INTRODUCTION

The month of August 1955 was spent aboard Ocean Weather Ship "Weather Recorder" in the North Atlantic at Ocean Station "India", 300 miles south of Iceland (59°N., 19°W.). Apart from three days towards the end of the period, when it changed owing to an S.O.S. signal being received and attended to, this position was maintained from 4th to 26th August.

Much of the time was spent on deck, but nevertheless it was inevitable that many birds would be missed, especially passing migrants at night and in the early morning. Time on deck varied, but visits were always made once an hour for at least ten minutes, and on some days the whole time, apart from meals, was spent there.

The numbers of each species, their directions of flight and the

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weather, if considered relevant, and general behaviour notes are given. All times are Greenwich Mean Time.

**POSITIONS**

**2nd August 1955:** 0800 hours, 56°0’N., 8°40’W.; steaming at 8-9 knots on a heading of 295°.

**3rd August 1955:** 1400 hours, 58°0’N., 15°40’W.; steaming at 8-9 knots on a heading of 295°.

**4th-18th August 1955:** Stationary at 59°0’N., 19°0’W.

**19th-20th August 1955:** Steaming at 10 knots until 1100 hours on the 19th. Steaming around at 1-3 knots for the rest of that day and the 20th at position 58°20’N., 16°40’W.

**21st August 1955:** Steaming all day back to station.

**22nd-26th August 1955:** Stationary at 59°0’N., 19°0’W.

**27th August 1955:** 0900 hours, 58°10’N., 16°10’W. (80 miles north-west of Rockall); steaming all day on heading 115° at 10 knots.

**28th August 1955:** 0700 hours, 57°0’N., 12°20’W.; steaming all day on heading 115° at 10 knots.

**29th August 1955:** In the Clyde.

**SEA BIRDS**

**LEACH’S PETREL** (*Oceanodroma leucorrhoa*).—The only record was one on 7th August.

**STORM PETREL** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*).—Seen only on four occasions: one on 7th, 20th and 27th August, and two on 28th August.

**MANX SHEARWATER** (*Procellaria puffinus*).—Apart from two on 3rd August and one flying east on the 12th, none was recorded until 14th August, but for the next eight days they were often seen. Sometimes they were just gliding around, presumably hunting, but all those that were flying on straight courses were going either east or west, probably from N. Scotland, moving to and from feeding-grounds farther afield. They were either single or in small parties, the most seen together being 25 on 16th August, flying low over the sea to the west.

**GREAT SHEARWATER** (*Procellaria gravis*).—On ten days none was seen at all, and on eight less than five were recorded. On four occasions, however, very scattered parties of over thirty birds, sweeping around low over the water, were noted; and on 25th August there was a raft of 80 sitting on the sea, with one or two Sooty and Manx Shearwaters and Fulmars amongst them. On most days they were not flying in any steady direction, and they did not often settle on the sea (except in the case of the raft already referred to).

**SOOTY SHEARWATER** (*Procellaria grisea*).—Never more than three were seen in a day, and they were usually flying around haphazardly, though the most constant direction was south. Often they consorted with Great Shearwaters if these were present.

**FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*).—No detailed work was done on the plumage of the Fulmars. For most of the month they were in old plumage with primary-, secondary- and tail-moults, and "moth-
eaten” wing-coverts, but by the fourth week of August there were many in immaculate new plumage.

The numbers present varied from one to 150, but were usually between 20 and 50. On steaming days and on the rougher days, the numbers were lower than on calm days, when the birds accumulated in flocks on the water. On these occasions the ship generally drifted away from them for two or three hundred yards before they took wing and caught up again. (Taking flight was difficult: often one would flap along the surface of the water for 20-25 yards and then give up.)

 Probably each individual was with the ship, when it was drifting, for less than a day, but the only clue to this was gained by watching the movements of distinctive birds; there were few dark phase birds about, never more than two in a day, but not one ever stayed for a whole day. Also, at one time when a larger quantity of oil than usual had been pumped out of the ship, the majority of the birds present were oiled, mostly on the breast; next day none of these was to be seen. Similarly, a very light bird, whose wings were almost white, was only observed on one afternoon for a few hours.

There were no directions of flight at all: the birds just seemed to materialize from nowhere and then disappear. A peculiar habit frequently noticed was that, when on the water around the ship, they would suddenly, for no apparent reason, all fly up and after circling for a minute or two resettle on or near the original place.

