

# The Collection of Wild Birds' Eggs and Nestlings in Sweden

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"The Sea-bird in Cultural History" was one of the topics discussed at the Twelfth Nordic Congress of Ethnologists and Folklorists, held at Bergen in 1955. In this connection, Sverri Dahl gave a detailed and instructive account of the conditions on the Faeroe Islands, an account which unfortunately was never printed.<sup>1</sup> After referring, by way of introduction, to Peder Clausson Friis's bold hypothesis that the name "Faeroe Islands" really means "Feather Islands", Dahl emphasized the fact that the Faeroe Islands were originally, *par excellence*, "The Land of the Birds", into which man penetrated and learned how to exploit its great natural wealth.

There is no doubt that the Faeroe Islands occupy such a unique position, although the supply of birds was of great importance for the economy of other districts too, as in some places in the Orkney and Shetland Islands, in Iceland and in northern Norway.<sup>2</sup> The "bird cliffs" which were the precondition for the profitable catching of birds in these districts have no counterpart in other places in Scandinavia. Nonetheless, the collection of wild birds' eggs, especially water-birds' eggs, and of nestlings has played a not altogether unimportant role, where the natural conditions have allowed it. Without making any claim to completeness, I have compiled in the following pages a number of items of information which are likely to illustrate the relevant conditions, primarily in Sweden.<sup>3</sup>

It has everywhere been the general practice to collect birds' eggs

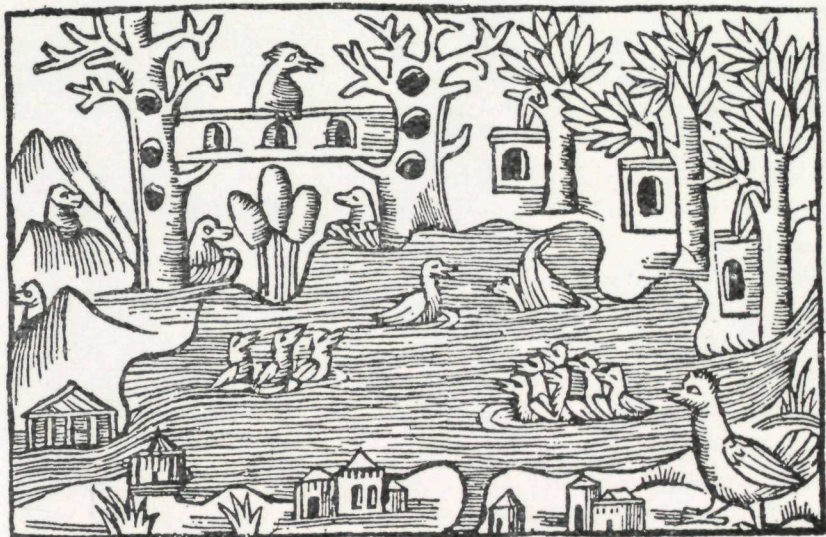


Fig. 1. Nesting-boxes for sea-fowls. From Olaus Magnus' *Historia*, 1555.

from nests discovered on the open ground—what Storå calls “extensive” egg-collecting, in contrast so “intensive” egg-collecting, in which use was made of nesting boxes. My maternal grandfather, who was a peasant farmer in southern Dalsland and was born in 1840, considered that the eggs of the lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) were a great delicacy and Sven Nilsson, the zoologist, wrote as early as 1816 from his native Skåne: “The country boys used sometimes to go out into the meadows and look for lapwings’ eggs, with which they had pancakes made” (Nilsson, 1879, p. 5). The lapwing’s eggs were greatly appreciated in Denmark too (Højrup, 1966, pp. 170 f. ). In northern Sweden, the eggs of the ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*) are the equivalent in many places (Drake, 1918, p. 142). But the eggs of the crane (*Grus grus*) were eaten with avidity in some places (Bylin, 1975, p. 147) and the eggs of the ordinary woodland birds, the capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and the black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrix*), were not despised either.

However, it was the eggs of the waterfowl which attracted



especial attention and in this case they were often collected systematically. This was practised both by people who lived along the shores of lakes and watercourses in the interior and, above all, by the people of the coastal areas in the archipelagoes on the east and west coasts.

Only a few species of waterfowl build nests in trees; the majority nest on the ground, the nests being completely open or more or less hidden. Among the waterfowl that frequent fresh-water lakes, attention was devoted, in the first place, to the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and the diver (*Gavia*). A report from central Småland in the 1850s says: "We took the eggs of the duck and the diver, if we found them. The divers lay their eggs just by the edge of the lake, because they cannot walk. ... We did not eat their eggs whole but beat them into sauce. Duck eggs are like hen eggs. If you break them, they are just a bit more watery." (Granström, 1933, p. 9.) But people also robbed the nests of the greylag goose (*Anser anser*), the red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*) and even the coot (*Fulica atra*).

Along the coasts, almost all the birds' nests found were robbed. The most accessible were the eggs of the common eider (*Somateria mollissima*), the greylag goose and the red-breasted merganser. Reporting from the Finnish part of Lappland, Jakob Fellman says that, in the case of the merganser, people even dug pits on shores and islets to induce the birds to lay their eggs there (Fellman, 1906, p. 80). But they also collected the eggs of the long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), the common guillemot (*Uria aalge intermedia*), the black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*),<sup>4</sup> the velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), the razorbill (*Alca torda*) and the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*). Nor were the eggs of the gull despised, in spite of the fact that they tasted strongly of fish oil.

In Sweden, as in Finland, it was particularly the uninhabited outer skerries and islets that were plundered. This was no doubt connected with the fact that here the rights of ownership, in so far as any such rights existed, were difficult to safeguard. In his *History* (1555), Olaus Magnus also writes as follows:



Fig. 2. Nesting-box for common seals. Urshult, Småland. Photo P. Vejde 1939.

Some of them [the birds] build their nests on slabs of naked rock, some on dry reeds twisted together or on dry grass, and there lay innumerable eggs, which anyone who sails there can take freely. People collect the eggs in large barrels and offer them for sale or else shell them, salt them down and preserve them long and well as a welcome addition to their diet. They taste good, even though they come from wild birds. (Olaus Magnus 19:37.)



