

Far from Land: The Mysterious Lives of Seabirds

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BOOK REVIEW

Far from Land: The Mysterious Lives of Seabirds

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Far from Land: The Mysterious Lives of Seabirds by Michael Brooke. 2018. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA. x + 249 pp., 8 color plates, 13 maps, numerous figures and line drawings. \$21 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-691-17418-1.

This book is an authoritative, insightful, and evocative natural history of seabirds. They are not the wind-tossed creatures that seafarers once thought, but highly adapted birds that make use of the myriad resources of the oceans. Unlike most birds, seabirds spend most of their lives at sea, which makes them difficult to study using traditional methods. Thus, much of their life history has long remained unknown. Technological advances over the past three decades have allowed seabird biologists to make incredible advances in understanding the behavior and ecology of seabirds on land and at sea, and Brooke provides a popular, scientifically robust, and entertaining account. The digital age has enhanced our knowledge of the wanderings of seabirds beyond our wildest imagination.

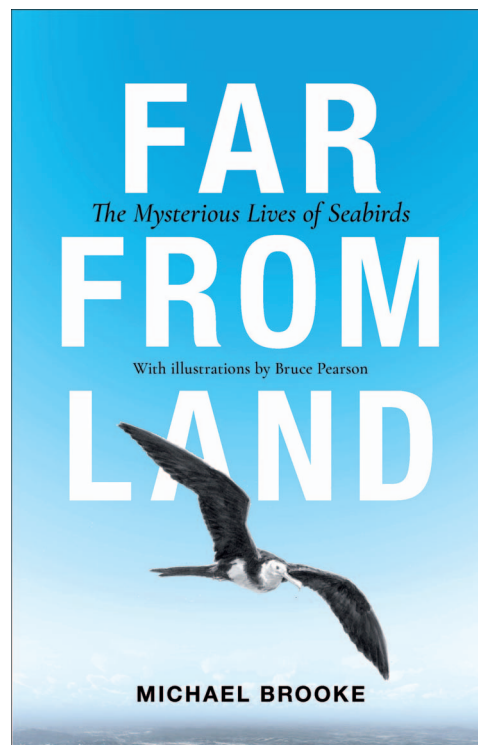
The book contains 10 chapters that include an introduction to seabirds, early journeys, the immaturity years, adult migrations, movements during the breeding season, predators and cooperators, individual behavior, foraging, and interactions with people. This list, however, conveys the topics but not the magical way that Brooke describes each within a framework of the latest theories and technological innovations of seabird biology. This framework provides a guide to understanding the daily lives of seabirds, how

they cope with the physical environment of the oceans and nesting islands, and the social environments of their neighbors—both friend and foe. By providing personal details of how he and other seabird biologists study these creatures, he takes the reader on a seabird adventure. The reader experiences biologists capturing birds, applying

tracking devices (and anxiously waiting to recapture birds the following year), and calling up satellite data to finally discover where albatrosses, petrels, frigatebirds, and other seabirds travel throughout the year. There are thrills in seabird research. For example, nothing compares to holding an albatross that has traveled thousands of miles simply to find food to feed its growing chick.

The book is richly and charmingly illustrated by Bruce Peterson, whose line drawings introduce chapters and concepts and depict daily behavior, including courtship displays, nesting behavior, migration, and antipredator behavior. Particularly poignant drawings show masses of seabirds enmeshed in longlines, and a lone Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalasarche carteri*) caught in a longline hook, flailing in the sea. The figures and maps bring to life the wander-

ings of breeding Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*), differences in the individual feeding ranges of Northern Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*), the trans-equatorial migrations of Sooty Shearwaters (*Ardenna grisea*), and the tracks of individual Atlantic Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), among others. These illustrations convey far more than words about the daily, seasonal, and yearly movements of



seabirds. Because the data are continuous, they show where birds stop, the length of their nonstop migrations, and their travel speeds. They illustrate both individual differences and, in combination, the movement patterns of seabirds that cannot be captured by banding returns or individual observations. It would have been useful, however, for the figures to be numbered and tied to particular passages in the text. The eight color plates illustrate the beautiful and diverse form, function, and beauty of seabirds. Particularly useful is the color image showing marine productivity as measured by chlorophyll concentrations in the world's oceans.

Two really fascinating aspects of the book are Brooke's ability to contrast seabird foraging and movement behavior during the breeding season with those behaviors at other times of the year, and to describe the clashes between humans and seabirds. The similarities and contrasts between the breeding season and the rest of the year are stark, largely because of the place-based nature of breeding and, for some species, the very long breeding season (sometimes allowing breeding only every other year). The constraints of an extended breeding season on behavior are many, and the book amply illustrates these differences among species. The importance of "food hotspots" is discussed for different species that have different constraints. In short, seabirds have divided up the oceans of the world, temporally and spatially, some claiming the underwater realm as their domain, others diving from above. Interspecific and intraspecific competition clearly plays a role in whether a species (or individual) chooses to travel to a food hotspot or to a different place with fewer food resources and less competition. These complicated questions are discussed in easily understood terms, and relevant data from tracking devices are illustrated graphically. Similarly, the varied methods of foraging are

discussed with respect to morphology, behavior, and adaptations. In short, information on the life histories and varied behavior of seabirds is woven throughout the book, forming a fascinating tale of advancing technology, seabird biologists, and seabird biology.

In an era of increasing human populations and their increasing concentration along coasts, the chapter on seabird interactions with humans is thought-provoking and provides some practical solutions to the conflicts. Seabirds are arguably the most threatened group of birds worldwide. They face increasing threats on both land and sea. Habitat disturbance on land, energy development in nearshore habitats, and competition with fisheries on the seas pose major threats and are fairly and openly discussed. The fundamental conflict will remain, especially as human populations increase, and Brooke notes many solutions, including the importance of having new tools to map the locations of foraging hotspots for different seabird species. Given his impressive career, Brooke is in a position to know firsthand how humans can reduce these conflicts, and his suggestions for seabird conservation through fish stock protection and enhancement are noteworthy.

Far from Land is a popular science book that shows how cutting-edge technology has made it possible to understand the lives of birds living across the oceans, and its taxonomic treatment reflects new ideas regarding species limits in seabird families. Brooke eloquently describes how seabirds manage to breed on remote islands and fly over the vast seas to forage, sometimes thousands of miles from their growing chicks. It is a fascinating read for anyone interested in birds, from backyard naturalists to hard-core birders to professionals.

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