



V. Curritcher/DPPI/Offshore Challenges



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Total freedom, endless opportunity

The diminutive record-breaking young yachtswoman, **Ellen MacArthur**, has much in common with **albatrosses**, the world's biggest birds. Both are renowned for their fearlessness, and both travel huge distances around the globe on the winds.

Ellen broke the world record last year for sailing single-handedly around the world on her custom-made trimaran *B&Q/Castorama*. At just under 1.6 metres tall, she caught public imagination worldwide as she battled mountainous seas, mechanical troubles, injury and exhaustion. Her triumph was the culmination of a lifelong love of the ocean.

Out at sea, she encountered many albatrosses. The survival of 19 species of the birds is threatened by longline fishing – the practice of dragging lines of bait behind boats, on which the birds get hooked and drown.

Hailed on her return in February 2005 as Britain's greatest sailor, she demonstrated her concern for wildlife by taking time to participate in a survey of wandering albatrosses on Albatross Island – a wildlife sanctuary in South Georgia – alongside researchers working with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and BirdLife International.

She told TUNZA that she wanted to draw attention to their plight, as well as learn more about them. 'The current trend will lead to their extinction, so we need to give these birds the best chance we can.'

TUNZA caught up with her between her time on the island and her departure in March 2006 to establish new crewed speed records in Asian waters, when she hopes to be joined by young Chinese sailors.

Q: What first drew you to the sea and sailing?

A: I joined my aunt on a sailing trip when I was very young, and after a few days on board, I was totally hooked. My passion grew from there. I loved every element of being on the water; it felt like total freedom and endless opportunity. I also enjoyed the responsibility involved in sailing, and the preparation and care it took to look after the boat on shore.

I have a huge respect for the ocean: in this profession you need to understand what a complex and unpredictable environment it can be.

Q: Have you noticed changes to the marine environment on your voyages?

A: I did notice on my last around-the-world trip that the icebergs were far further north than they had been, and the water temperature was also marginally higher. This occurred over a four-year period, which suggests that there has been some effect due to climate change.

Q: Through the Ellen MacArthur Trust, you promote the idea that 'everyone has a goal'. Do you feel that this applies to young people, and to the environment?

A: The Trust was set up to allow children with cancer and leukemia to experience a totally new world out on the water. The transformation in some of the children who have joined us on the trips has been amazing and inspiring.

I think it is definitely important for young people to have something to work towards. It certainly helps if you aim to achieve your dreams – whether it's sailing or helping the environment – and be the best you can!

Team Ellen