However, it is clear that this was not an unlimited freedom from the Harbour Guild regulations of 1450 for Huvudskär in the Stockholm archipelago, which say: "Anyone who takes eggs on another man's skerry or islet without permission will be fined 3 marks" (*Guild regulations*, 1856, p. 306). Judging from several earlier instances, such robbing of the nests of ground-nesting birds was common throughout the archipelagoes, especially on the outer, uninhabited islands. The same applied to the islands in the big Swedish lakes. For instance, P. G. Gyllenius, a student, observed in 1625 that this practice prevailed on the islands in Lake Vänern off Kristinehamn (*Diarium* 1882, p. 12). Islands and islets where egg-stealing might occur were also included in the cadastration records, for example, at Ed in Kalmar County, where a note made in 1691 says that on Lökeskär "egg-collecting was formerly practised, but it is now spoiled" (quoted in *Statens offentliga utredningar* (Swedish Government Official Reports, SOU) 1925:19, p. 235). The practice of egg-collecting has left traces in the place-names; "Äggskären" or "Äggkobben" is recorded in 1740 at Grums in Värmland (*Sveriges Ortnamn* (Swedish Place-names): Värmland 5, 1926, p. 44) and such names are common in several places (cf. Sahlgren, 1931, p. 149). At Nordmaling in Ångermanland, Linnaeus noted on his tour to Lapland in 1732 that, on an island called Bonden, situated 12 km or more out to sea, the peasants stole the only egg laid by the razorbill, whereupon the bird continuously laid new ones, which were also removed (Linnaeus, 1732, p. 28).

Egg-collecting frequently assumed quite extensive proportions and disquieted several 18th-century writers on economics. One of them, writing from central Bohuslän in the mid 18th century, says that "the sea-bird is being destroyed year by year because of the taking of its eggs for household needs, although their beautiful down should secure them royal privileges" (Qvistberg, 1943, pp. 106 f.). Opinions were no doubt divided. From Lindberg in the neighbourhood of Varberg in Halland, A. G. Barchaeus wrote in 1773 that "a man accused the peasants of taking eggs from under sitting birds to make pancakes with and thereby destroying them. Others denied this, for, if it were true, the birds would not be there each year in such

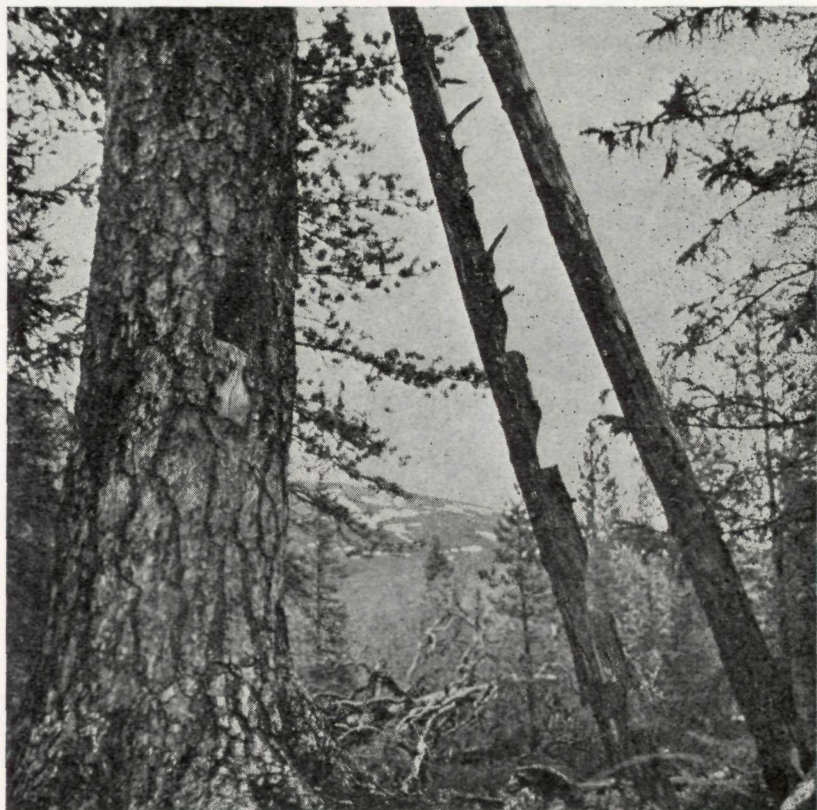


Fig. 3. *Fir with artificial nest and ladder. Jokkmokk, Lapland. Photo J. Holmbom 1948, Dialect Archives, Uppsala.*

numbers" (Barchaeus, 1773, p. 55). However, the authorities became convinced that protective measures must be taken and, on 28 September 1762, a royal ordinance prohibited the traditional practice of egg-collecting, a prohibition which was renewed in the Fisheries Act of 14 November 1966 (Modéer, 7, pp. 540 ff., and 8, p. 319). The royal edict stipulated different penalties for persons who transgressed the prohibition, according to whether the offence was committed by peasants, persons of rank or sailors. The mildest penalty was fines, coupled with compulsory attendance at church.



The penalty was doubled for a second offence. It is difficult to assess the effect of these regulations. In any case, egg-collecting, to all appearances, continued to be very common and later ordinances allowed for the occasional collecting of eggs (cf. Hahr, 1880, p. 150), primarily, of course, for household needs.

The collecting of eggs from the nests of wild birds was easily accomplished and required no special contrivances. We seldom read of anyone giving the birds a helping hand in the breeding season. However, this did happen in Lapland, where in the spring brush-wood was carried out to the islands where it was known that the red-breasted merganser generally bred (E.u. 11538 and 20428). Special nesting-holes might also be arranged (Ekman, 1910, pp. 196 f., with picture). Perhaps it should also be recorded that collectors might stake their claims to the nests by planting a stick alongside them, thus showing that they had been there first and thereby had a right to the eggs (see, for example, Wibeck, 1927).

Of greater interest is the egg-collecting which took place under more specific forms—what Stora calls “intensive” collecting. This refers chiefly to the birds which nest in holes, in the case of Sweden primarily the duck, the goldeneye and the goosander. These species willingly use the cavities in the trees made by the black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*). When these cavities were used by birds which laid edible eggs, it was a comparatively simple matter to collect as many as were needed for the household. Collecting eggs in this way is also reported from other parts of Sweden.

However, the collectors went further, in that they constructed artificial nesting-boxes, which could then be placed at strategic points. The lack of suitable trees meant that these artificial nests were well populated and attracted new flocks of desirable birds. These nesting-boxes might consist of a sawn-off tree trunk, in which a suitable cavity had been made and which was often placed on a stone or other elevated place. Bird-boxes of this type, covered by a slab of wood or a flat stone, are known from Jämtland and also from central Sweden (communication from Södertörn by Sigurd Erixon; Haugard, 1922, pp. 65 ff.; Wibeck, 1922). An interesting variant of this type, with a special hole with a hatch at the bottom,

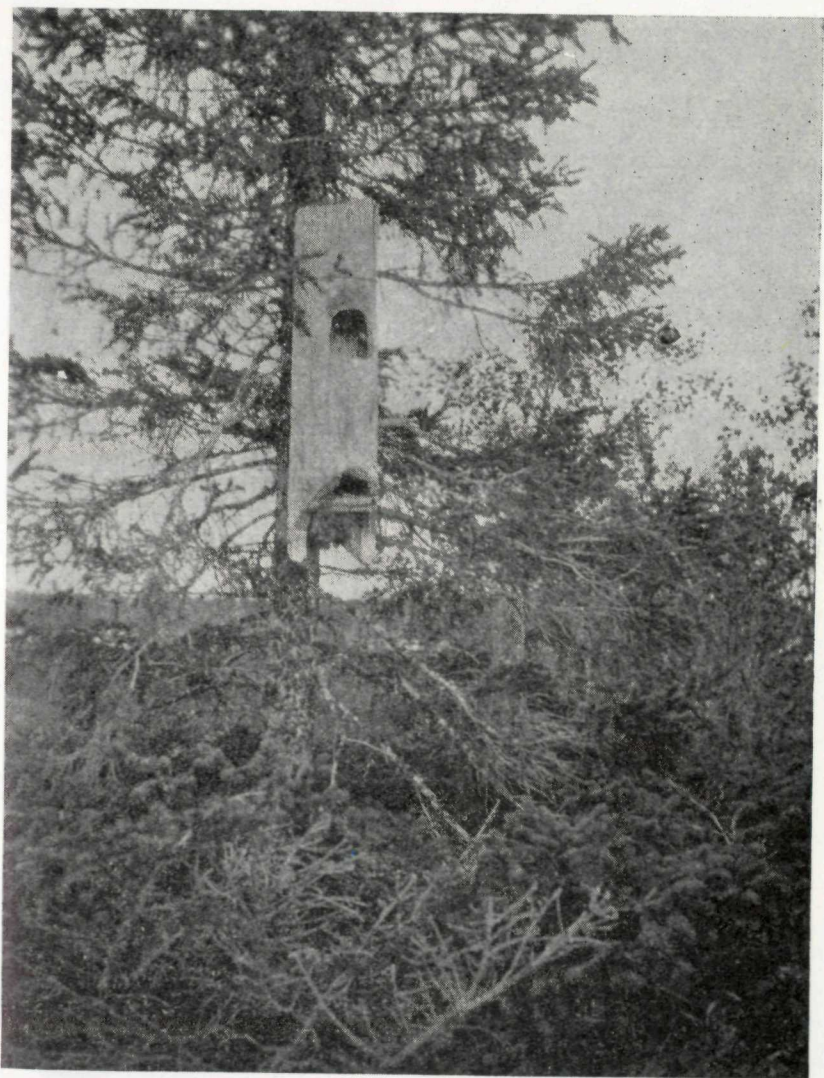


Fig. 4. Nesting-box, Jukkasjärvi, Lapland. Photo Ernst Manker 1948. Nordiska museet, Stockholm.



has been reported from Gräsö in Uppland (Sjöbeck, 1948, pp. 36 f.).

As a rule, however, a somewhat smaller nesting-box was constructed, which could be placed in a living tree, either by being hung from a lopped-off branch or by being tied to the tree with withies. Generally, somewhat larger boxes were made for mergansers than for goldeneyes, but the size was usually 0.5 m. At the top, a hole was cut in the side through which the bird could enter and this hole was sometimes also used for the removal of the eggs. Otherwise, they could be removed through the lid, which consisted of a board or a tuft of grass. The bottoms of the boxes also consisted of a board or—especially in northern Sweden—of two sticks placed crosswise, on which rested the layer of mull prepared for the female bird to sit on. The box was usually made of a sawn-off tree trunk with the bark peeled off. If it was difficult to make the box sufficiently large, it could be made in two halves tied together with withies. Barrel-shaped boxes were also to be found, as August Strindberg observed in the Stockholm archipelago in the 1870s. He writes that "in the middle of the trunk there is a snuff keg, which a fisherman has knocked the bottom out of and hung up, so that the eider [Strindberg was mistaken on this point, as the eider builds its nest on the ground] will lay eggs in it for him, and the eider is stupid enough to do so every year" (*Dagens Nyheter* 1874, quoted by M. Rehnberg in *Stockholms skärgård*, 1956, p. 40).

The nesting-boxes were naturally placed near water and it was important that the hole should point in the direction of the water. There were often large collections of nesting-boxes, for example, along the rivers in the northernmost part of Sweden. Each peasant might own 30—40 or more. A somewhat unusual arrangement has been reported from Tornedalen, where, at a place in the neighbourhood of Jukkasjärvi, seven nesting-boxes were placed one above the other on a pole (*Dagens Nyheter*, 8 January 1934).

These nesting-boxes are known by various dialectal names in different parts of Sweden, including *stomme*, *stut* and *stryte*, all of which seem to refer to the material—the end of a log or the like (cf. Elmevik, 1965). We know of them far back into the past through several accounts, the earliest of which is Olaus Magnus'

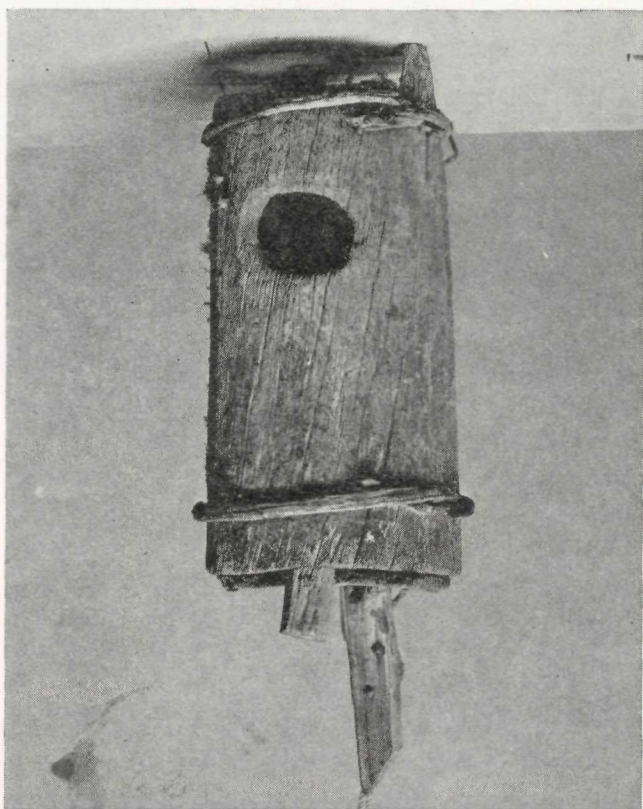


Fig. 5. Nesting-box. Stensele, Västerbotten. Nordiska museet.

statement, dating from the beginning of the 16th century, in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*. He mentions there that people catch waterfowl in pots hanging like nests in the branches of the trees along the sea-shores. The ducks settle in these pots to lay their eggs and to hatch their young, on account of the foxes which molest them on the ground (Olaus Magnus, 1555, 19:46).<sup>5</sup> In another place in his book (19:8), Olaus Magnus depicts these nesting-pots hanging in trees (Fig. 1). His information undoubtedly refers to the archipelago on the east coast of Sweden, where egg-collecting in



this way was customary down to recent times. The custom of egg-collecting has left traces also in the place-names, as in the case of Holkören (= Holkskäret, "Nesting-box Skerry") on Gräsö in Uppland, a name which has been known since 1686 (Stahre, 1952, pp. 68 f.). From this particular parish, there is evidence of the practice in 1780, given by a topographical writer who, however, attributes it to the period before the prohibition in 1762 (Alner, 1949, p. 286). Naturally, it is possible that the prohibition had a restraining effect to some extent, but it did not give rise to any great and lasting change in this ancient method of food-gathering.

We read at an early date of nesting-boxes being in use among the Lapps in the far north of Sweden. They are mentioned there in accounts dating from the mid 17th century as being used for both divers and geese (Tornaeus, 1900, p. 60; Lundius, 1905, pp. 16 f.). Linnaeus also observed them on his tour of Lapland in 1732 and made a quick sketch of one on the bank of the Ume River (Linné, 1913, p. 39). In his valuable dissertation of 1749 on hunting in Jämtland, Aeschill Nordholm gives a detailed description of the use of nesting-boxes for goldeneye and merganser and says that "every peasant who lives near water usually has 20—30 such boxes, from which he can get 7 or 8 score of eggs in a year" (Nordholm, 1749, pp. 58 f.). He also depicts a nesting-box which is identical with those used later in this province (E. u. 23406, including a series of pictures from Hammerdal). The same method of trapping birds is well known as far south as Särna and Älvdalen in Dalarna.

From Hälsingland at the beginning of the 18th century, Olov Broman gives detailed information about the use of nesting-boxes for goldeneye and geese (Broman, 1912—34, pp. 305 and 348).

However, egg-collecting boxes were in use also in more southerly parts of Sweden. Their frequent occurrence in the archipelagoes of Uppland and Södermanland is balanced by their appearance in the coastal districts of Östergötland and the adjacent parts of Småland (Rietz (1867) knew the term "skräkk-stom" used in Östergötland; information from the islands off Västervik in Wallman and Moberg, 1833, pp. 159 and 183). According to John Granlund, they were set up on Runnö Island in Döderhult parish for geese

and red-breasted mergansers, but he says that no eggs were ever taken, the boxes being intended to increase the stock of birds, which were hunted as game (Granlund, 1958; similar reasoning in Modéer, 1933, pp. 204 f.). It may be questioned whether egg-collecting was not practised here also in the past. Boxes for goosanders were set up on Gotland too. There they were known as "skrækko-strunkur" or "skrækko-stunkur" and P. A. Sävö gives detailed information about them from Fårö and other parts of the island (Sävö 1, no. 635, and 3, no. 139, with references). But also in the interior of the southern-Swedish uplands, nesting-boxes have been used for divers and in exceptional cases also for other birds (see, *inter alia*, Wibeck, 1927, p. 65; nesting-box for teal (*Anas crecca*) at Urshult, photograph by P. G. Vejde, *Hylten-Cavalliusföreningens årsbok* 1940). There are several reports about this practice in the tradition archives; there is an unusual report from Ärnäsviken on the shore of Lake Vättern, where such boxes were observed in 1863 (information received from August Friberg).

Considerable attention was devoted to the care and supervision of the nesting-boxes. They were cleaned out in the spring, before the birds arrived, and were often singed inside and out, in order to freshen them. In this connection and when taking the eggs, a primitive ladder was often used, consisting of a slender tree which had been lopped, retaining footholds at suitable intervals. However, on this point Broman says that it "takes great skill and great effort to climb up and down ... not without iron crampons on one's feet and a rope round one's back and in one's hands" (Broman 3, p. 348). This is an early report of this method, which is well known from the keeping of forest bees in eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> As already indicated, a peasant could own a large number of nesting-boxes and they were searched at regular intervals, every other day or so. Sometimes, several female birds would settle in the same box one after another and in this way the supply of eggs became abundant. As the eggs were removed, each female bird laid new ones. Broman reports "as a miracle, that, if a white stick is placed vertically in the nest, the female will lay as long as the eggs reach as high as the stick, especially when the box is shared by more than one pair"



(Broman 3, p. 305). This strange idea is also vouched for in later folk tradition, for example, from Liden in Medelpad (E. u. 35207) and is also known from Finland. "It is uncertain whether there is any real basis for these ideas about the nest stick." (Storå, 1966, pp. 198 f.)

A difficulty arose because, of course, people wanted the fresh eggs and it was impossible to decide at once which eggs were fresh. It is related that they were tested by placing them in water, when the eggs on which the bird had been sitting for a long time would assume a vertical position with one end upward, while if the egg lay on its side, the bird had not finished laying. In the latter case, the eggs could be used and were taken, with the exception of two or three which were left behind as nest eggs. There are reports from several places in eastern Sweden to the effect that artificial nest eggs were made of wood, which facilitated sorting. Such wooden eggs are mentioned by Broman from Hälsingland (Broman 3, p. 305) but were common on Gotland too, where they were also used in scoters' nests (Säve 1, no. 1185). The method has been known in recent times in Östergötland (Lindquist, 1926, p. 174) and was also used by the Swedish-speaking population on the Estonian island of Rågö (Söderbäck, 1940, p. 182).

