

## FAST FACTS:

# Laysan Albatross

(*Phoebastria immutabilis*)

The Hawaiian name for the Laysan albatross is *moli*.



MARINE PHOTOBANK

## APPEARANCE

Laysan albatross are black and white seabirds named after Laysan Island, one of their Hawaiian breeding colonies.<sup>1</sup> They stand almost three feet tall (32 inches), weigh six to seven pounds, have wingspans of more than six feet<sup>2</sup> and have life spans from 40 to 60 years.<sup>3</sup>

## DIET



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This species eats mostly fish, fish eggs, squid and crustaceans. They also feed on fish waste from fishing vessels. They use their good nocturnal vision to spot and scoop up squid and other foods floating on the ocean's surface at night.<sup>4</sup> Adult Laysan albatross feed their young an oily, fat-rich, regurgitated mixture of flying fish eggs and squid oil.<sup>5</sup>

## HABITAT

Laysan albatross live on both land and sea. The birds spend nearly half the year in the North Pacific Ocean, touching land only during breeding season. They breed on various islands within the Hawaiian Archipelago.<sup>6</sup>

## BREEDING

Laysan albatross are monogamous, meaning they only have one mate at a time.<sup>7</sup> After engaging in complex courtship dances to find a mate, the birds build nests on just about anything, including large mounds of dirt, shrubs and grasses or even on the runway tarmac on Midway Atoll.<sup>8,9</sup> Starting in mid-November, females lay one egg and both parents share the responsibility of keeping it warm for a little more than two months (about 65 days) until the chick



ISABELLE GROC



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hatches in late January to mid-February. If a pair's egg breaks during incubation, the female may not lay another for up to two years.<sup>10</sup>



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Young albatross will be on their own after five or six months, once they develop their flight feathers, when they become a fledging.<sup>11</sup>

## THREATS

Like many seabirds, Laysan albatrosses are indiscriminant eaters. This means that as they swallow food, they can also inadvertently eat other objects that are attached or floating nearby. Unfortunately, these birds are known to accidentally swallow marine debris, usually made of plastic, when they forage and can pass these materials on to their chicks when they feed them. Eating this debris—including cigarette lighters, combs, brushes, toothbrushes, bottle caps and fishing lures—can make albatross feel full, preventing them from eating enough real food for proper



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nourishment. It can also block or tear the birds' digestive tract and can damage internal organs.<sup>12</sup>



NOAA

These seabirds can also be impacted by long-line fisheries and illegal drift net operations, particularly in the North Pacific, which causes them to drown. Other threats to Laysan albatross populations include invasive species and introduced predators in nesting grounds, ingestion of lead-contaminated soil by chicks, conflicts during breeding season with aircraft operation and facilities, collision with man-made structures and oil pollution.<sup>13</sup>

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## REFERENCES

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- <sup>3</sup> Laysan Albatrosses - Life History and Distribution. <http://www.scienceviews.com/animals/laysanalbatross.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> National Audubon Society - Watchlist. "Laysan Albatross: Natural History." <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/profile.php?speciesCode=layalb> 2010 (accessed March 8, 2010).
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- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>9</sup> National Audubon Society - Watchlist. "Laysan Albatross: Natural History." <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/profile.php?speciesCode=layalb> (accessed March 8, 2010).
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