

# WEEK 9 WILDLIFE

Position: -51.5522,  
167.453  
Time: 2016-12-28  
21:22:00 UTC



Next Week:  
Decision Making

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**By Rich Wilson, Skipper  
Great American IV**

Often I am asked – don't you feel confined in that little boat? And my answer always is – not at all! Because where else can you live every day, all day, with a 360 degree view of the horizon and a hemispheric dome of sky overhead?

Immersed in open nature this way, one finds oneself in the world of other creatures inhabiting the same space. We've had tiny shrimp, squid, and flying fish all come aboard, as well as what looked to me like a baby Portuguese Man-of-War. Groups of dolphins have escorted us.

And in the sky, we've had stormy petrels, terns, and the enormous Albatross, a bird that almost never flaps

its wings, but just soars and glides on the wind and its updrafts and downdrafts over waves. Plus myriad other birds that I can't identify, my knowledge being inadequate.

For all of those creatures, this is their natural environment. For me, it's not my natural environment, I am the intruder – or the guest – in their domain. Of course we must respect that domain by not polluting, but we must also appreciate it for its diversity and astonishing accomplishments. Look at all the things that those creatures can do that I cannot do! They are amazing! How did the albatross learn to fly like that?! How did the flying fish ever figure out to leap out of the water and glide on their fins as wings for 100 meters to escape predators?!

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## Marine Life

**by Sy Montgomery, Author**

Sometimes it feels lonely sailing around the world alone on a small boat on a big sea. Except Rich Wilson hasn't really been alone. He's joined from time to time by other living creatures—creatures with lives as wonderful, and journeys as compelling, as his own.

The ocean is our planet's largest wilderness. Yet so many of its creatures seem to us like outer space aliens, they are so different from us. But one magnificent creature keeps Rich company and these two have a lot in common. Both are riding the wind. Both are on epic, long-distance journeys. And both will be spending months on end without seeing others of their own kind.

The albatross has the longest wingspan of any bird—more than 11 feet for the largest kind, the wandering albatross (there are 22 species). With its snowy white body and grey wings, the bird looks rather like a sea gull crossed with a limousine. It's a spectacular sight many mariners like Rich have enjoyed through the ages. An albatross will often follow a boat, hoping for a handout from the crew, or at least some tasty fish guts tossed overboard. So it's no wonder that albatrosses occupy a special place in maritime lore.

Some sailors believed that the albatross carried the soul of dead sailors—and seeing one was good luck. The soul of the dead sailor, some insisted, would protect them from harm.

The truth about these magnificent sea birds is even more amazing. Without even flapping once, an albatross can

glide for hours and cover several hundred miles! No other creature can do this. The bird's secret? It's called dynamic soaring. They spend half their time gaining height by angling their wings while flying into the wind. They then turn back toward the sea, swooping along at speeds up to 67 miles per hour, till they catch another updraft skyward. And do it again and again, expending remarkably little energy. By studying exactly how they do it, engineers are trying to design more efficient airplanes.

Wisdom, a Laysan albatross (who wanders the North Pacific), is the oldest seabird in the world—and as this article is being written, she's incubating an egg! So Rich—the oldest sailor in the Vendee Globe race—and Wisdom, the world's oldest seabird— have something else in common: they both are showing the world that no matter how old you are, you can still do something wonderful to enrich our precious blue planet.

Full essay: <http://vg2016.sitesalive.com/essay>



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