

Nesting colony of Australian gannets, *Sula serrator*

Australian gannets, like their larger cousins, the Atlantic gannets, are majestic birds that breed in dense colonies, preferably on small, precipitous islands. Newly hatched chicks, nourished on a diet of fish, grow rapidly into fat-laden juveniles. These leave the colony after about three months to forage for four or five years before returning to the colony to establish their own nests and advertise for mates. The gannet returns each season to the colony to breed, typically remaining faithful to both mate and site throughout its life of perhaps 16 to 20 years. This colony is located on a small island, actually an active volcano off the coast of New Zealand, described by the photographer as a "wonderful island to visit but a terrible place to live," where the acid volcanic fumes and falling dust are hard on both gannets and visiting humans.



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