeding area, a condition which makes it harder to save the colony. It is, therefore, essential that while unemployed birds are on the breeding grounds, trying to form marriage bonds for future breeding, they should be assured of privacy.

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