

EYE ON THE NEWS

WISDOM, BELIEVED WORLD'S OLDEST ALBATROSS, IS A NEW MOM!

By E.M. FAY



The albatross is a remarkable bird in more than one way. Leaving aside the spectral figure that haunted the guilt-ridden Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's famous poem, these seabirds have several amazing qualities: Albatrosses are among the largest of flying birds, with the Great Albatross the largest of all birds alive today, having a wingspan of up to twelve feet. Fantastic flyers, they can stay aloft for hours at a time, navigating air currents efficiently, beating their wings only occasionally, thus traversing great distances with a minimum of effort. One member of the genus, the Wandering Albatross, spends most of his or her life in the air, landing only to feed and breed.

A female member of the species, named Wisdom by those who study her, has just made some intriguing news. **At age 62, she is the oldest-known wild bird in the world, yet she has become a mother again. On February 3rd, she hatched a healthy chick at her home in the Midway Islands.**

Wisdom is a Laysan Albatross, and this species does not normally live much beyond 30 years. But perhaps being a prolific mother is especially good for Wisdom's longevity, for she is estimated to have hatched about 35 chicks over her lifetime. She also regularly flies around the Pacific Ocean, like birds half her age, say the scientists who have studied her, logging up to 50,000 miles per year by their reckoning.

Threats to albatrosses' existence are, as with most species, caused by humans. Pollution, over-fishing by man, hunting, and introduced species that eat their eggs, are all taking a toll on the worldwide albatross population. Let us hope that Wisdom's story is not unique, and that her hardiness will be imparted to her young, allowing this wonderful species to survive.

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poignant poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (published,

1798) the albatross is both a real bird, who saved a ship full of sailors' lives by showing them a safe passage towards home, and a symbol meant to awaken human conscience, when its spirit returns to haunt the mariner who ungratefully shot the bird dead: "With his cruel bow he laid full low The harmless Albatross." More than ever these days it seems, mankind needs reminding to show appreciation and respect for our winged friends. To quote near the end of the poem:

*He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God Who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.*

More at:

<http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/02/12/worlds-oldest-wild-bird-stumps-scientists-by-giving-birth-at-age-62/#ixzz2KuRBsDpx>