

Ornithological Observations in the Norwegian Sea, the Greenland Sea, and NE Greenland, July-August 1972

By

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(Med et dansk resumé: Fugleagttagelser i Norskehavet, Grønlandshavet og NØ-Grønland, juli-august 1972.)

In the period 19th July to 9th August 1972 I was as a passenger onboard M. V. Thala Dan on the yearly voyage to Daneborg, Ella Ø, and Mestersvig in NE Greenland. We passed Jan Mayen at a distance of 7 km the 24th July (Fig. 1), and reached Daneborg in the afternoon the 25th. The same evening and night Sandøen was visited, and the 26th I was sailed to Zackenberg, where I stayed at the hunting station for two days and visited the plain west of the river up to 5 km from the coast. On the 28th, we left Daneborg and reached by Sofiasund Ella Ø on the 30th. After six hours stay here we went on to Mestersvig, where we stayed for four days. The homeward passage went through Kong Oskars Fjord and Sofiasund, and we left the coast

early in the morning on August the 4th.

Ice conditions were rather unusual this year, as there at the time of our passage was practically no polar ice off this part of the coast. A tongue of open polar ice, abt. 20 km wide, was passed 125 km from the coast. Except for this there only was easier ice in a 30 to 50 km wide belt along the coast. The fiords were almost icefree. The actual seasurface isotherms and ice conditions are plotted on the map Fig. 1 (simplified after Bracknell Sea Ice Observations Chart 24th-28th July 1972 (29th July 1972)).

The crews on M. V. Thala Dan, Sirius, and Mestersvig are thanked for help with accomodation and transport, and for much information and hospitality.

OBSERVATION IN THE NORWEGIAN SEA AND THE GREENLAND SEA

The sea observations were carried out from the bridge or the upper deck, and parts of the sea were regularly scanned with binoculars. Periods of continous observations are marked on the map (Fig. 1). Meteorological conditions during the voyage were changing, with windstrengths up to 7 (Beaufort), and particularly the first part of the homeward passage was troubled by heavy sea.

In the following, statements of age follow the calender year: 1st year is the year of birth, and so on.

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

The most numerous species in the open sea. Most numerous between the Shetlands and Norway, up to 100 around the ship, some of the dark phase. In the open sea constantly 5-10 around the ship, yet up to 35 300 km NE of the Faroes. Alltogether 6-7 dark ones observed outside the 5° sea isotherm, most on the homeward passage.

