

The Boobies of the Galapagos Islands:

These birds belong to the Order Pelicaniformes. In the British system they are classified as Gannets. The sailors who came to the Galapagos Islands found them tame, easily caught and not electing to run away or fly away from their captors. The sailors decided these birds were dumb and called them “boobies.” The name has stuck.



The Boobies of the Galapagos Islands are endemic and not seen anywhere else on the planet. There are three distinct types of boobies found in the islands : 1) The Blue Foot Booby 2) the Red Foot Booby and 3) The Nazca Booby also called the Masked Booby. The Blue Foot Boobies are ubiquitous in the Galapagos and can be seen on San Cristobal, Floreanna Island, Espanola Island, Santa Cruz and Genovese

Island. The Red Foot Boobies can only be seen on Genovese Island. The Nazca Boobies are also fairly widespread and found on Espanola Island, Floreanna Island, Santa Cruz Island and also Genovese Island.

The Boobies are sea birds and are piscivores (fish eating). They live in large noisy colonies on the Galapagos Islands and tend to roost, breed and live out their lives in these colonies. They are large birds with long powerful beaks, long tapered bodies with long wings and tails. They are good flyers and good swimmers. Their mode of fishing is to plunge into the ocean from a height of 60 or 70 feet. They dive 20 or 30 feet into the water, grab a fish and swallow it whole.



The mating behaviors are unique. The males in the Red Foot Boobies build the nest and sit in it and call out to the females. The females look at the nest decide if it to their standards and if so will mate with the male. The mating pair stays together for the season and raises the young jointly. The adults have to fly out to sea, find and grab the fish, then fly back to the nest and regurgitate the entire fish into the throat of the chicks. This is hard work for the parents, and, both males and females share in the task.

With the Nazca Boobies and the Blue Foot Boobies, the nest building is less formal and any spot on the ground seems to serve for them -- a few sticks, some small rocks and that is all that is needed for a nest for these birds. The mating ritual is quick -- some billing and cooing, some posturing with neck out, back arched and a quick coming together. It is all over in a matter of seconds. Mating pairs are not necessarily monogamous even for the season they are together and a lot of "flirting and cheating" is readily seen.



Boobies lay two eggs per clutch and while it is always so with the Nazca boobies it happens with the other two types as well. The female booby broods over the eggs for 45 days. Both chicks will hatch but only one chick will survive. The larger chick pecks the smaller one to death. So life begins with fratricide for the boobies. The surviving chick will be fed and cared for by the parents for 8 weeks when the young begin to fledge.