Searching the nesting-boxes called for great caution and care. The usual practice was to search the box when the female had temporarily left the nest, but there are also reports that experienced egg collectors could remove eggs from under the sitting bird. A writer from Fjällsjö in Ångermanland describes how in his youth, around the turn of the century, he helped a neighbour to search his nesting-boxes: "On a long stick, he had fastened a small bucket, which he passed up to me when I had climbed up to the goldeneye boxes, where I gathered the eggs and carefully laid them in the bucket" (Rehn, 1967, p. 105). An informant from the neighbourhood of Lake Sommen in Östergötland states that a wooden spoon was used in taking the eggs of the diver and the merganser, but this seems incredible (E. u. 14318, received in 1939, informant born in 1880). On the other hand, I should mention the use also in Sweden of a ladle in taking guillemot eggs. As is well known, the guillemot



Fig. 6. *Nesting-box at Lake Pääjärvi, Russian Karelia. From Friis, 1871.*

lays its eggs under large boulders, as far in as it can reach. Nils Storå, who has studied this implement in great detail, assumes that it was in use in the Swedish archipelago but cannot adduce any concrete instance (Storå, 1966, pp. 211 f.). However, Broman mentions at the beginning of the 18th century that the guillemot eggs "are difficult to extract, which is only possible with small nets or hooks on thin sticks" (Broman 3, p. 302), a counterpart to the ladle known also in Finland.

Concerning the ownership of the egg-collecting boxes, Broman writes that they are "the sole property of the man who owns the forest and has set up the box, which may remain in place for a whole generation" (Broman 3, p. 305). But in the large parts of northern Sweden where the forest was not yet divided among different owners, the rule was that the person who put up the nesting box alone had the right to search it. We have reports, especially from Lappland, and pictures of nesting-boxes with partly very old marks of ownership carved on them ("owners' crosses"). This is



reported by J. Nenzén as early as the beginning of the 19th century (Drake, 1918, p. 9). E. A. Virtanen has devoted an interesting study to this state of affairs and, in doing so, has adduced parallels from Russian Karelia. The same rules applied to boxes in growing trees and to set boxes. On the death of the owner, the boxes might be divided between his sons, in groups around various lakes or water-courses (Virtanen, 1934 and 1940). On the other hand, judging by the collected traditions, the special development of the right of ownership which Sven Andersson described from the Åboland archipelago in Finland (Andersson, 1945) does not seem to have existed in Sweden. There, the right of ownership was divided among different members of the family, who had to look after the boxes and who individually disposed of the eggs collected.

The eggs could be eaten boiled, like hen's eggs, but, as a rule, they seem to have been used as ingredients in pancakes. Nordholm, writing in Jämtland, mentions these dishes, as well as "egg cheese" (Nordholm, 1749, p. 51). "Egg milk" was common, especially in Norrbotten and among the Lapps, and the eggs of wild birds could be added to the dough when baking thin, unleavened bread (Sjuls-son, 1979, p. 147; Montin, 1749). A report from Tärendö in Norrbotten mentions that a festive dish at midsummer consisted of the hard-boiled eggs of wild birds, crushed and mixed with butter (communication from Birgit Laqvist, 1934).

Obviously, the collecting of eggs—if we take a broad view of the circumstances—could not play a major part in the peasant's economy. However, there is evidence that it was not altogether without significance. C. U. Ekström, who was a discerning topographer, says, on the basis of his experience in the Södermanland archipelago, that "the collecting of eggs . . . is an important item in the individual economy of the islander" (Ekström, 1828, p. 214). A report from the northernmost part of Värmland says that, if it were not for the nesting-boxes, "the people in the mountains would go short of eggs, for there are no domestic fowls up there" (Schröder, 1890, p. 125). In Ångermanland, too, the goldeneye was called "the poor man's chicken" (Rehn, 1967, p. 105). Petrus Laes-tadius uses a different metaphor when he writes: "This [the nesting

box] is the bee-hive of the fishing Lapp, which in due time will be robbed" (Laestadius, 1831, p. 215).

However, some selling of eggs also took place, at any rate of water-birds' eggs. Iwan Fischerström has observed that hawkers in Stockholm in the 1860s sold the pickled eggs of the goldeneye (Fischerström, 1967, p. 90). Such selling is also mentioned in 1824 in the Åboland archipelago in Finland (Walter af Pettersen, quoted by C. A. Bergstrom, 1964, p. 94).

It was not only the eggs of the wild birds which were taken; in certain cases, their nestlings also met with the same fate. Storå has discussed in detail the method of extracting young guillemots from the nest, using a special implement, a long stick with a hook at the end (Storå, 1966). He states that this method was also used in Sweden and quotes, *inter alia*, Ekström's description of 1832 from the Södermanland archipelago. To this, I may add Broman's information of a much earlier date from the coast of Hälsingland. As already indicated, Broman writes that the trappers used sticks with hooks to extract the nestlings, "when they have hatched out; the parent birds bring them small fish, which makes them very plump. In former years, there were hundreds of guillemots at many places here in the summer . . . so that trappers could produce baskets full of eggs and nestlings from under stones. But since the very cold winter of 1700, there have been few or none at all." (Broman 3, p. 302.) Another report dated 1833 comes from Örö, south of Väster-vik, where two travellers reported that they "searched for guillemot young and found some without feathers in a cleft in a rock. They are collected here by means of hooks on long poles, which are thrust into the narrow clefts. We had no other instrument than two rammers, tied together with a scraper on the end." (Wallman and Moberg, 1833.) It is reported from the same place that the young, particularly those of the common gull (*Larus canus*), were collected and roasted, while all other birds were boiled. The young of the great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*) were also good, while those of the black guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) tasted of train oil. They were appreciated, however, since they were so fat that one or two could be placed in the pan, together with other birds, as a substitute



for frying fat (communication from Ragnar Wirsén in 1941; cf. Wirsén, 1968, p. 120).

