

## COLONY NESTING...DEFENCE OR FOLLY?



*By permission of the Hon. Walter Rothschild*

*[Tring,*

CARTING ALBATROSS EGGS ON THE ISLAND OF LAYSAN.

*At one time these birds were protected ; as this photograph testifies, this is no longer the case.*

Illustration: *circa* 1902

Although colony nesting evolved as an anti-predator measure, the practice has allowed exploitation by humans as a source of food in the form of eggs and meat, down for bedding, feathers for quill pens, and guano for fertilizer. Over exploitation can be devastating to a colony, or even to an entire population of a colonial species. For example, there was once a large seabird known as the Great Auk, which nested in colonies in the North Atlantic. Eggs and birds were used for a variety of purposes. Beginning in the 16th Century, seafarers took the birds in especially great numbers to fill ships' larders, and by the mid-1800's, the Great Auk was extinct. Likewise, the Short-tailed Albatross of the North Pacific was heavily harvested at what seems to have been its primary colony on Torishima Island. Millions of birds were killed in a few decades at the end of the 19th Century. It

survives, though highly endangered. In North America, the case of the highly gregarious Passenger Pigeon has been well-documented. It was hunted as if inexhaustible. Case in point: in 1871, in Wisconsin, an estimated 136 million pigeons nested in a dense congregation over a wide area; thousands of people were drawn to hunt the birds, shipping the squab to market by rail. By 1913 the Passenger Pigeon was extinct as a result of this over exploitation by humans.

Reference: Wikipedia

May 2010

BIRD KEEPING IN AUSTRALIA