

FLYING SQUAD

Members of the FLYING SQUAD vary in size from the tiny storm petrels with a wingspan of about 40 centimetres, to the giant wandering albatross with a wing span of over 3 metres.

Seabirds have their own special tactics when it comes to catching a meal. Cormorants can dive below the surface and use their strong webbed feet to paddle after their prey. Storm petrels skip, walk and patter over the surface in search of krill. Albatrosses simply float on the surface and seize unsuspecting squid and fish in their hooked bills.

Wilson's storm petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

These tiny birds skip over the surface of the ocean fishing for krill and other crustaceans, their main source of food.



The black-browed albatross

Diomedea melanophris is recognised by a dark eyebrow smudge and is the most abundant of all albatrosses. It mostly feeds on fish and krill from the surface but can also catch its prey by diving into the water from the air.



Snow petrel *Pagodroma nivea* Except for coal-black eyes and a short black bill, snow petrels look whiter than white. They are seldom found far from floating ice. Their main food is krill and small fish.

Cape petrels

have beautiful bodies with a striking checked pattern on their wings. They fly with a mixture of rapid wing beats and long glides, and dive into the water when fishing for squid, plankton, krill and fish. They nest on the Antarctic continent and subantarctic islands. In the winter they migrate as far north as the Equator.



The **blue-eyed cormorant** *Phalacrocorax atriceps* is the only member of the cormorant family to breed in Antarctica. It has a striking blue ring around its eyes. The orange flashes of colour on the upper beak are very bright during the breeding season.



Light-mantled sooty albatrosses *Phoebastria palpebrata* have a prominent semi-circle of white feathers behind their eyes.



The **grey-headed albatross** *Diomedea chrysostoma* has a distinctive black bill with bright yellow top and bottom ridges. It builds a large nest out of mud and grass and lays a single egg.



Male wandering albatrosses often exhibit elaborate courtship displays to attract the female.



SIZING UP THE SUSPECTS

Wandering Albatross

The wandering albatross *Diomedea exulans* easily earns the title of leader of the **FLYING SQUAD**. It is one of the world's largest birds with a wingspan of over three metres, and is beautifully adapted to life at sea. It lives for between 60-80 years and spends almost all of its time at sea, only coming ashore to lay eggs and raise young. Wanderers usually feed on large prey such as squid, but also eat small fish. They sit on the surface to feed, usually only dipping their head and bill beneath the water.

ADULT ARE ALMOST PURE WHITE Younger birds are dark brown but as they age their plumage becomes whiter and whiter.

SPECIAL SALT GLANDS are located in the skull above the eyes to remove excess salt that all seabirds ingest when they feed.

THE HOOKED BILL is used to firmly grip struggling prey and for tearing pieces of prey that are too big to swallow whole.

LARGE WEBBED FEET are used as brakes during flight.

THE ALBATROSS IS A PERFECT GLIDER It rarely needs to flap its long wings. Travelling distances of thousands of kilometres is no obstacle. The wind does most of the work for the albatross. Rough air deflected from the surface of the waves provides the wind power for flying.

Flying Squad MENU

Krill crackers
Fish stew
Squid schnitzel



BODY FEATHERS have a thick under-layer that traps a pocket of air to help insulate against the cold. Feathers are kept water-resistant by oil that is spread out from the preen gland located at the base of the tail.



An albatross chick waits patiently for a feed.

THE END OF THE LINE

Albatrosses get hooked and drown when they take the bait on longlines meant to catch tuna, swordfish and toothfish. It is thought that tens of thousands of albatrosses die this way every year, endangering the very survival of some species.



WHO'S
EATING
WHO?