Storå has placed the guillemot hook in a wider context.<sup>8</sup> In this connection, I lack a reference to the similar implements used in catching other species of animals. This refers to the "marten spear", which was called a "rivil" and is known from Härjedalen (Tännäs; the specimen in the Nordic Museum is illustrated in Ekman, 1910, p. 151). But these implements also include the "scrapers", which had a wide range of uses in extracting the young of beasts of prey from the lair or hunted and wounded animals from clefts in rocks etc. They consist of a stick with a screw-shaped device at one end and are similar to the implements of the same name used in the artillery to clean the barrels of muzzle-loading cannon. The Nordic Museum possesses such implements from Dalarna, Värmland, Västmanland and Västergötland. A similar device from Sunne in Värmland is designated a "harkrafs" (hare rake), which reminds me of what Jakob Ekeblad, a courtier, wrote on 6 October 1652 to his father—that, on a farm belonging to Jakob Törnsköld, a commissary (on Värmdo, outside Stockholm), he had tried out some foxhounds, which pursued a hare so far "that he was forced to take refuge in a cleft in a rock, from which we had to screw him out with a pole. We took off half his skin before we got him out" (Ekeblad, 1915, pp. 172 f.).

Nestlings were systematically collected on Gotland, where nesting-boxes were set up for the starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Many travelers have noticed these nesting-boxes, but the best information is given by G. Hilfelding in his travel book in 1797, in which he also illustrates these devices (Fig. 7).

Both in Visby and in every place that I visited on Gotland, the people have devices put out for the starlings to build their nests in, from which the young are taken for food when they are ready to fly. These devices are called "stare stunkor" and are fixed on the house gables, often along the whole roof ridge, also in gardens, in trees, on hedges along fences, and sometimes close under the windows, in order to hear these birds singing. Sometimes, there are 20—30 such nesting-boxes on one farm, indeed, up to hundreds on large farms. The trappers never take the old starlings, only the young and those of the first clutch, when the old birds lay again and sit on the second clutch. ... The device is made

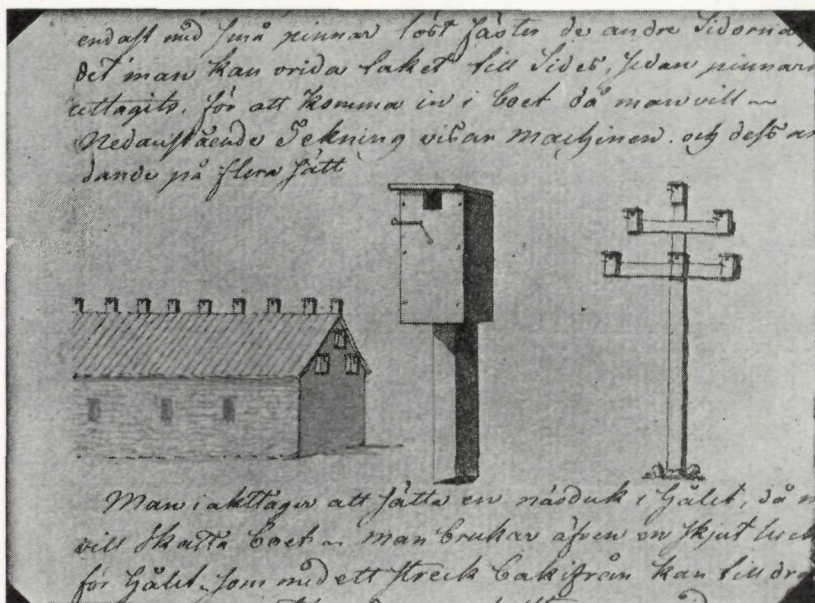


Fig. 7. Nesting-boxes for starlings, Gotland. Drawing by G. Hilfeling 1797. Royal Library, Stockholm.

of four pieces of board nailed together ... with top and bottom, like a small cupboard. The top should be movable and only jut out slightly in order to cover a little hole. ... A peg is inserted just below ... on which the starlings can perch to feed their young, when the latter become so big that they are sitting in the hole. ... A handkerchief is placed in the hole when the nest is to be robbed. ... It is remarkable that the starlings return to their nests each year and, as the young also visit their birthplace to build their nests, battles often ensue, the winner occupying the box. The people account it useful to have many starlings about, as they diligently remove the grubs from the trees and meadows, and I have never seen as many starlings as there are here. (Hilfeling, 1797, pp. 81 ff.).

In 1875, N. M. Mandelgren also depicted nesting-boxes for starlings from two places on Gotland (Mandelgren Collection, Lund, 1: 3—6, 42; cf. Mandelgren, 1877, Plate XV:35). Naturally, these nesting-boxes are also mentioned by P. A. Säve, who even wrote a special paper on this subject (Säve, 1868), though he and several



other writers obviously fight shy of speaking openly about the taking of the nestlings.

Starling boxes intended for the taking of the nestlings have also been found in Denmark. A report from Haderslev says that a master shoemaker in the 1890s owned 12 such boxes. When the young were ready to fly, the hole in the box was reduced in size, so that the young could still be fed, well after their time to fly. When they were large enough, they were roasted as a delicacy (Berg, 1954, p. 40). The people of Fyn were also partial to the young of the blackbird (*Turdus merula*), which were considered to be fatter and tastier than those of the starling, but no mention is made of how they were caught (Højrup, 1966, p. 170). P. J. Bergius says in his famous lecture on delicacies that, in one year in John III's reign, his court consumed 1934 starlings, 352 of which were young birds. In both Skåne and Bornholm, even today, young rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) are a much-appreciated delicacy.

Wild birds' eggs have been collected in various ways in many parts of the world. In Europe, apart from the "bird cliffs" in the Atlantic, eggs have been collected along the sea-coasts, for example, in Friesland, where they were collected for sale in Amsterdam (cf. the fact that on Halligen gulls' eggs were collected to feed the labourers from the mainland at harvest time, Konietzko, 1931, p. 177). From the territory of the Germanic tribes on the Rhine estuary, we find the earliest mention of egg-collecting in Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, in which he says that the people lived on fish and birds' eggs (IV, 10).<sup>9</sup> But the same practice prevailed also in the interior of Europe. K. Mozzyński briefly mentions the collecting of duck eggs in Poland (Mozzyński, 1929, p. 24), but it is chiefly Béla Gunda who has made a detailed and instructive study of the subject (Gunda, 1974). Such egg-collecting was common also among the northern Eurasian peoples of north-western Europe and Siberia. Kerstin Eidlitz has recently compiled the information on this subject and found reports from the Aleuts, Itelmens, Njananins, Nentsy, Dolgans, Mansi, Komi and the Skolt Lapps and also from Kamchatka (Eidlitz, 1969, pp. 39 ff.).

