

Ornithological Observations in the Faroes, 1966

By

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(Med et Dansk resumé: *Ornithologiske iagttagelser på Færøerne, 1966.*)

INTRODUCTION

Two expeditions from Britain visited the Faroe Islands in July and August 1966. The City of Leicester Youth Service Expedition had two ornithological parties in the field, mainly on Sandoy and Suðuroy, and led by R. G. GIBBS and Dr. DAPHNE WATSON. Other members of these parties were M. CHERRY, S. LUND, S. MORBEY, K. EVANS, W. NOBLETT, F. RUSSELL and

D. WARD. Parties from the Brathay Exploration Group, including P. J. MAWBY, A. MAWBY, K. BLACKBURN, J. HULSE, A. LAURIE, K. RIGBY, P. OLIFF and P. TATE, visited Streymoy, Vágar and Mykines. Since several papers on the bird-life of the Faroes have appeared recently, we only include our more original observations.

ITINERARY

30 June–6 July Tórshavn.
7–22 July Parties on Sandoy and Suðuroy.
22–24 July Sandoy.
25–26 July Skúvoy.
27–30 July Tórshavn.

30 July–1 August Parties on Svínoy, Streymoy and Mykines.
1–10 August Parties on Vágar, Streymoy and Mykines.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*).

Sandoy: Reported breeding near Skálavík by islanders.

Nólsoy: A party of about 50 gathered on the sea off the island, in the evening of 5 July.

Mykines: The population on Mykineshólmur was estimated to be about 100 pairs; none were seen on Mykines itself.

STORM PETREL (*Hydrobates pelagicus*).

Sandoy: The species was seen at night on the slopes of Raettin opposite Trøllhövdi, and was breeding

on the east side of Salthövdí, where two nests with eggs were found. A bird caught at the latter colony on 23 July had been ringed at a breeding colony on Foula (Shetland) in 1965.

Mykines: No significant differences in distribution were observed from that described by NØRREVANG (1950).

LEACH'S PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*).

Mykines: Over 100 were caught and ringed on Mykineshólmur, but no evidence of breeding on the main island was obtained.

GANNET (*Morus bassanus*).

Mykines: 1081 occupied nests on 1 August. Five nests were seen on the main island where NØRREVANG found seven pairs in 1960. We were told that the number of young Gannets taken by the islanders has fallen from 800 or more to about 200 per year, and that all these are now taken from the stacks Pikardrangars and Flattidrangar rather than the north-western ledges, because of the shortage of man-power.

WHOOPEER SWAN (*Cygnus cygnus*).

Sandoy: One on the lakes at Skopun on 4 and 7 July had gone by 14 July.

Vágar: A pair on Sørvágsvatn on 30 June. One on Fjallavatn on 8 August.

Streymoy: Three on the sea lake at Saksun on 31 July. While it is possible that some of these observations refer to the same individuals, previous records of this species in summer are few (NØRREVANG 1950).

SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*).

Sandoy: One was seen on Stórvatn on 13 July.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*).

Suðuroy: A duck with five ducklings was found on a hill lake between Hov and Porkeri on 16 July. This appears to be the first published breeding record for the Faroes.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*).

Recent reports indicate that this species may have decreased considerably in the Faroes, so we include all our observations.

Suðuroy: One seen on the mountain ridge between Hov and Fámjin on 15 July.

Sandoy: A female flying over the dip between Endin and Tindur on 10 July.

Svínoy: Singles seen three times over the village tern colony on 30 and 31 July.

Streymoy: A female seen on two occasions near Núgván, at the head of Kaldbaksfjørður.

PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*).

Sandoy: Two pairs were proved to be breeding, and a third probably bred. A pair with one young, just able to fly but with down still showing on the head, was seen on 8 July. This was on Vordan, on the south side of Eiriksfall, at about 300 m. above sea level. On 10 July, at a similar altitude, another bird was found with two young also just on the wing on Reynsendi, the northern end of the main island ridge. The third record was of an adult which tried to decoy observers away from the top of Skúvoyarfjall on 19 July.

These appear to be the first published breeding records for Sandoy. The only other published breeding records for the Faroes since 1948 are those of JOENSEN (1963), who found the species

breeding on Skúvoy in 1960. In addition, there is a nesting record for Mykines about 1949 (NIELS Á BOTNI, unpublished, *per* K. WILLIAMSON).

REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*).

Sandoy: Single birds were seen on several occasions, but the only pair seen in a suitable breeding habitat, at Lomatjörn on 9 July, had departed two days later.

Streymoy: A single anxious bird was seen at Myrar-nar on 2 August.

CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).

Suðuroy: Six at Orevík on 20 July.

Sandoy: One at Saltvíg on 9 July, with three there 23 July. on

Vágar: One near Sørvágur on 9 August.

This species may be on the increase in the Faroes, as a result of the climatic amelioration discussed by WILLIAMSON (1945). No proof of breeding has yet been obtained in the Faroes, nor did any of the birds recorded above appear to be nesting.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*).

Sandoy: Nine pairs were located: five on Gróthúsvatn, two around Lomatjörn, one at the north end of Sandsvatn, and one on the Skopun lakes. A single male was seen at Stórvatn.

