

Adri's Light Snack

The middle of the ocean is a vast desert made up of water. On the surface, nothing but waves can be seen for miles around in any direction. Under the surface is not much different. Any sign of life can be miles away; unable to be seen. Only a few oases exist in the form of coral reefs. And the ocean floor, from where we're at, is far too deep to reach. But there is one sign of life we can see: a humpback whale by the name of Ardios. Ardi was not your normal humpback whale that only ate small fish and krill. No, he preys on much more substantial meals. Dolphins, sharks, and even humans often found themselves on the menu. But lately, optimal food has been hard to come by.

Humpback whales are very observant, and have a long memory; it's how they are able to remember exactly where to go to find food. Something that Ardi remembers is that seabirds always seem to flock around him whenever he breaches to catch food. He thought, maybe, they will flock around him if he breached even without food. They would all flock to one spot where he could easily catch them. Birds are not the best food, but they're better than going a few more days on an empty stomach.

A few miles away, there was a stack, a steep rock column in the sea. The island itself was barren, but the wildlife on it was what interested Ardi. These islands are hotspots for birds. With no land predators, the birds here can nest and raise young with little threat of them being snatched. With so many birds in one place, this would be the perfect location for Ardi to try his new strategy.

Ardios swam near the island until he could see the individual birds that sat in their nest on it. He slapped his tail against the surface of the water, which got the attention of the colony. Terns and auks took to the sky and started hovering over where Ardi resubmerged his tail. *It was working.* The next bait Ardi set was a direct lunge on the surface of the water. The flock descended down upon the water, expecting fish. They dived into the water with beaks wide-open expecting beakfuls of fish, only to catch nothing.

While the birds wandered around in the confusion, looking for the fish, or trying to get out of the water; Ardi gracefully turned around with a wide open mouth. He breached the surface and lunged at the air; two dozen birds found themselves in the way. Before they could fly out, Ardi shut his mouth and slammed back in the water. They were trapped, and the only way to go was down the back of Ardi's throat. They flapped their wings desperately, but there was no way to get out. Satisfied with what he had caught, he pushed his tongue against his baleen to push out any water he had picked up. He could feel the birds wiggle against the massive muscle with no effect. Ardi, not wanting to keep the birds from their fate, opened his throat and swallowed them down. They were sucked into the dark tunnel behind them. Although the gulp wasn't anything special it could still be heard from in the water. Once they were gulped, there was no bulge. They simply disappeared from existence. Ardi could still feel them struggle in his esophagus as they slipped into his forestomach. Above him, birds still swarmed the air. Whether they were different birds that didn't see the trap, or they were too birdbrained to care, he did not know. But he was going to use their foolishness to his advantage.

Ardi's next plan of attack would be less labor intensive. Now, he was simply going to reach his head above water and open his mouth. And that was exactly what he did. With an open mouth, he brought his head above the water. Almost instantly birds started seaming his mouth hoping to find fish. With his sensitive mouth he could feel at least forty birds scrambling inside, he even felt a larger bird in there. They all dived into the water thinking there was fish to be had. Before they could be proved wrong, the roof of the whale's mouth slammed down on top of them.

This is all too easy, Ardi thought to himself. The birds inside could feel the creature around them rumble in satisfaction.

Inside the forestomach is a dangerous place. Here, the whale's digestive system crushes the unchewed food. Because of going months without eating, there was no other food in there besides birds. Right now, it's steady. But that could soon change. The birds inside still had enough room to

wiggle. But suddenly, the entrance to the chamber opened and more of their kin entered. Within a few seconds, the forestomach suddenly got way too crowded to move. Birds started piling in, and it quickly became too cramped. Some birds, the lucky ones, were crushed to death. The rest simply had to deal with it. Then...the chamber started moving. It started grinding.

The fullness of his forestomach didn't stop his feast. As some birds were pushed further down into his second stomach, more would be sent to his forestomach. After about an hour of tricking birds, he was officially stuffed.

Ardios slowly swam away from the chain of islands. If he bothered to look behind him, we would have noticed there was much less activity going on. Needless to say, many of the nests on the islands would be abandoned. As he swam, he could feel his digestive system come to life for the first time in months. He could feel the muscles inside him move as they worked on the poor birds inside. In his eyes, they were serving a higher purpose fueling him than flying around stealing his kin's fish. As he glided along, one could scarcely believe hundreds of birds were inside him, getting digested. Ardi sang happily at his full stomachs. And as he sang, some of his songs bounced back to him. It was a ship...his next meal. Things were looking up. It would probably take a day or two to get there.

Fortunately, by the time he got there the occupants in his stomach would be long gone. Nothing left would be left of them except a plethora of feathers littering his digestive tract. Their essence was now all over his body: turned into fat, muscles, energy, and blubber to keep him going. As Ardios approached the ship, he would blow some water out of his blowholes. The people onboard rushed to see the majestic whale.

Unfortunately, they were just a tad too far away to see the feathers flying out of the blowhole with the water.