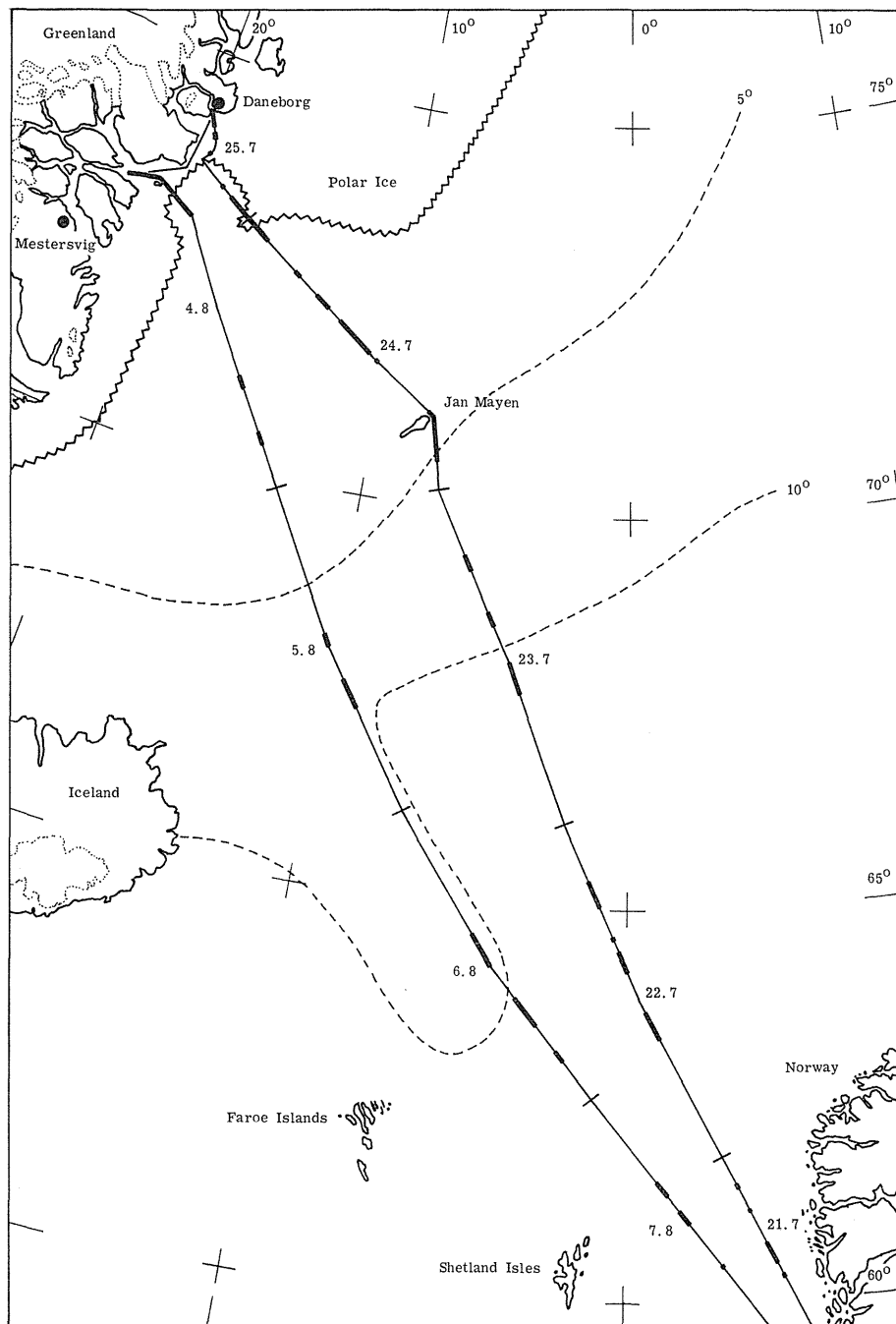


Fig. 1. The ships route across the Norwegian and the Greenland Sea with daily distances and observation periods (thick line) marked. The actual ice border and the 5° and 10° seasurface isotherms are shown.

Fig. 1. Den gennemsejlede rute i Norskehavet og Grønlandshavet med dagdistancer og observationsperioder (tyk streg) markeret. Den aktuelle drivisgrænse og 5° og 10° havoverfladeisothermerne er indtegnet.

At Jan Mayen several hundred light ones and 1 dark, from there and to the ice constantly 5–10 light ones. Inside the ice area generally 50 % of each phase, 3–10 around the ship down to 5–10 km from the coast, most of the dark ones near the coast.

On the homeward passage 10–15 simultaneously ($\frac{1}{3}$ dark) inside the 5° isotherm, after that 5–20 light ones and a few dark.

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*)

1 following the ship 6th August on 64° 10' N.

Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*)

Only observed on the homeward passage NE of the Faroes, altogether 8 individuals, the northernmost on 64° 20' N.

Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)

Was only observed outside the 10° sea isotherm, northernmost on 68° 00'. Altogether 10 observed in open sea and 6 along the westcoast of Norway. 7 were adults and 9 were from 2nd to 4th year.

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*)

1 circled about the ship and then flew east on 63° 45' N August the 6th.

Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*)

Altogether 17 observed, 9 in the North Sea. All outside the 10° sea isotherm, the northernmost on 68° 00'.

Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

On the way up 1 adult on 68° N and one more adult on 72° 00' N, 12° 00' W. On the homeward passage 1 adult and 1 2nd or 3rd year bird on 71° N between the coast of Greenland and Jan Mayen.

Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

4 of the dark phase, 1 of the light, and 1 intermediate observed on the entire voyage.

Longtailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Altogether 12 observed on the way up, mostly after Jan Mayen. 1st observation on 63° 30' N. In the ice area 30–40 were seen, on the homeward passage none after the ice. Some individuals had not fully grown tail (3rd year), 1 was very dark and had hardly any elongation of the tail feathers (2nd year).

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*)

Only 1 observation. 1 adult in the ice 18 km from the coast of Greenland on 73° 50' N, the 25th July.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

1 adult on 63° N, 02° W on the 6th August.

Lesser Blackbacked Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Only 1 observation outside the North Sea. 1 3rd year 22nd July.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

The first ones seen 70 km before Jan Myen, altogether abt. 25 during the passage off the island. After that only at the coast of Greenland, where altogether 30 were seen during the tour along the outer coast, 4 of these were 2nd year birds.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Together with the Fulmar the only species seen constantly everywhere, although the Kittiwake was less numerous. On the whole tour 3–500 birds equally distributed, yet most between the Faroes and Norway. Only 8 seen off Jan Mayen. At Greenland they were seen up to abt. 10 km from the coast. Abt. 15 % were 2nd year, but NE of the Faroes more than 25 % 1st year on August the 6th. Many birds were in heavy moulting, and some rested on the ship for several hours.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Seen up to 90 km from the coast of western Norway and one single 250 km NNE of the Faroes. At Greenland only at the coast.

Little Auk (*Plutus alle*)

Only 4 seen off Jan Mayen, 27 between that and the ice and abt. 175 in the ice up to 50 km from the coast.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

1 adult with 1 young on the water 100 km from the norwegian coast (61° 00' N) on the 21st July.

Brünnich's Guillemot (*Uria lomvia*)

Several hundreds around Jan Mayen, the first ones 15 km SE of the island. 15–25 between the island and Greenland on both passages. All observations inside the 5° isotherm.

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)

On the way up 8 observed, the northernmost on 68° N. Abt. 250 km NE of the Faroes 15 adults and 1 adult with 1 young were seen on the 6th August. 140 km NE of the Shetlands 5 adults with 4 young ones were seen on the 7th August. All observations outside the 10° sea isotherm.

Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

Altogether 21 observed, most NE of the Faroes, among these 1 2nd year. 1 at Jan Mayen.

OBSERVATIONS IN NE GREENLAND

The winter 1971–72 was rich in snow and the spring was somewhat delayed with snow and rain in the late half of June. The ice in Young Sund broke on July the 24th, although there had been open water up to Sandøen most of the spring. The weather was favourable during my stay. Apparently, there had been many Lemmings as well in 1971 as in -72. Only the more interesting observations are given.

Pinkfooted Goose (Anser fabalis brachyrhynchus)
Up to 38, probably all flightless adults, in Zackenbergbugten 26th to 28th July. Up to 5 km from the coast on the westside of the river none were seen.

Barnacle Goose (Branta leucopsis)
Abt. 50, almost all of them able to fly, were seen on Sandøen, and 16 flightless abt. 5 km up the Zackenberg river July the 26th. 1 pair with 1 big gosling was seen on Ella Ø, and in Noret at Mestersvig was on the 2nd of August 15 individuals able and 5 not able to fly, possibly a family.

Longtailed Duck (Clangula hyemalis)
1 female with 1 pull. was seen at the coast inside Sandøen and on the islands was 10–15 females and 1 male in flocks. 1 single female was seen in Zackenbergbugten and 2 females in the mouth of Noret at Mestersvig.

King Eider (Somateria spectabilis)
4 males were seen in a big flock of Eiders at Sandøen.

Eider (Somateria mollissima)
The remarkable colony between the more than 60 sledge dogs of Sirius at Daneborg has increased significantly. In 1955 there were probably none (CONRADSEN 1957), in 1964 70 nests were counted (ROSENBERG, CHRISTENSEN & GENSBØL 1970), in 1970 NIELS LIHME, Sirius, (pers. comm.) estimated 300 pairs, and in 1972 the crew estimated the population to 500 pairs. Unfortunately, my visit

was too late to permit a count of the colony, but abt. 25 females were still incubating. Even if precautions are to be taken with respect to the latter numbers, it is a colony of quite unusual size for these regions. The birds are nesting down to half a meter outside the reach of the dogs, yet every year 25–50 birds are taken by the dogs when flying low over the rowes.

This year the spring was rather unfavourable for the Eiders; shortly after the laying of the eggs the nesting birds were covered with snow up to their necks, and when the snow began melting, rain started too, and thus many nests were floated or washed off. Still one accident occurred, as a storm shortly after the hatching of the first youngs blew many of them away.

I counted 11 males, 118 females, and 44 pull. along the coast between Daneborg and Sandøen, and at Sandøen 60 males, 100 females, and only 10 pull. A part of the youngs along the coast were possibly hatched on Sandøen, as well as more broods could be lying at the coast east of Sandøen and north of Daneborg. In Zackenbergbugten up to 20 females were seen.

