

## The Albatross

S. T. Coleridge, the famous English romantic poet of the Lake School, is known for his ballads, one of which is called "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". This is a story of an old sailor, "the mariner", who once had a mystical experience on board a ship. During the voyage, the ship was caught in a storm which drove it too far south, pushing it into the icy waters of the Antarctic. While the sailors searched for a way out, a large bird, the albatross, appeared and led them out to safety. However, the mariner killed the bird with his crossbow, for no reason. This cruel act led to a series of inexplicable deadly misfortunes for the ship and its crew.

The inspiration for this ballad might have come from various sources that surrounded Coleridge. His tutor, William Wales, an astronomer on Captain Cook's ship, likely regaled him with seafaring tales. Strolls with his poet friend William Wordsworth when they discussed pirate voyages, might have ignited Coleridge's imagination. Moreover, the legendary ghost ship, "The Flying Dutchman", was a well-known maritime myth during Coleridge's era. Yet, the most profound influence on Coleridge's vivid imagination was likely the sailors' superstitions about the albatross.

According to those superstitions, killing this majestic bird unleashed terrible luck upon both ship and crew. Some sailors relied on the albatross's behaviour to predict bad weather: birds flying low over the water or congregating in large numbers were seen as signs of approaching storms. In some traditions, albatrosses were believed to embody the souls of sailors lost at sea, protecting and guiding their living comrades through perilous waters. Conversely, sighting an albatross could be interpreted as a warning of danger, prompting sailors to alter their course.

The **plethora** of superstitions surrounding the albatross is hardly surprising considering what an amazing bird it is. Albatrosses have the longest wingspan of any living bird, reaching up to 3.7 meters. These feathered giants can fly almost 1,000 km in a single day without flapping their wings. To do that, they use two tricks. First, they can lock elbow and shoulder joints when their wings are fully extended, which allows them to stretch their wings without any muscular effort. Second, they can use the power of the wind during flight, spending their own energy only when they take off the ground.

Once young albatrosses leave the nest, they spend most of their time in the air, rarely touching the water to evade sharks. It is not proven but some even believe that albatrosses can sleep while flying.

Albatrosses can live for over 50 years. Wisdom, an albatross banded in 1956 on Midway Atoll, returned to her nesting grounds for over five decades, raising numerous chicks and still doing so at the age of 70 in 2021! Albatrosses form unbreakable lifelong partnerships and boast one of the lowest "divorce rates" in the bird kingdom.

Today, albatrosses face significant threats in the wild. Their greatest challenges include getting entangled in the fishing lines and nets; battling invasive predators like cats and rats on their nesting grounds; and accidentally eating plastic trash in the ocean. Scientists and conservationists are working with governments and fishermen to find solutions to these threats and secure a brighter future for these magnificent birds.

Which of the following is NOT one of the sailors' superstitions about albatrosses?

1. Albatrosses may have human souls.
2. Albatrosses can change the weather.
3. Albatrosses' killers are always punished.
4. Albatrosses help sailors avoid trouble.