



# CAPE GANNET

## BREEDING BIOLOGY

Cape Gannets breed in their tens of thousands in densely crowded colonies on 6 islands offshore of Namibia and South Africa.

Gannets nest on a flat or gently sloping open area. Their mud and **guano** nests are built on the ground and have cup shaped hollows. One bluish-white egg is laid. The egg is **incubated** under the large, webbed feet of the parents, helping to keep it at a constant temperature and safe from predators.

Gannets are **monogamous**, choosing to breed with only one mate in their lifetime.

Both adults take turns to look after their chick and to forage for prey in the ocean. When they return to the nest, they **regurgitate** their nutritious meal of fish to feed their hungry, begging chick.

After 3 months of living in the safety of the colony, the **juvenile fledges**, going out to sea to look after itself.

### Interesting numbers

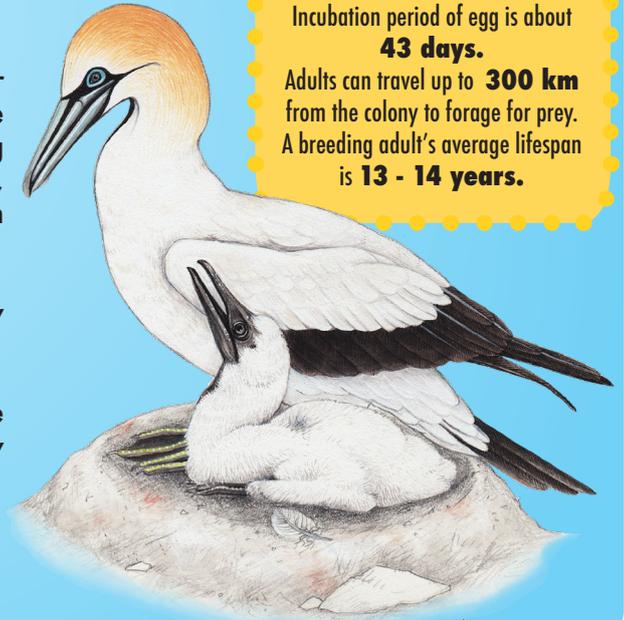
Only have **1** mate.

Lay **1** egg (rarely 2).

Incubation period of egg is about **43 days**.

Adults can travel up to **300 km** from the colony to forage for prey.

A breeding adult's average lifespan is **13 - 14 years**.



## COLONIAL LIVING

Gannets are fiercely **territorial** when defending their nest and chick. Living in such crowded and tightly packed colonies can lead to vicious fights and a nasty peck from a neighbour's sharp bill. To maintain relative peace and harmony within the colony, they construct their nests just outside of the **pecking range** of surrounding nesting gannets.

Having long wings means a gannet needs a 'runway' to build up enough speed to take off. They have to walk carefully through the closely packed colony of aggressive neighbours to reach the runway. To let other gannets know that they pose no threat, they stretch out their necks and hold their beaks up in the air in a dramatic gesture called '**sky-pointing**'. This eye-catching gesture is recognized by other gannets as a signal of non-aggression and helps to maintain order in the crowded colony.



## COURTSHIP BEHAVIOUR

When a pair of gannets is **courting**, they perform a kind of courtship dance: they cross their slender necks and rub their long bills together as if they are sharpening swords. This important **ritual** is called '**fencing**'. It helps to strengthen the '**pair bond**', which is the relationship between the pair.

Another **courtship** behaviour that ensures that their bond is kept strong is called '**allopreening**'. Pairs spend quality time **preening** one another's feathers.



### References:

BirdLife International (2022) Species Factsheet: *Morus capensis*. <http://www.birdlife.org>  
Hockey, P., Dean, W., Ryan, P. 2005. Roberts Birds of Southern Africa. 7th Edition. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund