

## Some Notes on Faroese Bird Names

By Håkon Hamre.

### *Fulkobbi, fulkubbi*

In his article, "More on Faroese Bird Names", *Fróðskaparrit* 16. bók (1968), W. B. Lockwood discusses the name of the little auk *fulkobbi*, p. 105. He concludes that the second element of the name is identical with the word *kobbi* m. "seal", while the first element is more uncertain, and could be either *full*- "full", or *fugl*- "bird", or maybe *fúl*- "foul". Earlier, in *Faeroensia* Vol. V (1961), "The Faroese Bird Names", he has on p. 66 suggested the meaning "bird cob".

The name is used in two variant forms, *fulkobbi* m. and *fulkubbi* m. The latter form indicates that the second element of the name is not generally associated with *kobbi* m. "seal", but could just as well be identical with Faroese *kubbi* m. "chunk; short, thick piece (of a log, etc.)", as will be discussed below.

The present pronunciation of the first element *ful*- would seem to indicate one of Lockwood's first two suggestions "full-" or "bird-" as the more likely interpretation. In compound names, however, such as place names and the names of plants and animals, it is a well-known fact that the individual components may undergo "irregular" developments. This may occur when the original components are no longer identified with their original meanings, (e. g., Faroese *kalvi* m. "halibut" < \**kafliði*, lit. "depth-wanderer").

It may thus be considered a distinct possibility that the first component *ful*- could originally have been *fúl*- "foul", especi-

ally since this would offer us a more meaningful interpretation of the name. We have a similar use of the element *fúl-* in the Old Norse name *fúlmár*, literally "foul gull", which has been adopted as a Norse loanword in English in the form "fulmar". The ON name refers to the fulmar's ability to spit an ill-smelling fluid at its attackers. It is interesting to note that another bird of the *Procellariidae* family, the stormy petrel, is often confused with the little auk, see Lockwood, *Fróðskaparrit* 16, p. 105. The name *bárufjertur* (or variants) refers in Fugloy to the petrel, and in Suðuroy (and in Norwegian) to the little auk. The name *haftyrðill* refers in Faroese to the petrel, in Icelandic to the little auk. The stormy petrel, like the fulmar, is able to defend itself by ejecting an oily substance, and the name *fúlkubbi* would, if originally applied to the petrel, not only be appropriate, but also a perfect parallel to the name *fúlmár*, the component *-kubbi* alluding to the lesser size of the petrel.

It is not, however, necessary to presuppose a confusion of the two birds as condition for the name. It clearly belongs to a sizable group of pejorative bird names which contain elements denoting dirt, excrement, and various other kinds of filth. In Faroese we find, for instance, *lortamási* "muck gull" for the common gull (Lockwood, *Bird Names*, p. 47), and *skarnskortur* "filthy face" for the immature puffin (Lockwood op. cit. p. 69). From the other Scandinavian languages the following examples can be cited: *lortand* "mud duck" for the teal, *Anas crecca*, in Swedish and Norwegian also found in the form *saurand*, same meaning. The same first component is found in Swedish *lortskrika* "muck jay" *Garrulus glandarius* 2. In Danish we find *skiddenmette* "filthy Mette" for the wag-tail, and *skidhejre* "muck heron" *Ardea cinerea*, and in Norwegian *skitt-trast* "muck thrush" *Turdus pilaris*. As second components, these and similar pejorative elements generally refer to the diminutive size of the birds named, as for instance in Faroese *-fjertur* (and variants) "fart", in Norwegian *-fjert* and *-fis* in the same meaning, also in Norwegian *-skit* "muck", and in Icelandic and Faroese *-tyrðil(l)* "little turd".



The second component in *fúlkubbi* or *fúlkobbi* is in all probability identical with Faroese *kubbi* m., as mentioned above. This word, with the same meaning, is common in the other Scandinavian languages. In Icelandic it is found in the forms *kubbur* and *kubbi*, in Norwegian *kubb*, *kubbe*, in Swedish *kubb*, *kobb*, *kubbe*, *kubba*. In Icelandic and Norwegian it is also used to refer to a short, stocky person. The use of *-kubbi* has an exact parallel in a Norwegian name for the little auk, *sjøkutt*, where the last component *-kutt* has a meaning similar to *-kubbi*, and refers to the size and round appearance of this bird. It should also be mentioned that another Norwegian term for the little auk, *alkekong(e)* (or variant *sjøkong(e)*), also probably shows a parallel to *-kubbi* and *-kutt* if the second component *-kong* is interpreted to be an abbreviation of ON *kúfungr* m. (also *kúðungr*), alluding to the round figure of the bird. Still another Norwegian name for the same bird is *klubbálke*, where the first component *klubb-* likewise refers to the size and roundness of the little auk.

Lockwood, as mentioned above, has suggested that *-kobbi* in the *fúlkobbi* form of the name is identical with *kobbi* m. "seal". If this is a widespread explanation of the name in the Faroes, it is in all probability only an irrational popular etymological interpretation, but it would serve to explain the transition from *-kubbi* to *-kobbi*. Whether *kobbi* is in itself a diminutive of or a pet form derived from *kópur* m. "seal" is questionable. It seems reasonable to link it both etymologically and semantically with *kubbi* and variants, (see *Alex. Johanneson: Isl. Etym. Wörterbuch*, p. 313). The meaning "seal" for *kobbi* would then be secondary, the name originally having referred to the seal's roundness, compare Swedish *kubbsäl* "seal". Noteworthy, too, are other Germanic usages of the word: *kobbe* in Dutch and Frisian means "sea gull", and *cob* (or *cobb*) in English can mean "sea gull, esp. great black-backed sea gull" (*Webster Third New Internat. Dict.*).

