

Observations on Birds of the Faeroes, 1960.

By G. R. POTTS.

Department of Zoology, Durham Colleges
in the University of Durham.

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Introduction.

A Durham University Exploration Society's Expedition was in the Faeroes between 18 July and 10 September, 1960. During this period I made observations on the birds paying particular attention to the Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*). The first modern treatise on the birds of the Faeroes is that of SALOMONSEN (1935). NØRREVANG (1955) wrote of changes in the avifauna since 1935 in relation to the amelioration in the climate. Reference will be made to changes since these latter observations were made.

The following areas were visited:—Torshavn, North West Strømø, Klakksvik, Svinø, Vågø, Mykines and Sunnbøur, South Suderø, the latter from 17 August to 8 September.

Classified Observations.

Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*). The number of breeding birds has decreased in recent years (NØRREVANG, 1955). I saw none on Svinø (1 pair 1953) or Vågø (2 pair 1953).

Leach's Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) and Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*). A mist-net was set just below the Klettur on Mykinesholmur on the night of 8–9 August. In three hours, 11 Storm and 14 Leach's Petrels were caught. Between 27 August and 6 September 5 Storm Petrels were found dead beneath the light at Akraberg fyr (Lighthouse 61°21' N, 6°40' W).

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*). This species was especially common at sea feeding off South Suderø and some were seen each day from the shore. However, on 27 August between 16⁰⁰–19⁰⁰ hrs. 3,000–3,500 birds moved east around Akraberg.

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*). Three were fishing off Akraberg 06⁰⁰–07⁰⁰ hrs. 3 September. (It appears that more were recorded from the coast of Great Britain in 1960 than in any previous year (see British Birds 53, p. 536).

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*). I estimate nearly 7,500 *nati* or young Fulmar were taken for food at Sunnbøur, South Suderø which has a population of about 500. The majority of these birds were taken from the sea; only a few being gathered from the cliffs.

Following the *psittacosis* outbreak in the Faeroes in 1936 young Fulmars were forbidden as an article of food, but before 1936 at least 80,000 young were taken annually (FISHER and LOCKLEY, 1954). The revival of the fowling of this species (in the last 4 or 5 years) is probably due to the apparent disappearance of *psittacosis* in the species, the availability of penicillin should the disease recur and the use of motor boats for catching the young in the flightless condition. Extra care is now observed, small birds are rejected and cleanliness is strict. Most were killed in the period 26 August to 3 September when the fowling was aided by the calm conditions at sea.

About 10 young were still on the cliffs at Akraberg, Suderø on the 7 September, 3 days later than recorded for the Faeroes (FISHER, 1952).

Gannet (*Morus bassanus*). NØRREVANG (1960) estimated c. 1950 pairs of Gannets on Mykinesholmúr in 1957. Two crates of live young were exported to Kastrup on 10 September.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). Two birds flew north between Tindhólmúr and Mykines on 10 August. The status of this bird appears to be obscure in the Faeroes.

Heron (*Ardea cinerea*). On 19 July I found spoor of a heron beside a tarn north of Halsarejn Tórshavn. One flew north from Sunnbíarholmúr (small island off Sunnbøur) 5 September.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). About 30 frequented the Tórshavn plantation to Hosvik area and 2 broods were seen. Mallard were tame on the pools in the main plantation and were fed partly on bread by the inhabitants nearby. A group of 4 on Fjallavatn 5 August were the only others seen.

Teal (*Anas crecca*). A female flew into the plantation pools to join Mallard on 8 September.

Eider (*Somateria mollissima*). Eider-down is still collected from Sunnbíarholmúr. The numerous incubating Duck are protected by small stone shelters (NICLAS POULSON, Sunnbøur). About 25 were feeding on limpets (*Patella* sp.) thrown out to them by some children on the quay Sunnbøur 5 September.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*). Seen at two localities. On 24 July 2 females, one with 5 the other with 4 young, were on the reservoirs north of Vestmanna. At Fjallavatn, 2 females with 3 and 7 young and 8 other adults were seen.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*). Tórshavn plantation pools, 4 adults, 1 juvenile. Våg Suderø, 16 August, 1 adult.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). Despite the reductions reported in NØRREVANG 1955, I found the species widespread in the upland areas. Two occurred at Sunnbøur – possibly on passage: 24 August, 1 male and 6 September, 1 female or 1st year bird.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). NØRREVANG (1955) states that this species is a very occasional passage migrant. I saw one male at Sunnbøur on 6 September.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*). Near Tórshavn on 19 July I saw a bird rise with what appeared to be a chick between its legs. On 27 August just north of Akraberg, I saw another rise with a piece of brown wool between its legs suggesting that the first observation may have been incorrect. On 1 September 35 flew due south just before dark from Akraberg (300 ft.). They left the coast flying at about 750 ft.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). A flock of 26 were seen along the shore near Sunnbøur on 4 September.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*). Four at Mykines on 7–11 August and 3 at Sunnbøur on 17 August to 1 September, were probably on passage.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*). Still present on 9 September but very few in South Suderø after 1 September.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*). Maximum 5 at Sunnbøur between 17 August and 8 September. On 19 August I found one at 1,200 ft. in the hills north of Sunnbøur.

