

## More on Faroese Bird Names

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The following are discussed *passim* below: *bukari*, *drunn-hvíti*, *fulkobbí*, *gjøðr*, *havgás*, *hyplingur*, *imbrimil*, *kolont*, *reyðhani*, *rusk*, *skata*, *vendingarfuglur*.

### *Bukari*

In the *Faroese Bird Names*, 67 f., I referred to Fa. (Suðuroy) *bukari* 'stormy petrel', found in Mohr's Dictionary (see now 'bugari', *Dictionarium Færoense*, 100), formally the agent noun from the verb *buka* 'strike'. I considered the possibility that the name could be related to Scots *bouger*, *bowger* 'puffin', a loan from Gaelic *bugaire*, etc. However, it is now possible to state that any such relationship must be regarded as out of the question. Moreover, the Faroese name can be fully explained in terms of itself.

This I have realised as the result of etymologising the English name *petrel*, in essentials as follows. Both the form *petrel* and its often-quoted derivation from St. Peter — of. No. *Søren Peder*, *Pedersfugl* — are, as it turns out, definitely secondary and due to speculation on the part of the learned buccaneer Dampier (1703). The original form (1676) was *pitteral*, another spelling *pittrel*, a name patently explicable as a spontaneous creation from *pitter-patter* 'beat continuously with light, rapid strokes', cf. such bird names as *dotterel*, *titterel*, *whimbrel*, all of popular origin. Thus Fa. *bukari* lit. 'striker' undoubtedly means what it says. The name derives from the

bird's habit of striking the water with its feet as it skims over the waves searching for the surface-living organisms upon which it feeds. The name will, of course, have been bestowed by fishermen who met the bird out at sea.

Fa. *buka* has an exact correspondence solely in Norwegian (cf. A. Torp, *Nynorsk etymologisk Ordbok*), but is not known from the medieval language. Further, bird names ending in derivative *-ari* are very rare; only two others have been noticed: *glibbari* (Hestur, obsolete) 'young shag', cf. No. *glibba* 'sluge i sig', and *jarmari* (Sandoy) 'great shearwater' lit. 'bleater' (*jarma* 'bleat'). Such names are all local and presumably rather recent; certainly the formation is not medieval in the case of bird names. For these reasons it is pointless to speculate on possible affinity between Fa. *bukari* and Scots *bouger*, etc.

#### *Gjør, better Gjød̥r*

One would like to amend the spelling *gjør* 'Sclavonian grebe' (*FBN*, 52f.) to *gjød̥r* in accordance with its etymology, making the latter at least the main form, as suggested by U. Zachariaesen, *Fróðskaparrit*, XV, 80.

#### *Havgás*

The name *havgás* 'great northern diver' lit. 'ocean goose' is discussed in *FBN*, 64f., where it is suggested that the name is most likely a noa term in origin. On the other hand, matters are complicated by the presence of the name *havgassa*, apparently related.

The name 'ocean goose' strikes one as a most peculiar designation; it is at once vague and quite ridiculous. But perhaps we here have a clue to the correct understanding of the name. First, a semantic parallel. In Manx Gaelic, this bird is called *arrag vooar* lit. 'big pullet'. In Man as in Faroe, much superstition was associated with this solitary diver. The fishermen of both places will often have started at its loud madman's laugh and speculated apprehensively on what it might portend.

Without a doubt, the Manx term is evasive in origin, as its vagueness eloquently testifies, and it seems noteworthy that a ridiculous nickname has established itself as the ordinary term for this bird. In this respect, the comparison with Fa. *havgás* is undeniable, strengthening the view that one is dealing with an originally noa name in Faroese also. In any case, ridiculous noa names for birds are well known in fishermen's parlance. The following have been noticed in Faroese: *baka-spjað* 'heron' lit. 'old spade', *sóttre* 'shag' lit. 'soot beam'. That the practice is old is proved by *havtyrðil* 'stormy petrel' lit. 'ocean muck', attested in ON *haftyrðill* 'kind of seabird'. Of course this latter has, like *havgás*, become a quite usual name, and is no longer confined to seamen's language.

It looks as though it will be best to separate *havgás* from *havgassa*, regarding the former as an independent Faroese coining, the latter as a subsequent importation of Dan. *havgasse*, the degree of formal relationship being due to chance.

### *Imbrimil*

It is evident that the foregoing discussion of *havgás* has some relevance for the philology of its older synonym *imbrimil*. This name continues ON *himbrin* (or some unrecorded variant), but modified by *brimil* 'male seal' (FBN, 64). It would seem *a priori* strange that a seal name should influence a bird name. However, in view of what was observed in the case of *havgás*, we are well within the bounds of probability if we consider *imbrimil* as a deliberate perversion of the older form of the name though facetious association with *brimil* in the service of name taboo. Nor should we omit to mention the form 'Ildbrimel' (Clusius, 1605) which, if genuine, must surely represent *illbrimil* 'male seal of ill omen'. Thus the stage is reached when a bird name is fully transformed into an animal name, which in turn can have suggested further possibilities, as illustrated in our next example.



*Fulkobbi*

We are now in a position to comment on the name of the little auk, provisionally analysed in *FBN*, 66, as follows: *julkobbi* lit. (if *fugl-* is for *fugl-*) 'bird cob'.

Fa. *kobbi* means, of course, 'seal'. But I hesitated to find this sense in a bird name and therefore put the less precise 'cob' which, as the etymological equivalent of the Faroese, easily suggested itself. But this equation obscures the semantics. It would have been preferable to have put 'seal', for this is the specific meaning attested in Faroese, as elsewhere in West Norse (Ic. *kobbi*, No. *kobbe*). Moreover, we have at once a most striking semantic parallel to *imbrimil* (above).