G. R. PORRS (unpublished) recorded about a dozen pairs on Sandoy in 1961, so numbers appear not to have changed appreciably.

GREAT SKUA (*Stercorarius skua*).

The distribution of the Great Skua in the Faroes was studied by BAYES *et al.* (1964). Table 1 compares our results with their figures for 1961.

Table 1. The number of pairs of Great Skuas (*Stercorarius skua*) in some breeding places in 1961 and 1966.

Table 1. *Antallet af par af Storkjove (Stercorarius skua) på nogle ynglepladser i 1961 og 1966.*

	1961 (pairs)	1966 (pairs)
SANDOY:		
Eiriksfall	10	13-14
Reynsendi „a few“		2
Skúvoyarfjall	3 (1960)	7
SKÚVOY:	40-45	about 20-25*
SOUTH STREYMOY:		
Kirkjubøreyn	2-3	2
NORTH STREYMOY:		
Svínaskóradalén	180	100
MYKINES:	-	single bird
VÁGAR: Fjallavatn	1-2	single bird

* About 30 pairs were reported to have been shot on Skúvoy this year.

ARCTIC SKUA (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

Sandoy: An estimate of the population on the island was made:

	pairs
Skúvoyarfjall	90
Eiriksfjall – Vordan (W side)	60
Eiriksfjall – Vordan (E side)	30
Scattered pairs	30+

Thus the total population on the island was at least 210 pairs, but was thought not to exceed 300 pairs. Of 172 counted, 27 were pale phase. Two dark phase skuas on Skúvoyarfjall, Sandoy, showed partial albinism with white patches on the lesser coverts at the bend of the wing, one bird having two such patches on each wing. These variants, previously reported from the Faroes and elsewhere, are discussed by WILLIAMSON (1965).

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*).

Streymoy: A single bird was heard in the Tórshavn plantation on 29 July.

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*).

On Sandoy, this species was confined to the infield (or böur) and the area around the lakes.

ROCK PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*).

The distribution was found to differ from island to island. On Mykines and Sandoy they were distributed throughout the islands, except that on Sandoy they were absent from low-lying meadows and the summit plateaus of the hills. On Suðuroy and Streymoy they were mainly seen on the coast, but at Saksun (North Streymoy) they were common around farm buildings, apparently occupying the niche of the absent House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*).

Suðuroy: One flew over the camp on 17 July.

Mykines: A pair were present around the harbour throughout our stay.

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING (*Sturnus roseus*)*.

Suðuroy: An adult, first seen on 21 July feeding in a newycut hayfield in Hov with 80 Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), was last seen on 25 July.

CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*).

Streymoy: Five in the Tórshavn plantation on 4 July.

TWO-BARRED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*)*.

Mykines: A juvenile was found exhausted near the lighthouse on 5 August, but soon recovered and flew away. This is the third record for the Faroes, but the first since 1903.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*).

Vágar: An adult male was seen near the summit of Snaedansfjall on 8 August.

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*).

This species continues to spread in the Faroes. We found it breeding in Kvalvík, where it has arrived since 1960 (POTTS 1961). However, it was not seen at Saksun nor at Kaldbaksbotnur where there are several new houses.

TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*).

Streymoy: A pair was seen in the Hoydála plantation near Tórshavn on 6 July, but could not be found there at the end of July.

* Approved by the rarity-committee. *Godkendt af sjældenhedsudvalget.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank KENNETH WILLIAMSON for his assistance in the planning of these expeditions and for his helpful comments on this paper, and all those

Faroese, too numerous to mention individually, who gave us invaluable assistance in every way.

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DANSK RESUMÉ

Ornithologiske iagttagelser på Færøerne, 1966.

I juli og august 1966 besøgte to grupper ornithologer Færøerne. I artiklen omtales kun de mere interessante iagttagelser, og her skal kun få omtales kortfattet.

Sule (*Morus bassanus*): Kolonien på Mykines Holm og Mykines rummede 1081 besatte reder den 1. august (heraf 5 reder på selve Mykines). – Sangsvane (*Cygnus cygnus*): Iagttaget på Sandoy (1 fugl), Vágur (2 fugle) og Saksun, Streymoy (3 fugle). – Gravand (*Tadorna tadorna*): 1 på Sandoy. – Troldand (*Aythya fuligula*): 1 hun med ællinger på Suðuroy den 16. juli. – Sortgrå Ryle (*Calidris maritima*): Enkelte par fundet ynglende på Sandoy. –

Odinshane (*Phalaropus lobatus*): 9 par fandtes på Sandoy. – Storkjove (*Stercorarius skua*): En række kolonier blev besøgt, se tabel 1. – Almindelig Kjove (*Stercorarius parasiticus*): Bestanden på Sandoy blev anslået til 210–300 par. – Rosenstær (*Sturnus roseus*): 1 ad. set på Suðuroy 21.–25. juli. – Hvidvinget Korsnæb (*Coxia leucoptera*): 1 juv. fundet på Mykines 5. august. Get er den tredie record fra Færøerne, men den første siden 1903. – Snespurv (*Plectrophenax nivalis*): 1 ad ♂ set på Vágur 8. august. – Skovspurv (*Passer montanus*): 2 set på Streymoy 6. juli.

MS received 5th August 1967

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