



ALBERT TIMES

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“Don't be warped - trawl for fish, not birds”

From the desk of Admiral Albert Ross MBE (Mighty Big Eater)

No! Happy Feet is not more important than Albert!

God-help-me, Happy Feet is still making headlines, 'from the grave'. He might have been a media star in NZ, but down in the Southern Ocean he's just another (relatively small) part of the food chain!

First let's be real clear! I am a Mighty Big Eater but I did not eat Happy Feet! Too oily what! The word around the flock is that one of those 'pesky' long-range sea lions may have scoffed him. There's a heap of hungry ones around that area and those big bad boys will eat anything! They're well known for snacking on my yellow-eyed penguin mates.

I don't wish any harm to the 'prince of penguins' but come on! I lose a couple hundred cousins a year down here and we just deal with it... My long range scouts tell me that the NIWA boat dropped the poor bugger off to the Northeast of Campbell Island, yet we saw the NIWA vessel 100nm further South a fortnight later. I do wonder why they didn't keep him onboard for a bit longer and drop him off much further south, and much closer to his home?

As a result of TV news, comments on Facebook and all those Tweets and Blogs, everyone knows what HF and his adoring minders were up to every minute of the day. We all love the limelight I suppose but back here at HQ, in the real world, I and those big steel lunchbox captains still have to deal with the day-to-day risk to the cousins, and that's just the way it is!

Mind you, if I had known HF was stuffed full of yummy salmon I might have had a go at him myself, What!

ChowAlbert

Bird Napped

Well it was only a matter of time before someone had to point a finger at the fishing industry over the Happy Feet saga. The vet from Wellington Zoo, who cared for Happy Feet, then travelled with him down to the Southern Ocean onboard the NIWA research vessel, (*R.V. Tangaroa*) has suggested that “Happy Feet was bird-napped by a fishing boat”. She must have been suffering from “post traumatic penguin disorder” for even thinking that HF could have been taken as by-catch from a fishing vessel all the way down in the Southern Ocean, and then later being released near Wellington....!

Back in July a huge 'weather bomb', which caused a seabird 'wreck', swept up from Antarctica, driving thousands of non-local

seabirds onto Kapiti Coast beaches. These unusual weather 'events' lead to all sorts of unexpected outcomes. Happy Feet's arrival on the same coastline a fortnight earlier was undoubtedly the result of an unusual event in the

Southern Ocean!

Deep-sea vessels only occasionally venture so far south. The sea conditions there are notoriously bad and only a few large enough to fish those waters target southern blue whiting in the spawning season, which lasts for just a few weeks of the year in September.

The deepwater fishing fleet has high observer coverage in the Southern Ocean by Government observers (20 to 30% of all fishing effort is observed) and in more than a decade, no vessel has ever been observed capturing an emperor penguin! (nor any other sort for that matter!!)

Every deepwater vessel has an independent, Government-regulated satellite vessel monitoring system, which allows its every movement to be tracked



Female NZ Sea Lion. Photo Credit: R Wells

by MFish. It would take 5 minutes to see if any deepwater fishing vessel was anywhere near the foraging range of emperor penguins in the Southern Ocean around the months that HF was allegedly 'bird-napped'

Someone also forgot to tell the vet that the R.V *Tangaroa* is only in the Southern Ocean because it's undertaking research for MFish, research that is fully funded by the fishing industry. A fishing vessel could not have 'bird-napped' HF, but the fishing industry did help to get him on his way back home! Perhaps that would have been a more prudent observation for the vet to comment on!



WHICH COUSIN OF MINE IS THIS?



These cousins often hunt in a pack, fanning out along the water in a line, then beating the surface with their wings before diving.

BE IN TO WIN: Albert Ross' cap and the "Field Guide to New Zealand Seabirds"

If you know the name of this bird then email your answer, name, postal address and date of publication to albertross@fishinfo.co.nz



The cousin of last month:
Australasian Gannet

SBW & Sea Lions

The southern blue whiting (SBW) fishery in the southern ocean has had the odd incidental capture of large male sea lions. A small fleet of 8 to 12 factory trawlers targets SBW in September around the Campbell Plateau, fishing at depths of 400 to 500m. Fishing is based on moving aggregations and finding the biggest sized fish is crucial in this low margin fishery.

Campbell Island has a small sealion breeding colony (around 580 pups last year and growing). Males are also known to travel here from the Auckland Islands.

The SBW fishery occurs well offshore from Campbell Island (over 100 nm!), and it's understood that while male sea lions forage over wide ranges, females tend to stay closer to shore.

During three weeks of fishing in a 'new' area due East of Campbell Island last September, ten sea lions (nearly all adult males) were incidentally captured. This area is not the traditional fishing ground and vessels only moved there after severe Westerlies forced them into

the lee of the island (although still 100 odd miles away). This area either has a resident population of foraging sea lions during September, which 'locked' onto the vessels for some 'free-feeds' or the sea lions were there because of the stormy weather! During this spate of captures, time was spent analysing where, how and why these were occurring as they had not occurred like this before. Perhaps some of the worst weather in a decade might have attributed to this 'capture event', causing both sea lions and vessels to be in the lee of Campbell Island at the same time.

We had hoped that the increase in captures last season may have been a 'one-off' event, but not forgetting what happened last year, we were watching closely. This year the SBW season started early with vessels arriving at Campbell Island three weeks earlier than usual. As luck would have it, the fish was found due east of Campbell and so were the sea lions! Thankfully, far less have been captured this season, but we will continue to monitor and manage the risk of incidental sea lion mortalities in this fishery!

To learn more go to www.albertross.co.nz and pick up this month's issue



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