We have thus to reckon, theoretically at least, with the possibility that *julkobbi* has replaced an older form of the name, as in the case of *imbrimil*. However, no such form has come down to us, nor is the name to be found in the cognate languages. The probability is, therefore, that *julkobbi* has always been a purely Faroese word, so that one tends to think in terms of a development of the post-medieval period.

The first element, however, still remains essentially intractable. Whatever it is, it appears to be corrupt and so not amenable to regular philological analysis. As it stands, *julkobbi* could mean 'full seal', though this gives no apparent sense. It could be 'bird seal' (as above). Another conjecture would perhaps be 'foul seal' (*ful-* irregularly for *fúl-*). It seems certain that such designations, bizarre as they may sound, must nevertheless be seriously considered.

Svabo records *julkobbi* in *Indberetninger*, 13, and notes that the bird was looked upon as a harbinger of bad weather. We observe, furthermore, that the little auk was sometimes confused with the stormy petrel, that other diminutive seabird of evil repute: (Suðuroy) *báraþjertur* 'auk', (Fugloy, noa name) *bárufjertur* 'petrel', cf. also Ic. *haftyrðill* 'auk', Fa. *havtyrðil* 'petrel'. We may, indeed, have no doubts about the milieu and can hardly avoid the conclusion that the old-time

fishermen must have found it comforting to be able to call an unlucky bird a seal.

### *Drunnbvíti*

It is time to reconsider this, today the most familiar name for the stormy petrel. As stated in *FBN*, 66f., the name is peculiar in that it contains *drunnur* 'rump with tail' otherwise used only of cattle and sheep, the normal word for bird's tail being *vel*. From what has been noticed above about the play of humour in the creation of bird names, it becomes apparent that the reason for this exceptional use of *drunnur* is to be sought in name taboo, the ridiculous-sounding name being thus evasive. With such a term, the seamen could refer with impunity to the uncanny bird. Procellaria of the storms, at any rate, would never realise that she could be so disrespectfully nicknamed.

### *Vendingarfuglur*

Faroese has produced several designations for the stormy petrel, the evidence suggesting that all will have been evasive in the first instance. At any rate this consideration must certainly apply to *vendingarfuglur*, a name of the vague type, based on *vending* 'turn', here specifically 'turn of the current'; the bird was said to be seen most when the current was changing (*Fróð.*, XIII, 52). This name comes from Hov. Obviously, the Hovbingar must have known one or other of the more usual names, but apparently preferred not to employ them. Their superstition led them to create, as a harmless euphemism, this rather clumsy term of their own.

### *Hyplingur*

It was demonstrated in *Fróð.*, XIII, 47ff., that *hyplingur* is the correct etymological spelling of the name of the cormorant, permitting us to accept the derivation from *huppur* 'hip', the bird being then named after the conspicuous white patch on the flanks (*hyplingsblettur*). Perhaps just a suggestion of

doubt about this etymology remained, since only *lær*, never *huppur*, is used of birds (*FBN*, 26f.). If, however, the use of *drunnur* to form *drunnhvíti* (above) be any guide, then the unexpected occurrence of *huppur* in the present case finds its natural explanation as a creation of superstitious seamen. Needless to say, the cormorant is known to have been involved in the usual taboos. Since *hyplingur* was undoubtedly in use in the Viking Age, we again observe that such practices are ancient.

### *Kolont*

In *FBN*, 9, I incorrectly described M. á Ryggi's *kolont* 'common scoter' lit. 'coal duck' as uniquely Faroese. This name must, however, have been inspired by Dan. *kuland* 'do.', an alternative to *sortand* lit. 'black duck'. Scoters are always named after their striking dark plumage, also e. g. Ic. *brafn-önd* 'raven duck', Scots Gael. *lacha dhubh* 'black duck', Eng. dial. *black diver* — Standard Eng. *scoter* must therefore be a scribal or printing error for *sooter*, cf. one of the German names *Rußente* 'soot duck', a conclusion which has so far escaped the etymologists.

### *Reyðhani*

The use of the term *reyðhani* 'red cock' to denote the sun was recorded in *FBN*, 88, and reference made to its ultimate connection with the concept expressed in the Danish idiom *lade den røde hane gale over* (= set fire to) *ens hus*, with a parallel in German. It would have been appropriate to have mentioned that this idiom was also naturalised in Faroese, cf. J. Jakobsen, *Sagnir og Ævintýr*, 38: *hann . . . lovaði, at reyður hani skuldi gala yvir Neystagarð*.

### *Rusk*

The term *rusk* lit. 'rubbish, dirt' has been reported from Elduvík as a seaman's noa word for the eider duck, *FBN* 82. The motivation of the name, however, remained unexplained.



To man, the eider is the most prized of the ducks. We therefore suggest that the disparaging *rusk* here means the opposite of what it says: it refers to the valuable down, the ordinary name *dún* having not unexpectedly fallen under taboo in seaman's parlance.

### *Skata*

In a footnote, *FBN*, 46, I questioned the traditional etymology of *skata* 'magpie' which connects the name with No. *skata* 'løpe ut i en spids', the bird being called after its long tail. My objections were partly for the reason that, in the Swedish dialects, this name is also given to other birds, such as thrushes and dippers. I tended to think more in terms of an onomatopoeic origin. However, I now learn from the files of the *Tiernamenwörterbuchstelle*, Berlin, that in German, too, the name of the magpie proper has very frequently been transferred to numerous other species in cases also where onomatopoeia could play no part. It must be assumed that similar things have happened in Swedish, so that my objections were groundless.