



The Gannet is a fisherman and therefore flies for his living; the author of this article, which describes the characteristics and activities of the bird, has reached the conclusion, however, that Gannets sometimes fly just for the kick they get out of it.

Flying for Business

By JOHN BARLEE

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When considering possible names for an aeroplane designed for hunting underwater enemies, the Fairey Aviation Company could not have chosen one more suitable than The Gannet. For it is named after what is probably the most familiar North Atlantic bird, whose spectacular power-dives after fish are an everyday sight to Naval and Merchant Navy personnel. Many birds are commoner, but the Gannet stands alone in size and performance, and can seldom be confused with other birds.

The Gannet, which measures 3 ft. from beak to tail, has a wing span of 6-6½ ft, a wing area of 2¼ sq ft and weighs between 7 and 8 lb. From these measurements we can get an aspect ratio of 16 and a wing-loading of 3 lb/sq ft. Such figures mean little unless they are compared with similar measurements from other birds, and so I have made the table on the opposite page to make comparison easy.

We see from this table that the Gannet has a very high aspect ratio, in fact the highest of all British birds; its wing-loading is also high and it has very small wing muscles. The large aspect ratio is apparent in the photographs, which also show the exceptional degree of streamlining. Good streamlining is not so important for a large bird as for a small one, for as the bird increases in size, resistance increases as the square, and weight as the cube, of the linear dimensions. Therefore in small birds resistance/weight is large compared with bigger birds. The Gannet's good streamlining indicates that it has the exceptionally low drag needed to enable it to fly fast and far with such small muscles.

Slots

Some of the main flight feathers are slightly emarginated (cut away) at the wing-tip, and as a result there are two or three short wing-tip slots when the wing is fully spread. Usually only one can be seen when the bird is gliding but all are fully open when the bird is landing.

There is also a slot halfway along the leading edge of the wing formed by the three or four feathers of the alula. (The alula is the 'thumb' of the bird's 'hand'; it

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