BIRDS SEEN IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC,
AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, 1934.

BY

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These notes were made when I was travelling as a member of the Public Schools Exploring Society Expedition (1934) on board the s.s. "Nova Scotia", between Liverpool and St. John's, Newfoundland, from August 3rd to 9th, and on the return voyage, on board the s.s. "Newfoundland", from September 12th to 18th. I am indebted to their respective navigating officers for all information as to the position of the ships, and to Furness, Withy & Co. for an accurate summary of the weather encountered. On both voyages we followed much the same route, round the north of Ireland. Our noon positions are given for each day and otherwise, except in a few cases, the time at which observations were made is given alone, as providing sufficient indication of our position. Our usual speed was from twelve to fourteen knots.

Several papers have appeared on the birds of the North Atlantic in recent volumes of British Birds (e.g. XXII., pp. 122-123; XXIV., pp. 266-274; XXV., pp. 156-158, and XXVI., pp. 271-272); the first two mentioned contain charts on which the observations included in the present paper may be followed. I have not made any special references to the notes included in the above papers, nor have I compared them with my own observations; this paper is intended solely to add a few more facts to the subject of North Atlantic birds; no doubt someone will draw the necessary conclusions when sufficient data have been published.

Outward Voyage:—

August 4th (55° 26' N., 7° 26' W.). Wind moderate W.S.W. until 9 a.m., then strong S.W.; within sight of the Irish coast from Belfast Lough to Tory I., between about 7.0 a.m. and 1.0 p.m., after which we lost sight of it owing to bad weather. In the neighbourhood of Belfast Lough, Terns were not uncommon, those that came close enough appeared to be Sandwich Terns (Sterna sandvicensis); near here, and again near Rathlin I., I thought I saw Fulmars (Fulmarus g. glacialis), but could not make sure. Between Rathlin I. and Inishtrahull, especially near the latter, Manx Shearwaters (Puffinus puffinus) were quite common, though I saw none later. Alcidae were fairly frequent as long as we were not far from the coast. Of those that I identified, the Puffin...
(Fratercula a. grabce) was the commonest, while Guillemots (Uria aalge subsp.) and one Razorbill (Alca torda) were also seen. Only one Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo) was noted, and that was near Rathlin I. Of the Gulls following the ship, Herring-Gulls (Larus argentatus) were numerous, several British Lesser Black-backed Gulls (L. f. graellsii) were continuously with them; I only saw a few Great Black-backed Gulls (L. marinus). At 2.30 p.m., when some twenty-three miles from the mainland and in fifty-seven fathoms, several Lari were still following, but when I continued observations at 6.0 p.m. they had all gone, and the only Gulls following the ship were six Kittiwakes (Rissa t. tridactyla), one or two of which species had been following most of the day. Gannets (Sula bassana) had been fairly common all day, and eight or ten were still to be seen at this time, when we were in about ninety fathoms (about 55° 26' N., 0° 32' W.). There was a remarkable number of Fulmars following the ship at 6.0 p.m., whereas between 2.15 and 2.30 only three had been seen. It was obvious that here, in ninety fathoms, the ranges of the off-shore and pelagic communities overlapped, the two being represented by the Gannets and Fulmars respectively. From my notes it appears that only a few of the many Gannets and Herring-Gulls were in immature plumage.

August 5th (55° 14' N., 17° 22' W.). Light S.W. wind, freshening later; cloudy. Fulmars were seen all day, but were not really numerous; Great Shearwaters (Puffinus gravis) were much in evidence; I saw ten together on one occasion. At 9.10 a.m. two birds, which I was at a loss to identify, passed astern, flying low over the water; they were black and white with white wing-bars and with black extending down the throat to the upper-breast. The only birds they could have been, it seemed, were Oyster-Catchers (Haematopus ostralegus), but they seemed so out of place in that setting that I am still doubtful if they really were. At 10.35 a Gannet (immature) was seen, which seems to be unusually far out for the species. Kittiwakes were definitely scarce, but seen at intervals until 4.0 p.m. A Great Skua (Stercorarius s. skua) flew past the ship at 7.10 p.m., and disappeared in a southerly direction.

