



Gannet Fact Sheet 9

Nests and Eggs

Each pair will lay one egg that weighs just over 100g which is much lighter than other seabirds. Sometimes two eggs are found in one nest and this can either mean that one egg has been stolen from another nest or two females have laid an egg in the same nest. If one egg is lost from the nest then the female will lay another egg to replace the one she has lost. After the egg has been laid the pair will take it in turns to incubate the egg for 42-46 days and they do this using their webbed feet which are filled with warm blood. Once the chick is ready to hatch (which may take up to a day and a half!) the incubating parent will stop covering the egg with his or her feet and allow the chick to break freely of the egg, this stops the parent accidentally standing on the chick. Unfortunately this is a common cause of death in the chicks of first time parents³. Once the chick has fully hatched from the egg case it is rarely left alone by its parents and chicks that are left unattended can be killed or attacked by other Gannets. In the first few weeks of life a chick will be covered in fluffy white downy feathers but gradually the chick will begin to grow a covering of black feathers (which are waterproof). The reason the feathers are black is so that the parents don't mistake their own chick for being an intruder and accidentally attack their own offspring!



Young chicks are fed semi-digested food by their parents and gradually the chick will be fed whole fish as it grows. Gannet chicks do not move around the nesting site or flap their wings to beg for food as this reduces their chances of falling from the nesting site which can often be on precarious cliff edges. Parents will feed by their chicks for 11-12 weeks at which point a chick may weigh more than its parent at over 4kg (adults weigh up to 3kg!)

Once ready to fledge the nest the chick will glide down into the sea and as they are so heavy they are unable to return to the cliff. Their fat reserves will allow them to spend 2-3 weeks without eating but if a bird leaves the nest in bad weather conditions there is a chance they may be blown against the rocks and get badly injured. Being unable to fly back to the cliff is also beneficial as young birds can also be attacked by adults if they enter the breeding ground so they stay at sea where they learn to fish and fly.