They fed almost entirely on the refuse thrown overboard. On these occasions there was much bickering and cackling, and a sort of “peck-order” seemed to exist; at first, up to half a dozen Fulmars would hurl themselves in at a lump of meat, all squabbling. But within a minute a natural master would emerge, and the other birds would sit around quietly, watching him gorge. Any bird coming to within a foot would be driven off. Newcomers, attracted by the commotion, would fly straight down onto the meat, but soon be disillusioned and driven to the ring of spectators. If, however, there were too many birds, more than 8-12, total chaos reigned. Once a bird was seen to “duck-dive” to a depth of about two feet to retrieve a sinking scrap; it looked as if its wings were being used. If the food was distributed evenly over the water, the birds spread out into separate groups, and there was no central mêlée.

Skuas were the only birds to which the Fulmars showed any reactions. Once or twice a Great Skua, of which there were one or two on most days, tried to get the food from one of the scuffles already mentioned, by hovering above and dropping in. Usually when a Great Skua flew over, the Fulmars adopted the “busking” threat-posture, with head and tail thrown up and wings fluffed out and raised, but at these times it was ignored by the fighting Fulmars. When a Great Skua settled on the water near some Fulmars, it was often driven away, though the skua never
attacked them. Long-tailed Skuas, which were recorded on six or seven occasions and usually chased the Kittiwakes for a while, elicited threat-postures from the Fulmars; Arctic Skuas normally left them alone, but if one hovered above a Fulmar on the water, the latter adopted the “busking” posture. They were never seen to eject oil.

**Gannet (Sula bassana).**—One or two, both adults and immatures, were present on most days. Usually stayed for several hours, often settling on the water and occasionally diving.

**Arctic Skua (Stercorarius parasiticus).**—Most birds were dark phase, and they appeared between 11th and 19th August. Almost invariably they stayed for several minutes, harassing the Kittiwakes and hovering above the Fulmars. They were first seen on the same day as the first terns, whose peak passage period was the same, and the terns were their chief victims; also like the terns, they were all flying in directions between south and west. Usually they came singly, but sometimes two together.

**Great Skua (Stercorarius skua).**—This species was recorded on more than half the days, usually one or two that stayed for most or the whole of the day. Only once did a bird fly straight over, going steadily to the south at 35 feet. Often they rested on the water, and were sometimes chased off by the Fulmars. Once or twice Great Shearwaters were pursued; these would settle on the water, and presumably disgorged, for as soon as they took off again the skua would come down to the surface and appear to be feeding from it.

**Pomarine Skua (Stercorarius pomarinus).**—On 9th August two went by separately to the W. or W.N.W., and on the 17th one went over to the E.S.E. on a steady course at 30 feet. On the next day one circled around for a few minutes, occasionally harrying the Great Shearwaters with a harsh cry.

**Long-tailed Skua (Stercorarius longicaudus).**—One was seen on the morning of the 9th with the Pomarine, and that afternoon there were four present, settling on the water and hawking playfully after the Fulmars. Often they hovered just above the water and picked scraps from the surface with their bills. They left to the south or south-west. All had full-length tail-streamers. Between 0840 and 0925 hours on 16th August a party of 4 and three single birds flew by to the west; and between 0845 and 1000 hours on 20th August three went by to the north-east, close to the ship.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus).**—On the first day at sea two were present until 1000 hours. On 27th August, the day that we were relieved, one and later two were following the ship for much of the day, and at 1535 hours an adult and two immatures went by to the S.S.W. at 100 feet. From 1045 onwards on the 28th, up to 4 were present.
HERRING GULL (Larus argentatus).—On the first day at sea, up to 7 were present in the morning until 1300 hours, and then no more were recorded until 18th August when there was an immature Herring/Lesser Black-back for most of the morning; much of the time it was on the water.

KITTiwake (Rissa tridactyla).—Present on all days except two. They always came from the east, and circled the ship for some time before passing on. On most days up to three were present, and on two days two of them took to resting on a small platform by the lights at the top of the masts. On 11th and 12th August there were 23+ and 15+ together respectively; the first to arrive settled on the sea, and during the day the others came down and collected round this nucleus. They were mostly adults, and were once put to flight by an Arctic Skua. Rarely were they seen leaving, but on 14th August 7 adults and 2 immatures rose together and circled to about 200 feet; then, more scattered out, they flew off on a direct W.N.W. course, calling loudly. Normally they arrived at the ship at a height of 20-30 feet.