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*). Careful search in the hilly areas revealed no evidence of breeding (NW. Strømø and Svinø). On 3 August 4 were on the shore near the quay, Svinø. Up to 7 frequented the shore near Sunnbøur at the beginning of September.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). Fjallavatn was visited on 5 August. The species has been recorded breeding in the area regularly (WILLIAMSON, 1948, NØRREVANG, 1955, PETERSEN and ASKANER, 1956). Two birds were present near some pools covered with Bog bean (*Menyanthes*) at the western end.

Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). I found only one young which was not fledged, on 25 July. Most birds left South Suderø between 25 August and 3 September. After 27 August none were seen inland.

Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*). A census was carried out at the two major colonies on Faeroes:

Strømø: 22–27 July inclusive.

Svínaskora-dalen.....	85–95	breeding	pairs.
Adjacent areas.....	8	–	–
Skúgvíflati (S. of Saxunadalur).....	4	–	–

102 ± 5 pairs in all, in addition nonbreeders were estimated at 10 to 20 %. On 27 July between 7 and 12 young were taken for food (despite being a protected species) from the Svínaskora colony. I gathered that the local inhabitants are in the habit of taking a few young every year. Since the war years (1940–45) there has been only a very small increase in this area (75–100 pairs in 1946 (FERDINAND, 1947)). One clutch was still being incubated on 27 July when 5 young were flying. Young were estimated at 1.25 per pair on this date.

Svinø: 30 July to 2 August inclusive. I estimated the total number of adults using the island to be less than 250 and breeding pairs to be between 100 and 120. None were found in Northern Svinø where 3 pairs

bred in 1949 (PETERSEN, 1950). About 500 pairs were recorded as breeding on Svinø in 1949 (PETERSEN, 1950) yet only 80–100 pairs were present in 1945 (FERDINAND, 1947).

No Great Skuas were seen on Vågø in 1960, but in 1951, 6 or 7 pairs bred (NØRREVANG, 1955).

Greater Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). I found the species more numerous than the Great Skua and nesting on the same plateau. One adult had large, symmetrical white patches on the outer coverts of each wing.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). A few pairs were present on Southern Svinø. It is said (WILLIAMSON 1954) that as the Great Skuas increased on Svinø, this species decreased, and he recorded several pairs.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*). An early adult bird of this winter visiting species was seen from Sunnbøur 3 September. A bird seen in the same locality on 6 and 7 September was probably the same individual.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*). None seen. In July 1955, I. PETERSEN and T. ASKANER (1956) found c. 15 on Fjallavatn.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*). Towards the end of August I became aware of a considerable mortality in the Kittiwakes present in South Suderø. All the dead birds I examined had been fledged about a week or ten days. There is a colony of about 800 pairs on Akraberg and on 25 August I counted over 200 bodies on the sea. However, some of these may have drifted from areas further north. Others appeared weak and stood about on the shore. I examined 3 such birds after they had died and found their alimentary tracts devoid of food. One bird was captured by some children, forcibly fed, and it recovered after about 4 days.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*). I found c. 250 dead young at the Svinø colony on 2 August, these birds were almost at fledging age and appeared to have died 3 or 4 days previously. Most left Sunnbøurholmur 26–30 August. An adult present 5–7 September.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*) and Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*). Three Puffins and a Razorbill were seen fishing on the freshwater lake of Fjallavatn, 5 August.

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*). Said to have declined in recent years (NØRREVANG 1955) but the species is still widespread and numerous on Tindholmúr near Sørvaag and in S. Suderø. Up to 7 were seen feeding in the village bœur at Sunnbøur after the hay had been cut.

Swift (*Apus apus*). I found one flying amongst the Fulmar, Mykines, 8 August. Another was seen near the Akraberg fyr, 24 August.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*). At Sunnbøur one was present, 28 August and 2 were near my tent early on the morning of 7 September.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*). One was seen, 29 August flying up and down the shore at Sunnbøur. This is the sixth recorded occurrence on Faeroes.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*). Four visits were made to the main conifer plantation near Tórshavn. From there, I estimate 20–25 birds present; on the 28 July over 20 birds were present and these included birds of the year. I only saw 5–10, 8 September but there was a high wind. WILLIAMSON (1954) records only 1 pair breeding in May, 1953.

