



Albatross (Animal)

Graham Barwell

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“At length did cross an Albatross, / Through the fog it came; / As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God’s name.” The introduction of the albatross in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” remains one of the most well-known references to this majestic seabird in Western culture. In *Albatross*, Graham Barwell goes beyond Coleridge to examine the role the bird plays in the lives of a wide variety of peoples and societies, from the early views of north Atlantic mariners to modern encounters by writers, artists, and filmmakers.

Exploring how the bird has been celebrated in proverbs, folk stories, art, and ceremonies, Barwell shows how people marvel at the way the albatross soars through the air, covering awe-inspiring distances with little effort thanks to its impressive wingspan. He surveys the many approaches people have taken to thinking about the albatross over the past two hundred years—from those who devoted their lives to these birds to those who hunted them for food and sport—and discusses its place in the human imagination. Concluding with a reflection on the bird’s changing significance in the modern world, Barwell considers threats to its continued existence and its prospects for the future. With one hundred illustrations from nature, film, and popular culture, *Albatross* is an absorbing look at these beautiful birds.

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