August 6th (54° 32' N., 27° 20' W.). Light W. to S.W. wind, dull and some rain. Fulmars present in varying numbers throughout the day, but never very numerous; Great Shearwaters as before. The most notable feature of the day's observations was the frequency with which Skuas were seen. Unfortunately, they rarely came close enough to be identified
with certainty, except in the case of the Great Skuas. We saw two of the latter species, one at 9.40 a.m. and another an hour later; the first one attacked a Great Shearwater and both fell fluttering on to the water; presumably the Skua was forcing it to disgorge. I think that the smaller Skuas were Pomatorhine Skuas (*S. pomarina*us) and immature Arctic or Long-tailed Skuas (*S. parasiticus* or *longicaudus*); at 4.30 p.m. ten of one of the last two species appeared on the port bow and passed astern, as had most of the others. This was the largest number I saw at once. At 9.25 a.m. I saw a Sooty Shearwater (*P. griseus*); no Kittiwakes were seen during the day.

August 7th (52° 54′ N., 36° 04′ W.). Wind S.W. to W., strong to light; sea rough, visibility poor at times. Fulmars and Great Shearwaters fairly common. One or two small Petrels (sp. ?) were reported, but I did not see them. At 10.0 a.m. a small Skua (sp. ?) flew past, and was the only other species seen.

August 8th (50° 46′ N., 44° 23′ W.). Wind S.W. to W., moderate. Fine and clear. Just as on the 6th we ran into a belt of Skuas, so to-day we ran into a belt of Petrels; they were fairly numerous nearly all day, but did not come very close to the ship. As far as I could tell, they were Leach's Petrels (*Oceanodroma l. leucorrhoa*). Fulmars were not common, but a few were usually to be seen; Great Shearwaters were fairly numerous—in all of them the contrast between the dark crown and white throat was most noticeable; there were no signs of *P. kuhlii*, which is said to occur off Newfoundland. Three Skuas were seen during the morning, two of them probably Pomatorhine Skuas and the third an adult Long-tailed Skua.

August 9th (47° 51′ N., 51° 48′ W.). Fine and calm; wind S.W. to W., light. At 10.0 a.m. two Gannets were seen, floating on the water, and thereafter were fairly common, though as we neared land no more were seen; most of them were in adult plumage. We crossed the hundred-fathom line at 10.0 a.m. At 10.25 the first American Herring-Gulls (*L. a. smithsonianus*) appeared, and they, or others, followed for some time, though round noon none were seen for a short while. Two undoubted Pomatorhine Skuas were seen shortly after 10.0 a.m., and several more Skuas (sp. ?) at 10.35. At this time a Kittiwake was seen, and odd ones from then until we reached St. John's. A Black Guillemot (*Uria grylle*) flew past at 10.40 and another at 1.15; an Atlantic Puffin (*F. a. arctica*) was seen shortly before the latter. At 1.0 p.m.
a Sooty Shearwater flew near the ship, and a moment later I noticed that land was in sight. While still fairly far out, several small Petrels (Leach's) were seen. The first Great Black-backed Gull joined the ship at 1.15 p.m. and by 1.55 four were following. At 2.5 p.m., when only about two miles off St. John's, a Phalarope (sp. ?) flitted across close under our bows in a northerly (?) direction. As we approached the coast, Herring-Gulls had become increasingly numerous, and by the time we entered the harbour hundreds were wheeling in the air over the stern, many of them immature.

Return Voyage:—

September 12th. We sailed from St. John's at noon. Moderate N.W. wind, fine and clear. The only observations I made were that Herring-Gulls were less numerous than on August 9th, though Great Black-backed Gulls were seen as before; two of the latter followed us out for some distance.

September 13th (50° 19' N., 45° 15' W.). Wind W. to S.W., fresh to strong; rough sea, but fairly fine. Fulmars common, Leach's Petrels and Great Shearwaters fairly so. At 9.30 a.m. I was called on deck to see a small bird which had flown on board in an exhausted condition; it proved to be a Redpoll (Carduelis flammea subsp.). I was unfortunately unable to obtain it. The wind was quite strong enough to have blown it out of its course, if it had been migrating from Greenland to Newfoundland, but hardly to have blown it out from Newfoundland direct, or from Labrador. Among other points that I noted while examining it at close quarters through ×6 glasses were the following:—It had a red forehead; underparts well streaked (this makes it unlikely that it belonged to a race of C. hornemanni), white wing-bars, whitish edgings to most of tail-feathers, two almost white lines down centre of back, edged by three blackish lines (as far as I could see); general colour apparently paler than that of examples of C. f. flammea (= Acanthis l. linaria of A.O.U. nomenclature) seen in Newfoundland; bill not very pointed. It was impossible to gauge its size accurately. From this description it would appear to have been a Greenland Redpoll (C. f. rostrata), and this is made more likely by the position of its occurrence, as has already been explained. After about a quarter of an hour it flew away and was not seen again.

