



What would you do with feet of blue? You'd want to show them off! Turn the page to see who's showing off *these* blue feet—and what makes them so neat.

BY ELLEN LAMBETH

Bibbidi - Bobbidi - BLUE!

You pick your right foot up. You put your right foot down. You pick your left foot up, and you raise it way up high.

The birds in the photo **below** seem to be doing the hokey-pokey, as they strut and flash their blue

feet. What's it all about? It's a way to say, "Let's be mates."

The birds are seabirds called *blue-footed boobies*. No surprise how they got the first part of their name! They got the "booby" part from long-ago Spanish explorers,

who called them *bobos*, which means "dummies." The birds weren't used to humans and so showed no fear of them. The explorers thought that was foolish behavior, because it made the birds so easy to catch for dinner.

These two birds rock back and forth, lifting their flashy feet. It's a dance that only blue-footed boobies can do!



TUI DE ROY/MINDEN PICTURES (08.19T); ARTHUR MORRIS/BIRDS AS ART (19B)

Blue-footed boobies live along the Pacific coast, from southern North America down to northern South America. Usually, the birds are out at sea, fishing. But when they come ashore to breed, it's time for some blue-foots on parade!

FAMILY TIME

The boobies come together in big seaside colonies. Each of the males begins bopping around and whistling, trying to attract a mate. The fancier his footwork, the better his chances of making a good impression! If a female approves, she might join in the dance and touch him with her bill, accepting him as a mate. Soon the serious business of raising a family begins.

The female lays two or three eggs in a scratched-out hollow right on the ground. Both parents take turns tending the eggs. Most kinds of birds have bare spots of skin on their breasts that keep eggs warm. But not boobies. They warm their eggs under their webbed feet!

Blue feet are neat for providing heat! That's why the parent booby above wraps its wide, webbed feet around its eggs. Finally, a nearly naked chick breaks out of one of the eggs (below).



After about six weeks, the eggs hatch, and the chicks beg noisily to be fed. They reach into a parent's throat, fishing around for a fishy meal.

Eventually, the parents' job is done, and the young are baby boobies no more. They'll head offshore for a life mostly at sea. Then, after a few years, they'll come back and try strutting their own blue-footed stuff!

TUI DE ROY/MINDEN PICTURES (20-21T, 21R); FRANS LANTING/LANTING.COM (20B)

This booby is coming in for a landing at the breeding area. With his webbed feet spread out in front, he flashes a blue "salute" to those below.

Ma and Pa Booby tell each other, "I'm OK—you're OK," with a touch of their bills. Meanwhile, their baby boobies wonder where supper is.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Boobies have an impressive fishing style. They usually fly high above the waves, on the lookout for schools of small fish below. When they see one, they tilt downward, fold back their wings, and pierce the water's surface headfirst.

Boobies also have excellent vision, so their aim is dead-on as they nab their underwater targets. *Splash—gotcha!*

Boobies are fishing pros. The group of blue-footed boobies at right has spotted a school of fish below the surface. Now the birds are diving in hot pursuit.

THE WORLD OF BOOBIES

Blue-footed boobies aren't the only boobies in the world. There are also *red-footed*, *brown*, *masked*, *Peruvian*, and *Nazca* boobies.

Not all boobies do the same dance that blue-footed boobies do. The others have their own ways of trying to impress their mates. They also choose different areas to fish and raise their families in.

But no matter how different these related seabirds can be, they are all still bibbity-bobbity-BOOBIES! 🐦

These red-footed boobies could challenge blue-footed boobies for "Most Colorful Feet." Unlike other boobies, the red-foots nest in trees.

Brown boobies (right) are the most widespread of all the boobies. Maybe you think they should be called "yellow-footed boobies"?

The birds below are Nazca boobies. Nazcas are big, so they prefer taking off from cliffs like this one. They simply turn and face the wind, spread their wings, then drop into the air. What a breeze!



TUI DE ROY/MINDEN PICTURES (22, 23B), LUCIANO CANDISANI/MINDEN PICTURES (23T)