COMMON/ARCTIC TERN (Sterna hirundo or macrura).—(Not usually distinguishable, but though some were undoubtedly Arctics, no definite Commons were seen.) From 12th to 19th August was the peak period. They flew meanderingly, at heights of 15-60 feet, and their course was usually completely unaffected by the sight of the ship. Once two were watched chasing a Great Skua, though they were harried by the Arctic Skuas when the latter were present. The only time when they were seen feeding was on 12th August when 48 passed during the day; in the morning about 15 went by from east to west accompanying a large school of ca. 150 Pilot Whales ( Globiocephala malaena) and dolphins (Delphinidae). The Terns fluttered down above the water and appeared to be feeding where it had been stirred up due to the cetaceans' breaking the surface. All flight-directions were between south and west; presumably they were on a migration route from Iceland. They were often heard calling around the ship at night, apparently in numbers.

PUFFIN ( Fratercula arctica).—On 28th August one was seen on the water; position at the time, 57°0'N., 12°20'W.

NON-MARITIME BIRDS

ANATIDAE.—On 28th August a flock of ten small duck went by to the north-east at 100 feet, and soon afterwards a skein of ca. 50 geese flew by to the east, approximately one mile from the ship; position, 57°0'N., 12°20'W.

RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius hiaticula).—2nd August, 1130 hours, two overtook the ship flying north-west at 10-20 feet. Position 56°12'N., 14°W.; wind light, north-west.

TURNSTONE ( Arenaria interpres).—All of these were still in summer plumage. At 1535 hours on 14th August a compact
flock of ca. 25 circled the ship a few times low over the waves, and went off to the east; wind light, west to north-west. On 20th August at 1300 hours 11 circled round low over the sea (see also under "Knot"); in the next three hours $1 + 1 + 2 + 1$ flew by to the east or east-north-east, all of them just above the waves; wind south-west, 20 knots. On 23rd August two circled the ship, but it was not seen where they went; wind south to south-west, 15-20 knots. On 27th August two circled the ship, then rose to 120 feet and left on a direct course to the south-east. Three hours later another two circled round; they rose to 120 feet and looked as if they were going to leave at that height, but then came down and re-circled before leaving to the south-east low over the waves.

**Whimbrel** (*Numenius phaeopus*).—On 18th August a party of nine went by on a direct course to the east, at 20 feet. The visibility was poor, but they were distinguished from Curlews (*N. arquata*) by their calls.

**Knot** (*Calidris canutus*).—On 12th August one bird in winter plumage circled the ship a few times, as if it were going to land, but then flew away low over the water, probably to the west. On 16th August two went by within five minutes of each other, one in summer plumage, just over the water, to the south-south-west; wind light, south-west. On 20th August there was one winter bird with the party of 11 Turnstones.

**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*).—On 18th August a compact party of 11 went by on a direct line to the south-south-west, just over the waves. (On this day these, the Sanderlings and the Whimbrel were all seen within an hour of one another, between 0840 and 0945 hours; the wind was south-west, 20 knots, then later in the day south-east and well above gale force.) On 19th August four probable Dunlin circled round, but their direction was not seen; wind south-west, 20-25 knots.

**Sanderling** (*Crocethia alba*).—On 18th August one very weak bird kept around the ship for about 15 minutes and once or twice settled under the lifeboats. On 27th August three circled several times, but it was not seen in which direction they went.

**Passeriformes**

**Wheatear** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*).—Three came aboard at about 0500 hours on 28th August, and were found on the bridge; one of them died, but the other two soon left. Position, at 0700 hours, 57°N., 12°20'W.; steaming at 10 knots on a course of 115°.

**Meadow Pipit** (*Anthus pratensis*).—On 28th August 11 were seen passing the ship or resting on it up till 1110 hours. Most, if not all, were birds of the year, and went to the south-east at 60 feet and once at 150 feet.

**Pied/White Wagtail** (*Motacilla alba*).—On 27th August one circled us and the relieving ship, but it was not seen in which direction it left; position 58°0’N., 15°40’W. Six were recorded
the next day, some staying on the ship for several hours. They came from the west-north-west, and all those whose plumage was clearly seen were immatures.

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SUMMARY

1. Observations made in August 1955, aboard Ocean Weather Ship "Weather Recorder" in the North Atlantic are listed in detail, together with the ship's positions and indications of the wind conditions.

2. There were only five records of small petrels; there seemed to be no correlation between the shearwater and Fulmar records and the weather. Most shearwaters, skuas and terns were between 12th and 20th August. There was evidence of skuas accompanying terns on migrations. Only one gull was recorded on station.

3. Of the five wader species on station, Turnstones were by far the most frequent. The number of waders increased towards the end of the month.

4. No Passerines were recorded from the station, but on the return journey several Pied/White Wagtails and Meadow Pipits were seen, also three Wheatears.