

From the Editor

Because I usually study small animals, I am always jealous of people wise enough to study those things that are large enough to carry tracking devices that last more than a few weeks. In this monograph, Fifield and co-authors present results of a tracking study of Northern Gannets across almost all of their North American breeding range and from multiple years.

Migration is largely under genetic control and has evolved to allow individuals to occupy locations that maximize survival and ultimately fitness. There is thus much interest in knowing how individuals respond to annual fluctuations in conditions, and how such short-term responses result in long-term patterns in movements and survival.

Although they did not enter into the debate over climate change per se, the authors note that if climate change alters the timing of prey availability at stopover sites or at the breeding grounds, then a mismatch could occur between the timing of events in wintering and breeding areas. They also make the important point that because changes in climate are likely to vary by latitude, birds returning to colonies at different latitudes will be affected differently. Changes in climate may decouple timing linkages between departure and arrival at seasonally occupied locations. Of course, climate has and always will be changing; it is the nature and timing of the changes, and how birds adapt to these changes, that is of interest for persistence of a species.

This monograph thus provides us with both an interesting study of migration patterns, but also important baseline data that can be used to monitor how this species responds to continuing changes in the environment. The discussion of migration provided by Fifield and co-authors provides important ideas for anyone interested in migration and goes far beyond specific application to the study species. Even species undergoing short-distance migration must deal with matching timing of movements with resources; hence the message here applies to most—if not all—species at some appropriate spatial and temporal scale. Even those of us who find telemetry of little practical value can learn a lot from this monograph.

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