*Karkarassur*

Three of the many names for the puffin, usually called *lundi m.*, have a common first component, *karkarassur*, *karkarakkur*, *karkareyði*. The first one is clearly a pejorative name, the second component *-rassur* meaning "ass". In the second name *-rakkur* is, according to Lockwood, "presumably . . . a corruption of *-rassur*," while *-reyði* in the third name comes from the adjective *reyður* "red", and refers to the red "beak and/or legs of the bird" (Lockwood, *Far. Bird Names*, pp. 17—18). The component *karka-* is according to Lockwood (op.cit.) obscure.

It would seem, however, that *karka-* might be interpreted satisfactorily as an onomatopoeic (sound-imitating) word. Transcribing screams and sounds made by birds and other animals in letters of the alphabet is of course a nearly impossible task, and the perception of the sounds is highly subjective. The crowing of the cock, the barking of the dog, and the grunting of the pig have many different transcriptions in the various languages. However, an investigation of the voice of the puffin in various books on birds, and also of some more general terms for the screaming of birds, indicates that the interpretation of *karka-* as a sound-imitating word is certainly very possible.

In Witherby: *The Handbook of British Birds*, 5. impr. 1948, Vol. V, p. 168, we find the following description of the puffin's voice: "Has only one note uttered at or in burrows or on the sea, a low growling "arr", sometimes uttered singly, but generally thrice in slow succession, and in fighting, same growl is uttered, but more sharply" (R. M. Lockley). Also rendered "co-o-or-aa" or "haa-haa" R. Perry. In *Fuglene i Norden*, Oslo 1953, Vol. 3, p. 231: "På vartiden kan man høre et sakte kurrende *gra-gra* i forskjellige jamrende tonelag (Rosenius)." In *Nordens Fugle i Farver*, Copenhagen 1958—63, Vol. 3, p. 245: "et lavt rullende *aar-ha-ha*."

In *Bløndal, Íslensk-dønsk orðabók*, Copenhagen 1920—24, we find the following more general reference to bird voices:



*garg* n. "skrig, (is.) Fugleskrig", and *garga* v. "l. skrige (om Fugle)." *M. A. Jacobsen og Chr. Matras, Føroyisk-donsk orðabók*, Tórsh. 1961, has the following interesting words referring to the voice of the common guillemot: "*karr* interj. (og n), efterligning af lomviens skrig", and "*karra -aði*, (om lomvien) skrige". The same verb *karra* is found in Norwegian in reference to bird voices, particularly that of the ptarmigan.

Taking into account the subjective perception of the voice of the puffin (and other birds), as demonstrated above, it would seem reasonable to assume the (earlier) existence of a sound-imitating verb *\*karka* which characterizes the sounds made by the puffin, and also an agent noun *\*karki* m., the genitive of which forms the first component in *karka-rassur*.

### *Náti*

*Náti* m., also found in the form *náta* f., is a Faroese name for a) the fulmar or b) the nestling fulmar. According to *Lockwood* (Far. Bird Names, p. 54) the name has no parallel elsewhere. It is possible, however, that we have a parallel in Icelandic *hnáta* f. This word is used locally in Iceland in the meaning "little, chubby girl". *Hnáta* is a cognate of Icelandic *hnat* n. "tuft of wool", other related words are probably Icelandic (and Faroese) *knöttur* m. "ball", and variants of this word in Norwegian *knatt*, *natt*, *knott*, *nott* with semantically related meanings, (*Alex. Jóhannesson, Isl. Etym. Wörterbuch*, p. 333).

The meaning of *hnáta* in Icelandic, referring particularly to a *girl*, is of course secondary. The original meaning obviously refers to the small size and round appearance of an object, and if we suppose that Icelandic *hnáta* is a cognate of Faroese *náti*, *náta*, this meaning would apply perfectly to the nestling fulmar, which is indeed a puffylooking little creature. Lockwood has also suggested, for different reasons, that the name originally applied to the nestlings: "The name appears to have spread north (from Suðuroy) with the spread of the fulmars themselves as nesting birds, being taken over

into other dialects as a fowler's term to denote the young birds before they can fly". (*Lockwood, Faroese Bird Names*, p. 54).

#### ÚRTAK

Fyrri liður *ful-* í orðinum *fulkobbi* verður settur í samband við lýsingarorðið *fúlur*, javnlíkt við *fúl-* í *fúlmár*, íslenska orðinum fyrri »hahest« (»náta«); ætlað verður, at tað sipar til, at hesin fuglur spýr frá sær, og at orðið upprunaliga hevur verið nýtt um *drunnhvíta*. Seinni liður *-kobbi* (ella *-kubbi*) verður settur at merkja okkurt »kubbut« ella »stumpur«.

*karka-*, fyrri liður í lundanevnum *karkarassur* (viðhvørt *karkarakkur* ella *karkareyði*) sipar til ljóðið, ið lundin gevur frá sær.

Orðið *náti* (hendur seg *náta*) verður sett í samband við ísl. *hnáta*, »lítill, koggut genta«, skilt við *hnat*, »nipil«, o. o. og skuldi sostatt upprunaliga bert verið nýtt um ungan.