

Gannets

If you happen to be on a boat trip to the Farne Islands, or even if you are walking along the North East coast, look out for Northern Gannets. They are usually seen flying further out to sea than the gulls. They are a large white seabird with yellowish heads, black-tipped wings and long bills. They are the largest seabirds in the North Atlantic, having a wingspan of up to two metres. They tend to stand out as being very white, a brilliant white in fact. You are most likely to see them flying alone or in small groups, moving North or South, parallel to the coast.

They have a distinctive habit of flying up high and along a bit before flying down lower, to check the water for fish and repeating this. If they find fish, you might see them diving into the water at speed (up to 60mph). They have special adaptations for this, having no external nostrils; they are located inside the mouth, instead. They also have air sacs in the face and chest under the skin, which cushion the impact with the water.

The best time to see Gannets is in the Summer when they are nesting. The best places to see them in large numbers, and close up are at Bempton Cliffs in North Yorkshire or at Bass Rock which lies off the coast at North Berwick. From there you can get a boat trip which takes you around the rock giving great views of the birds nesting there. At Bempton Cliffs you don't even need to get on a boat as the Gannets nest on the Cliffs. You can walk along the cliff top getting quite close to the birds, although there are rangers there to protect the birds. It is a great place to observe the bird's behaviour and get close up photographs.

In Spanish the word for Gannet is Alcatraz, although this can also mean Pelican or 'big bird'. The famous island in San Francisco Bay does not, however have Gannets but it does have Pelicans and other sea birds.





Mary Brazier - Alnwick u3a