I went to the second, smaller plantation twice but no thrushes were present.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). This species first bred in Tórshavn in 1947 (WILLIAMSON and PETERSEN & BOTNI, 1948). In 1948–49 breeding again occurred and a pair bred on Kunø, and until now these are the only confirmed breeding records. On 19 July I saw a young Blackbird which had just left the nest, begging for food. A female was carrying food nearby. A day later, I saw a female low in some stunted pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) carrying food at the other end of the plantation. In addition to these birds 2 adult males were present 20 July. Yet another Blackbird on the same day may have been a female or a bird hatched early in the season. About 10 were present 10 September.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*). This species was a scarce winter visitor during 1940–45 and has not been recorded in summer before (WILLIAMSON, 1948). On 19 July 2 adults were present in the plantation at Tórshavn and one of these was feeding a fledgling. Two young were probably present but were not seen together. At least 3 red-breasted birds were present on 8 September.

Barred Warbler (*Sylvia nisoria*). This species was widespread in Britain in late August and in September, 1960 (Bird Migration No. 5, 1961) and numbers in Shetland were unprecedented. Early on 19 August I found a tired bird on the coast north of Akraberg, this bird was ringed the next day. A second bird (also in 1st autumn plumage) appeared on 27 August and stayed 8 days in the village area, Sunnbøur. The first influx at Fair Isle was on 25 August. This is the third record for the Faeroes.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*). At Sunnbøur one was killed by a cat on 29 August and another bird, with a white secondary was seen on 2 September. A further two occurred on the 5 September.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*). 10 or 11 passed through Sunnbøur between 25 August and 6 September; 6 were seen 29 August.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). One was seen in a garden at Sunnbøur 28–30 August. Two pale grey birds seen on 2 September probably belonged to the Scandinavian race (*Phylloscopus collybita abietinus*).

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*). One seen feeding in some rose bushes at Sunnbøur on 18 August. This is the 6th record for the Faeroes.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Musicapa striata*). One at the eastern end of the village of Sunnbøur 28 August was the 4th record for the Faeroes.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*). Movement of this species occurred in late August and early September. Just after dawn on 20 Au-

gust S. Suderø, c. 50 flew south out to sea in about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour, others came in from the north-west and a few from the south. On 27 and 28 August c. 300 birds passed south to the Akraberg region mostly before 08⁰⁰ hrs. Most of this influx appeared to leave on the night of 28 August, none were seen to pass out to sea. I heard birds calling as they flew south at 01⁰⁰ hrs. on the morning of 7 September.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba alba*). One, Tórshavn, 19 and 28 July. At Sunnbøur, a small passage occurred:—Two peaks were noted—23 on 23 August, 45 to 50 on 28 August. Only 2 remained on 7 September.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*). This species has only once been recorded in the Faeroes in summer or autumn (NØRREVANG, *in litt.*). One flew north over the plantation on 20 July. Two of blue-headed variety were on Mykines 9–11 August.

Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*). This species has not been recorded breeding in the Faeroes and is a scarce passage migrant. Two were settled in the western part of the plantation, 20 July.

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*). This species has been recorded breeding in the Faeroes. I covered large areas of upland and so did the other members of the expedition, but no Snow Bunting were seen. The other members were geologists and geographers but I asked for a special look out for this species which is easily recognizable.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). Continues to increase:—

1. *Tórshavn*. Part of the reason for the House Sparrow's success in the capital (colonised 1946, NØRREVANG 1955) is linked with the presence of the plantation. Here in the late summer of 1960 I saw many birds (certainly up to 50 at a time) feeding and gathering insects for their broods in the town.

2. *Klakksvig, Bordø*. The species is now established here. I saw c. 25 feeding on the street sides and along the shore, 29 August.

3. *Svinø*. The population seems to have changed little since the "c. 12 pairs" in 1953 (WILLIAMSON, 1954).

4. *Midvåg, Vågø*. Common.

5. *Sørvåg, Vågø*. I saw many birds in the town. None were noted here in 1955 (PETERSEN and ASKANER, 1956).

6. *Mykines*. C. 7 pairs, 1 brood was being fed in a nest box, 11 August, the species reached this village about 6 years ago (per local inhabitants).

7. *Våg and Tverå/Trangisvåg Suderø*. Very numerous, but more so in Våg which, though a smaller town, has more gardens.

8. *Sunnbøur, Suderø*. One brood was still being fed on 5 September and c. 17 other birds were located on that day; only 3 males in full plumage could be found.