September 14th (52° 36' N., 36° 55' W.). Strong N.W. wind, heavy sea. Fulmars numerous, Great Shearwaters fairly common; several Sooty Shearwaters were seen at intervals, often quite close. A party of Terns (Sterna sp. ?) was noted at 11.0 a.m., a Skua (sp. ?) was harrying them;
several other small Skuas were seen during the day, but were lacking in distinctive tail-feathers. About 1.0 p.m. two small birds flew alongside, but apparently did not settle; they were undoubtedly Wheatears (*enanthe enantha*). At 5.0 p.m. another Tern flew past the ship.

September 15th (54° 20' N., 28° 01' W.). Wind W.N.W., moderate to fresh; fine and clear. Great Shearwaters fairly common all day, Fulmars particularly numerous. A Kittiwake followed the ship for a short time about 11.30 a.m. Terns were seen in small parties several times during the day, but I could not make certain of the direction in which they were flying; presumably they were Arctic Terns (*Sterna* macrura). In the morning a Great Skua was seen to attack a Great Shearwater, in exactly the same way as was seen on August 6th, when we were in much the same longitude. Two small Skuas were seen in the morning, and during the afternoon they became really common (cf., August 6th); three parties of fifteen or more passed the ship, and there were rarely less than two or three in sight. Most of those that came at all near were immature birds, but I saw one or more adult Pomatorhine and Long-tailed Skuas. About 8.0 a.m. a small Passerine was reported, evidently a Wheatear.

September 16th (55° 18' N., 18° 30' W.). Wind W. to S.W., moderate until 4.0 p.m., when it changed to E., freshening; rough sea, overcast and showery. Until 3.0 p.m. small Petrels were fairly common in the ship's wake, those that came near enough appeared to have forked tails and certainly had pale wing-bars; they were presumably Leach's Petrels. Fulmars were comparatively scarce, though I saw one or two all day; I saw no Great Shearwaters or Skuas. A Kittiwake followed the ship for a short time, about 2.0 p.m. Soon after this I was surprised to see a Wheatear flying among the Petrels in the wake of the ship; it seemed very exhausted and only managed to catch the ship up inch by inch; often it looked as if it were going to be swamped by the waves. A little later I noticed that three were following; after what seemed like an age one of them gained the comparative shelter of the forehatch, and I spent some time watching it there. Others were flying round the ship until 6.30 p.m., at which time one was caught in an exhausted condition; we were then in 55° 24' N., 15° 50' W. I skinned this bird, which proved to be a female Greenland Wheatear (*E. leucorhoa*). Its skin is now in the British Museum (Natural History). Its stomach was completely empty except that what looked like thick oil was adhering to the lining; possibly
this is what it had picked up from the deck, in extreme hunger, for the bird that I watched had frequently appeared to peck at something on the deck, though whether it swallowed anything I did not see.

September 17th (55° 32’ N., 8° 52’ W.). Wind S.E., fresh to strong, changing to S.W. later. At 9.0 a.m. a Wheatear settled for a short time on the poop, but none were seen after that. At 11.0 a.m. a Swallow (Hirundo r. rustica) came on board and remained until about 1.0 p.m., by which time we were within sight of land, some fifteen miles off. During this time someone had seen four together on one occasion; the one I examined was a young bird, without tail-streamers. At 12.0 p.m. Fulmars and Great Shearwaters were common in the wake, but by 1.15 they had disappeared. The first Gannet appeared at 11.30 a.m. (we crossed the hundred-fathom line at about 10.0 a.m.). A Great Skua flew past at 1.15 p.m., and at 1.40, when still ten or more miles from the Irish coast, a small wader that was probably a Turnstone (Arenaria i. interpres) was seen. At 2.30 the first few Herring-Gulls joined us, and as we drew in closer to the land they became commoner; I saw only one British Lesser Black-backed Gull, two Great Black-backed Gulls and no Kittiwakes during the day. Near Inishtrahull several Puffins were seen and also a young Shag (P. a. aristotelis). The only other species noted was a Tern (sp. ?) near Rathlin I.