The distribution of egg-collecting boxes, on the other hand, is

far more limited. Apart from Sweden, it must have occurred in the interior or Norway, although information on this point seems to be very sparse. However, egg-collecting is mentioned in a topographical description of Gudbrandsdalen in 1785, which says: "The peasants here have hollowed-out logs in the form of troughs, which they hang in trees along the watercourses and in which waterfowl lay their eggs. ... The peasant who watches over the box always allows the bird to keep a few eggs and can collect from each box 30 eggs, besides the 5 or 6 on which the bird sits." (Hjorthøy, 1785, p. 36.) The egg-collecting box is found throughout Finland with some local variations (according to a communication from Toivo Itkonen and Ilmari Manninen in 1932). Detailed information on the Swedish-speaking areas is provided by Andersson and Storå (Andersson, 1945; Storå, 1966).<sup>10</sup> As regards the Lapp population, the reader is referred primarily to Itkonen (1934 and 1948). In Estonia too, egg-collecting with the help of nesting-boxes was common almost throughout the country (Leinbock, 1934). For the islands formerly inhabited by a Swedish-speaking population, I have received valuable, supplementary information and pictures from Nils Tiberger. On Dagö, there might be nearly 20 or so nesting-boxes for goosander in the hayfield near the farm known as "the bird farm". Also on Runö, there were large numbers of nesting-boxes for merganser, but nothing is known there about the collecting of eggs.<sup>11</sup> J. A. Friis saw nesting-boxes on the shore of Lake Pääjärvi in Russian Karelia (Friis, 1872, p. 325). Moreover, they were common among the Skolt Lapps (Paulaharju, 1921, p. 76 (picture); Manninen, 1932, pp. 306 f.) and among the Zyryans in the Komi A.S.S.R. in the Soviet Union (Hofmann, 1856, pp. 43 f. and 49 (picture; Manninen, 1932, pp. 266 f.). According to U. T. Sirelius, they were also to be found "among the Ob-Ugrians, as well as among several other northern peoples" (Sirelius, 1919, p. 224). Concerning an occurrence even further east, Eidlitz says: "In the case of Siberia, however, I have not found any evidence to show that nesting boxes were used in this way to collect eggs" (Eidlitz, 1969, p. 40).

By reason of its closed distribution and its universal homogeneity



of form, even in details, we have to assume a genetic context for this device. It is mainly associated with the enormous belt of conifer forest which covers north-eastern Europe and which also shows great homogeneity in other respects. There is special reason to recall in this connection the ancient custom of keeping forest bees, which shows technical similarities with intensive egg-collecting. Finally, there may be reason to emphasize that there are strong arguments for thinking that the name of the nesting-box in the Finno-Ugrian languages must obviously be ancient and is common not only to Finnish and Lapp but also to Ostyak (Vilkuna, 1937, pp. 146 f.; Wichman, 1965, pp. 506 f.).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf., however, Dahl, 1958. Bird-trapping on the Faeroe Islands has recently been described in detail by Nørrevang, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> As regards Orkney and Shetland, Fenton, 1978, and as regards Norway, Munch, 1972—75, and Kolsrud, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Almost 50 years ago, I discussed these questions in a paper in Swedish entitled "Northern Scandinavian and Northern European" (Berg, 1933). In the following year, F. Leinbock (Linnus) produced a detailed account of egg-collecting in Estonia (Leinbock, 1932; printed in 1934). Later, the corresponding conditions in Finland were described by Toivo Itkonen (Itkonen, 1934), Sven Andersson (Andersson, 1942 and 1945) and Nils Storå (Storå, 1966). Finally, Béla Gunda thoroughly discussed egg-collecting in Hungary (Gunda, 1974). A good deal of comparative material was produced in these papers. The varying methods have also been commented on in several, more general, ethnological accounts.

Reports from different parts of Sweden are to be found in the Swedish ethnological archives, particularly at the Nordic Museum (E. u.) and the Institute of Dialectology and Folklore Research in Uppsala. Among those who helped me in my study of egg-collecting, I wish to mention particularly Dr. Albert Eskeröd, the late Dr. Nils Tiberg and the late Dr. P. G. Vejde. The terminology follows that given in *Våra fåglar* 1—4 (Curry-Lindahl, 1959—61).

<sup>4</sup> Bertil Hanström states that, as long as the red curlew abounded on Öland, its eggs were used for making pancakes and as pig food. According to Professor Gerda Boëthius (personal communication in 1947), her mother, who was born in 1859 and grew up near Lake Hästefjorden in the parish of Frändefors in Dalsland, said that there the eggs of crows (*Corvus corvi*) were collected and calves were reared on them. The calves grew fat, but their meat was black!

<sup>5</sup> Capiuntur etiam aquaticae aues in vasculis littoralium arborum, ramis per modum nidorum appensis: in quae anates praecipuum sese raeciunt ad producendum oua & pullos, propter vulpeculas, am quibus in terra inestationem patiuntur.

In the Swedish translation, the word "vasculum" is wrongly translated "basket"!

<sup>6</sup> In Hertfordshire in England, Peter Kalm noted in 1747 that he had there seen "a special kind of iron crampons, which they use when they climb trees to take young squirrels, crows' nests or anything else" (Kolm 1, 1966, p. 198).

<sup>7</sup> I can supplement Storå's collection of material with the report that the spoon was used at Røst in the Lofoten Islands in Norway to take the eggs of the razorbill, (*Alca torda*). Deeply buried nests containing a single egg can only be reached with the aid of "long, wooden sticks, to which a wooden ladle is attached" (Grieg, 1964, p. 109, who quotes an article by Dorothea Schjoldager in 1890).

<sup>8</sup> To the information which he has produced in this connection, I may add T. Scot-Ryen's report from Troms County in Norway that there people took the young of the small cormorant in the same way. "The nestlings of the cormorant are still salted and stored for winter food" (Scot-Ryen, 1941, p. 61).

<sup>9</sup> Pars magna /insularum/ a feris barbarisque nationibus incolitur, ex quibus sunt qui piscibus atque ovis avium vivere existimantur.

