

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Q. Dear Twig: This one time, at science camp, an albatross (albatross!) threw up on my aunt.

A. Whoa! Thanks for sharing. Here's what I think: I think that the camp took a trip to a **rookery**. (A place where some bird types, such as albatrosses, breed in huge groups of nests.)

And that maybe, just maybe, the albatrosses there thought your aunt and her friends were **predators**. (Albatrosses, big seabirds, live on the southern oceans. They nest on land, often on islands.)

And that maybe, just maybe, the birds took action to keep themselves and their babies safe.

Blargh! It happens.

A cool book called *Antipredator Defenses in Birds and Mammals* says bug an albatross and it will barf gross **stomach oil** on you. The gunk, the book notes, "is a very effective

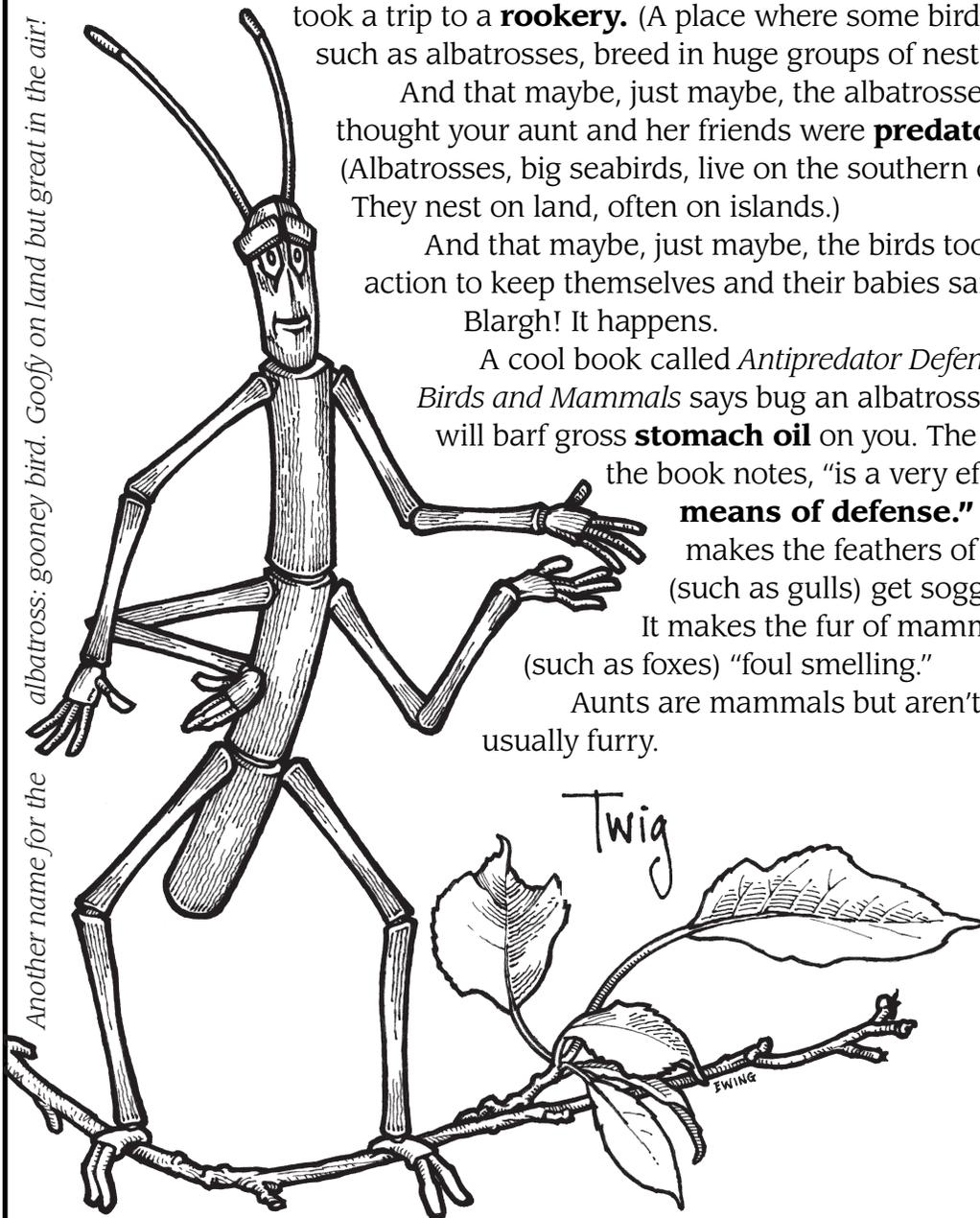
means of defense." It makes the feathers of birds (such as gulls) get soggy.

It makes the fur of mammals (such as foxes) "foul smelling."

Aunts are mammals but aren't usually furry.

albatross: gooney bird. Goofy on land but great in the air!

Another name for the



From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).



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Notes: In Ohio, check out Ohio 4-H Sea Camp, <http://woostercenter.osu.edu/4-h/scinfo.html>. (Note: No albatrosses. But gulls. So many gulls.) Source: *Antipredator Defenses in Birds and Mammals* by Tim Caro (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), specifically "Flight and Behaviors of Last Resort," subsection "Counterattack." An apparently unbombed Edgar Allen Poe on albatrosses in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*: "Nothing can be more astonishing than the spirit of reflection evinced by these feathered beings, and nothing can be better calculated to elicit reflection in every well-regulated human intellect." Send questions/science camp tales to Twig at knebusch.1@osu.edu.

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