Sabine's Gull (Xema sabini)
One pair with a nest and 2 eggs was found in low vegetation on Sandøen, one of the birds showed distraction display 3–4 m from the nest, while I was at it.

Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea)
Seemingly a good even somewhat late breeding season for this species in this part of NE Greenland. On Sandøen 100–200 pairs were breeding, 20 nests with 2 and 1 with one egg were found. On a little island in the mouth of Noret at Mestersvig 40–50 pairs bred, 10 nests with 1 and only 4 with 2 eggs were found. The embryos in some opened eggs were smaller than in some from Sandøen in spite of the fact that they were investigated a week later.

Wheatear (Oenanthe o. leucorrhoa)
1 pair with 2 juveniles at the Zackenberg station. This is one of the northernmost instances of breeding in NE Greenland (SALOMONSEN 1967; MARRIS & WEBBE 1969).

DANSK RESUMÉ

Fugleagttagelser i Norskehavet, Grønlandshavet og NØ-Grønland, juli-august 1972.

I tiden 19. juli til 9. august sejlede jeg som passager med M/S Thala Dan på forsyningssturen til Daneborg, Ella Ø og Mestersvig i NØ-Grønland. Jan Mayen passeredes (se Fig. 1) og ved Daneborg besøgte Sandøen og Zackenberg. På Ella Ø var der et kortere ophold, og vi var 4 dage ved Mestersvig. Isforholdene dette år var ret usædvanlige, idet der så godt som ikke var storis ud for denne del af kysten.

Havobservationerne blev foretaget fra brovingerne; perioder med kontinuerlig observation er fremhævet på kortet (Fig. 1). Mallekukken (*Fulmarus glacialis*) var den almindeligste art på det åbne hav, i drivisen var halvdelen af den mørke fase, ellers kun enkelte mørke. Riden (*Rissa tridactyla*) var foruden Mallekukken den eneste art, som sås konstant overalt. I området inden for 10° havoverfladeisoterminen sås Gråmåger (*Larus hyperboreus*), Søkonger (*Plotus alle*) og især ved Jan Mayen mange hundrede Kortnæbbede Lomvier (*Uria lomvia*); i drivisen sås 1 Ismåge (*Pagophila eburnea*).

Uden for 10° havisoterminen sås Suler (*Morus bassanus*), Storkjover (*Stercorarius skua*) og Lomvier (*Uria aalge*). 250 km nordøst for Færøerne og Shetlandsøerne sås flere Lomvier med endnu ikke flyvedygtige unger; desuden 8 Små Stormsvaler (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) og 1 Sodfarvet Skråpe (*Puffinus griseus*). Fordelt på hele turen sås 4

Mellemkjover (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), en del Små Kjover (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) og nogle Alm. Kjover (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

Vinteren 1971-72 havde været meget snerig i NØ-Grønland, og foråret var noget forsinket. 38 Kortnæbbede Gæs (*Anser fabalis brachyrhynchus*) sås i Zackenbergbugten, i alt næsten 100 Bramgæs (*Branta leucopsis*) sås i flokke på Sandøen, ved Zackenberg og ved Mestersvig, og 1 par med 1 gæsling sås på Ella Ø. Den store koloni af Ederfugle (*Somateria mollissima*) mellem slædehundene ved Daneborg var vokset fra 70 par i 1964 (ROSENBERG, CHRISTENSEN & GENSBØL 1970) til af størrelsesordenen 500 par. Fuglene ruger i indtil en halv meters afstand fra hundenes rækkevidde, og hundene tager hvert år en del, når Ederfuglene kommer flyvende lavt over kæderne. Snefald, regnvejre og storm ødelagde en del kuld dette år. Flere hundrede fugle sås langs kysten og ved Sandøen, herimellem en del ællinger.

I den mere end hundrede par store koloni af Havterne (*Sterna paradisaea*) på Sandøen fandtes 1 par Sabinemåger (*Xema sabini*) med rede indeholdende 2 æg. 1 par Stenpikkere (*Oenanthe o. leucorhoa*) med 2. juv. sås ved Zackenberg, hvilket er et af de nordligste ynglefund af denne art i NØ-Grønland (SALOMONSEN 1967; MARRIS & WEBBE 1969).

LITERATURE

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