<sup>10</sup> As the reports about egg-collecting in central Österbotten appear to be sparse, I may recall a letter to the sheriff of Vörå in 1740, which mentions the setting up of nesting-boxes for goldeneyes (Mennander, 1942, p. 538).

<sup>11</sup> As regards the Estonian egg-collecting boxes, I have received further information from the late Dr. F. Linnas (1936) and Dr. Ants Viies (1966).

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## ÚRTAK

Føroyar eru, sum Sverri Dahl tók til á sinni, fram um mong onnur lond fuglalandið, har sum menniskjan er komin uppí og hefur dugað at gera sær gagn úr hesum mikla náttúruveyði. Nakað sum líkist norðuratlantisku fuglabjergunum, sum vit, umframt í Føroyum, finna tey í Orknoyggjum, Hetlandi, Íslandi og Norður-Noregi, er ikki til nakra aðrastaðni á okkara leiðum. Kortini hefur tøka av villfugla- og tá serliga sjófuglaeggjum, eins og av ófloygdum fuglaungum, havt ikki einki at týða hjá fólki aðrastaðni.

Tað hefur verið sjálvandi at taka egg úr reiðrum, sum komið varð framá á sløttum, tað sum finski granskarin Nils Storå hefur kallað óskipaða (extensiv) ræning til at skilja frá teirri miðvísu (intensiv) ræningini við uppsettum búrum («holkar») ella øðrum smíðaðum fuglabýlum.

Tíllík óskipað ræning hefur verið av ymsum fuglasløgum, fyrst og fremst vatn- og sjófuglum, bæði við vøtn og áir inni í landi og í skergørðum fyri vestur- og eysturstrondini. Í fyrra føri vóru tað helst entur (Anas) og lómur (Gavia), í seinna føri øll sjófugasløg, ið eiga hjá okkum, sum æða (Somateria), toppont (Mergus serrator), ógvella (Clangula hyemalis) og álka (Alca torda). Í Svøríki vóru tað helst teir ytru, óbygdu hólmarir, sum vórðu rændir. Sum Olaus Magnus, seinasti katólski ekibiskupurin í Svøríki, sigur frá í Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus 1555, var øllum heimilt at ræna fugl her í gamlar dagar. Mangir staðir hava av eggjanøgðini fingið navn, ið byrjar við Ágg-. Ræningin gekk so nær, at ríkisvaldið helt vera neyðugt at banna hana í 1762, men hetta bann linkaði sum frá leið. Ið hvussu er forðaði tað ikki skergarðsfólki heilt fram at okkara døgum at taka egg til egna nýtslu. Nakað hefur verið selt til býrnar, men tað hefur havt minni upp á seg.

Sermerktari fyrir skandinavisku londini, Finnland við, er hin miðvísa ræningin úr fuglabúrum. Ymsastaðni, men eina helst í norðaru landslutunum og um mitt Miðsvøríki, hefur hesin háttur verið algongdur. Nýtt kundu verða trø, sum høggspeittan (*Dendrocopus*) hevði holað, ella kundi maður eisini sjálvur hola viðarbular og seta teir upp í høviligari hædd í livandi trøum ella á steinar og aðrastaðni, ið høgligt var. Hesi holatrø vórðu so vitjað fleiri ferðir um várið, og fitt fekst burturur av eggjum. Teir fuglar, sum soleiðis vórðu rændir, vóru helst »storskreke» (*Merganser merganser*), hvinont (*Bucephala clangula*), men eisini grágás (*Anser*).

Tíllík manngjörd fuglabýli umrøðir Olaus Magnus, og hann avmyndar tey við, 1. mynd. Tað er fitt av upplýsingum um tey hjá staðsøguhvundum aftan úr miðjari 17. öld. Tað sæst, at hvør bóndi kundi hava bæði 20 og 30 slík fuglabúr, sum vórðu uppsett á høgligum støðum við áir og vøtn. Í greinini verður sagt frá ymsum háttum at vitja búrini. Búrini vóru ogn hjá einstaklingum og vóru aloftast merkt við búmerki eigarans. Í Åbolands skergarði í Finnlandi kundi ognarrætturin verða býttur millum fleiri í ættini, sum hvør í sínum lagnum átti at ganga um búrini og gera skil fyrir eggjunum.

Eggini vórðu etin kókað, sum høsnaregg, men vanligu vórðu tey latin út í pannukøkur ella rørd út í mjólk. Mangastaðni vóru tey munagott íkast í húshaldið hjá bóndunum. Hvinontin hefur beinrakið verið skírd »fátæksmans høsn», og úr Lappmørkini skrivar kunnigur maður í 1830-árunum, at »fuglabúrini eru býflugubýli fiskilappans, sum einaferð í tíðini verða skattað».

Men heldur ikki er ókent í Svøríki at taka ófloygdar fuglaungar. Við serligum krókum drógu teir lomvigapisur úr urðarholum. Á Gotlandi settu teir starabúr á húsaskjeldrar og serligt træverk, haðan staraungar vórðu tiknir, tá ið teir vóru búnir; teir vórðu etnir stoktir og vórðu hildnir vera besta krás. Sama var í Danmørk, og har varð gjørt á sama hátt við kvørkveggjuungar (*Turdus merula*). Í Skáni eta tey enn í dag, eins og á Borgundarhólmi, hjaltakrákuungar (*Corvus frugilegus*) sum lystimeti.

At taka villfuglaegg hefur verið gjørt víða hvar, bæði í Europu og norðarlaga í Ásiu. Tey serligu »ræningarbúrini» vóru tó ikki so víða um. Tey hava tó, umframt í Finnlandi, Noregi og Svøríki, eisini verið nýtt í Estlandi, í Russlands-Kareliu og hjá skoltlappum og sýrjenum. Av tí at útbreiðslan hefur verið heldur avmarkað og so mangt er líkt landi úr landi, eisini í staklutum, verða vit at hugsa um fornt skyldskaparsamband viðvíkjandi hesi ræning. Yvirhøvur er hon knýtt at norður-eurásisku barrskógarlondunum og hefur at vísa seg samband við ta avgomlu skógarbýfluguróktina har. Tað er eisini vert at geva gætur, at málfroðingar hava víst á, at navnið á hesum búrum í finskugrisku málunum, tað finska *uu*, er elligamalt.