9. *Kvalvik and Saksen, Strømø*. Not seen.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*). This species used to breed on Skuø but this colony had died out by 1910. Apart from five which

“spent the summer” on Mykines in 1934 (SALOMONSEN, 1935) the species has not been recorded since.

I found between 11 and 15 resident at the eastern end of Sunnbøur village. Up to 6 at one time could be seen feeding with the ducks and fowl on scraps.

The birds did not keep together as a group. I was unable to prove that this species had bred as it was too late in the season. A group of 4 often perched side by side along the top of a wire fence; these birds always kept together and though they were not seen to be fed by parents, I regarded them as juveniles.

This village was visited by FERDINAND in 1946 but he found no Tree Sparrows. It seems that the species may perhaps have recolonised the Faeroes. In this connection it may not be irrelevant to add that Tree Sparrows have become more frequent on passage in the Shetlands and in northern Scotland in the last 3 years (Fair Isle Bird Observatory Reports, *in litt.*).

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Summary.

Observations on the status of some bird species in the Faeroes were made between 18 July and 10 September, 1960.

The number of breeding pairs of Great Skua was estimated at 100 on Strømø and 100–120 on Svinø. These figures can be compared with estimates of 80–100 pairs on Strømø in 1946 and 500 pairs on Svinø in 1949. Young Skua are taken for food on Strømø. There is a third (though small) colony on Skuø, but this island was not visited.

The decrease in the population of certain species was difficult to assess, but it is noteworthy that no breeding Red-throated Diver, Snow Bunting or Purple Sandpiper were seen. By the end of July 20–25 Redwings were present in the plantation at Tórshavn. The Blackbird, which bred in the period

1947–49 but not subsequently, was proved to be breeding again.

The Robin was recorded breeding for the first time and Lesser Redpolls were seen but breeding was not proved.

The Tree Sparrow has recolonised the Faeroes but again breeding was not proved, whilst the House Sparrow had increased and extended its breeding range.

The Fulmar is once again being taken for food by the Faeroese.

Several migrants were seen (mainly between 17 August and 8 September) near the southernmost village in the Faeroes, Sunnbøur. The Kestrel, Swift, Barred Warbler, Garden Warbler, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler were recorded; these species have occurred more frequently in recent years.

Other species included the Sand Martin, Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Yellow Wagtail, all vagrants to the Faeroes.

DANSK RESUMÉ

Fugleagttagelser på Færøerne, 1960.

De foreliggende observationer over nogle fuglearter på Færøerne blev gjort mellem den 18. juli og den 10. september 1960.

Antallet af rugende par af Storkjove (*Stercorarius skua*) skønnedes at være 100 par på Strømø og 100–120 på Svinø. Disse tal kan sammenlignes med det skønnede antal 80–100 par på Strømø i 1946 og 500 par på Svinø i 1949. På Strømø indfanges unge Storkjover til føde for mennesker. Der er en tredje (mindre) koloni på Skuø, men denne ø blev ikke besøgt.

Nedgangen i bestandstørrelsen hos visse arter var ikke let at fastslå, men det er værd at bemærke, at der ikke sås ynglende Rødstrubet Lom (*Gavia stellata*), Snespurv (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) eller Sortgrå Ryle (*Calidris maritima*). I slutningen af juli var der 20–25 Vindrosler (*Turdus iliacus*) i plantagen ved Torshavn. Det viste sig, at Solsort (*Turdus merula*), som ynglede i tiden 1947–49, men ikke senere, ynglede der igen.

Rødhals (*Erithacus rubecula*) rapporteredes som ynglefugl for første gang, og Gråsisken (*Carduelis flammea*) sås, men der fandtes intet bevis på, at den ynglede.

Skovspurven (*Passer montanus*) har igen slået sig ned på Færøerne, men der fandtes intet bevis på, at den ynglede, hvorimod Gråspurven (*Passer domesticus*) er taget til i antal og har udvidet sit yngleområde.

Malemuk (*Fulmarus glacialis*) indfanges nu igen på Færøerne til føde for mennesker.

Der sås en del trækkende fugle (hovedsagelig mellem 17. august og 8. september) i nærheden af Synnbøur, den sydligste landsby på Færøerne. Tårnfalk (*Falco tinnunculus*), Mursejler (*Apus apus*), Høgesanger (*Sylvia nisoria*), Havesanger (*Sylvia borin*), Gransanger (*Phylloscopus collybita*) og Løvsanger (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) rapporteredes; disse arter er i de senere år optrådt hyppigere.

Blandt andre arter sås Digesvale (*Riparia riparia*), Grå Fluesnapper (*Muscicapa striata*), Skovsanger (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) og Gul Vipstjert (*Motacilla flava*), alle tilfældige gæster på Færøerne.

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