Summary :-

**GREENLAND REDPOLL (Carduelis f. rostrata).** A Redpoll, probably of this race, came on board on September 13th, when we were in about 50° 16’ N., 46° 22’ W.; the wind on September 12th-13th had been between N.W. and S.W., strong on the latter date.

**GREENLAND WHEATEAR (Enanthe c. leucorrhoa).** Wheatears were seen round the ship as follows: September 14th (2), 15th (1), 16th (several) and 17th (1, early). This was between long. 36° 50’ W. and 10° W.; the wind changed from N.W., through S.W., gradually to E. on the above dates, and was usually fairly strong. One bird was obtained, on the 16th, and it is to be presumed that all were of the same race.

**SWALLOW (Hirundo r. rustica).** Between 11.0 a.m. and 1.0 p.m. on September 17th (55° 32’ N., 8° 52’ W., at 12.0 p.m.) at least four were seen; soon after we sighted Ireland they disappeared.

**GANNET (Sula bassana).** Not seen west of about 10° W. on the British side, or east of about 50° 54’ W. on the American side, except for an immature bird seen on August 3rd, in 55° 16’ N., 16° 42’ W. None were seen outside the hundred-fathom line except this bird; relatively few were in immature plumage.

**LEACH’S PETREL (Oceanodroma l. leucorrhoa).** We encountered a belt of small Petrels on August 8th and 9th, off Newfoundland, between about 43° and 52° W. On September 16th they were fairly common between 20° and 17° 10’ W. All those seen appeared to be Leach’s Petrels.
MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*). Seen only near land on the British side (August 5th).

GREAT SHEARWATER (*P. gravis*). Numerous between about 15° W. and 47° 30' W. (August 5th-8th), and between 47° 30' and 8° 50' W. (September 13th-17th), except that none were seen on September 16th for some obscure reason. No sign of *P. kuhlii*.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*P. griseus*). One in 54° 35' N., 26° 13' W., on August 6th, and another, just as Newfoundland was sighted, on the 9th. Several were seen at intervals on September 14th (52° 36' N., 36° 55' W., at noon).

FULMAR (*Fulmarus g. glacialis*). The commonest oceanic species, perhaps least numerous in the neighbourhood of 20° W., and probably more numerous in September than in August. I do not think that any one individual followed the ship for long. I thought I saw Fulmars close to the N. Irish coast on August 4th, but could not be sure.

OYSTER-CATCHER (? *Haematopus ostralegus*). Two birds, probably of this species, in about 55° 17' N., 16° 02' W., on August 5th.

TURNSTONE (?) (*Arenaria interpres*). A small wader, probably of this species, flew past the ship when about ten miles off the N. Irish coast, in long. 8° 07' W., on September 17th.

PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus* sp.). One flew across our bows, when about two miles off St. John's, on August 9th.

ARCTIC TERN (?) (*Sterna paradisaea*). Parties and single birds evidently referable to this species were seen on September 14th and 15th, between 38° and 25° W. The direction of their flight was not definitely ascertained.

KITTIWAKE (*Rissa t. tridactyla*). On the outward voyage several were seen off the N. Irish coast and others at intervals as far west as 19° 30' W. No others were seen until near the Newfoundland coast. On the return voyage they were noted as follows: September 15th (c. 28° W.), September 16th (17° 36' W.); no others were seen. All were in adult plumage.

GREAT SKUA (*Stercorarius s. skua*). Three were seen between 20° and 27° W. on August 5th and 6th; one in about long. 28° 30' W. on September 13th, and another on September 17th in sight of N. Ireland.

POMATORHINE SKUA (*S. pomarinus*). ARCTIC SKUA (?) (*S. parasiticus*).

LONG-TAILED SKUA (*S. longicaudus*). On August 6th (54° 32' N., 27° 20' W., at noon) we passed through a belt of Skuas, in which probably all these species were represented, a few others were seen on the 7th, 8th and 9th. On the return journey Skuas were seen on September 14th (several) and September 15th (many), between long. 37° 30' W. and 25° W. There was obviously a large migration taking place in the region of 27° W. Most of the birds seen were apparently immature, but I definitely identified several adult Pomatorhine and Long-tailed Skuas.

Other species, such as Puffins, Guillemots, Black Guillemots, Gulls, Terns and Cormorants, were seen fairly close to land, and details concerning them are to be found under August 4th and 9th, and September 12th and 17th.

Altogether twenty-seven, and probably more, species were seen on the two voyages.