



MARCH 2015

Dear TAG supporters,

We are only 300 pounds away from reaching our target of 10 tags! This is a huge achievement and we could not have done it without all of your support!

Daring Divers!

In order to eat, a Gannet will often fly up to 300 miles from its breeding colony to find a shoal of fish to feed on. When a shoal of fish is sought the Gannet will dive into the water like a bullet at speeds of over 60 miles per hour whilst, at the same time, competing with other foraging seabirds and marine mammals such as dolphins, whales and sharks. After diving into the water Gannets use their wings and feet as paddles to propel them deeper in pursuit of fish such as Mackerel and in doing so are able to reach depths of 22m! Not only are Gannets strong divers they are also equipped with excellent binocular vision which they can adapt from use in the air to water in a split second; they also have the ability to block out UV light reflection which can alter the position of a moving fish if not filtered out!

They might not look like it but Northern Gannets really are one of the world's greatest diving birds!



Fun Fact: Gannets actually have a third eyelid! Just before they hit the water a transparent membrane covers the eyes protecting them whilst not obstructing the birds' view.



Going the Distance

In Northern Gannets both the males and the females have similar body sizes. It is common in birds that have differently sized males and females to obtain food differently during chick rearing; however it is much more unusual in birds like Gannets to forage differently. While Gannets are rearing chicks one parent remains on the nest whilst the other one feeds and on return they almost instantaneously switch roles. Through GPS trackers similar to the ones we are installing it has been shown that when rearing chicks the female Gannets tend to travel much greater distances compared to the males. As well as this they have actually been shown to eat a different variety of fish during this time, with males feeding on a higher proportion of white fish compared to females. As white fish tend to be found at greater depths than Gannets can dive this food source is most likely discarded fish from fishing vessels. So why is this? Well it is unknown why the males travel shorter distances and rely more on discards but it could be because males spend more time defending the nest. This frees the females to travel further distances for food. Conversely, despite the differences in distance it has also been shown that the time females spend away from the nest is not significantly different to that of the males. So although we do not have a definitive answer to why they forage differently, it may well be that the females just refuse to eat leftover fish!

C. STAUSS ET AL (2012). Sex-specific foraging behaviour in northern gannets *Morus bassanus*: incidence and implications. Marine Ecology Progress Series. 457, 151-162.

