

Explore

Blue Ocean Writings

Diary

Carl Safina's voyages around the world have brought him face-to-face with giant, car-sized Leatherback turtles, hundreds of thousands of nesting albatrosses, and pods of dolphins facing death from tuna fishing. Scroll below to read some of his diary entries:

Midway Atoll Field Blog

Situated more than halfway between North America and Japan, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge hosts the world's largest albatross colony. With just 2.3 square miles of land and over 460,000 pairs of albatrosses nesting in 2006, it is perhaps the oddest U.S. possession.

Add 100,000 pairs of Sooty Terns, thousands of Fairy Terns and tropicbirds and boobies, endangered Monk Seals, Green Turtles, and many others, and the result is a major wildlife metropolis. Yet even the most remote islands have been transformed by human influence including toxic leftovers and plastic choking hazards. And nature itself is no picnic; life and death are everywhere. Many chicks die daily, and while many look healthy, you also see many others who look weak. They will soon click off.

But vast crowds of surviving birds utterly dominate. They throng the beaches, preparing for departure. From 460,000 albatross nests this year, about 60 percent will fledge a chick that has survived long enough to leave the atoll. Most leave over about a 3-week period, so that's around 13,000 departures daily. Impressive.

With lots of luck, in a few years their feet may once again feel dry land as the survivors return to prospect for mates, renewing the great cycle of life.

I'm here with the great wildlife photographer Frans Lanting and his wife videographer Chris Eckstrom, as well as Dr. Scott Shaffer of the University of California at Santa Cruz, on assignment for National Geographic Magazine. This is our first stop on a series of travels to build a global portrait of albatrosses; their life, challenges, and future prospects. Look for our article toward the end of 2007. To see the amazing tracks of young albatrosses that Scott tagged with satellite-tracking equipment just before they left the island, go to www.TOPPCensus.org