

LITTLE AUKS *ALLE ALLE* IN SOUTHERN SCANDINAVIA
WITH EMPHASIS ON THE 1996 INFLUX

*KLEINE ALKEN IN ZUID-SCANDINAVIË
IN HET BIJZONDER TIJDENS DE INVASIE VAN 1996*

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Persistent southerly winds in the Skagerrak region early November 1996 led to yet another influx of Little Auks in coastal regions in the North Sea. Several Little Auks were blown inland in southern Norway and an influx was witnessed in Oslofjorden. Much larger than usual numbers were recorded from Swedish coastal sites. This short note summarizes the first records and descriptions of this influx.

An influx of Little Auks *Alle alle* was recorded late October/early November 1996 in southern Norway and southwest Sweden. Several inland records of Little Auks in southeast Norway and in Sweden were the first indications of a wreck. Both in Sweden and in southern Norway, wintering numbers of Little Auks appear to have increased in recent years, considering the growing numbers of sightings in coastal regions. This note is a description of the occurrence of Little Auks in Oslofjorden and along the Swedish west coast, followed by a preliminary report of Little Auk sightings in October-November 1996. The former is a compilation of published data in local bird reports, the latter is partly based on sightings reported on the Internet.

LITTLE AUKS IN OSLOFJORDEN The innermost part of Oslofjorden is a 20-30 km long basin to the south of Oslo (figure 1). To reach this basin, seabirds have to travel through Drøbak Sound, which is a 1 km wide sound bordered by rather steep hillsides. In Oslofjorden, the weather is often relatively calm. Little Auks are generally described as 'frequently seen in late autumn, even as far in as Oslo' (Collett 1921, Løvenskiold 1947, Haftorn 1971). A major influx occurred in 1943, and there are several observations from the 1950s. Since the 1950s, there have been no sightings until 1983. The ornithological activity in the area was high enough to discover Little Auks, at least since the late 1960s. Around Fornebu Airport (S Oslo), where wildfowl and seabirds have been counted frequently since the early 1970s, not a single Little

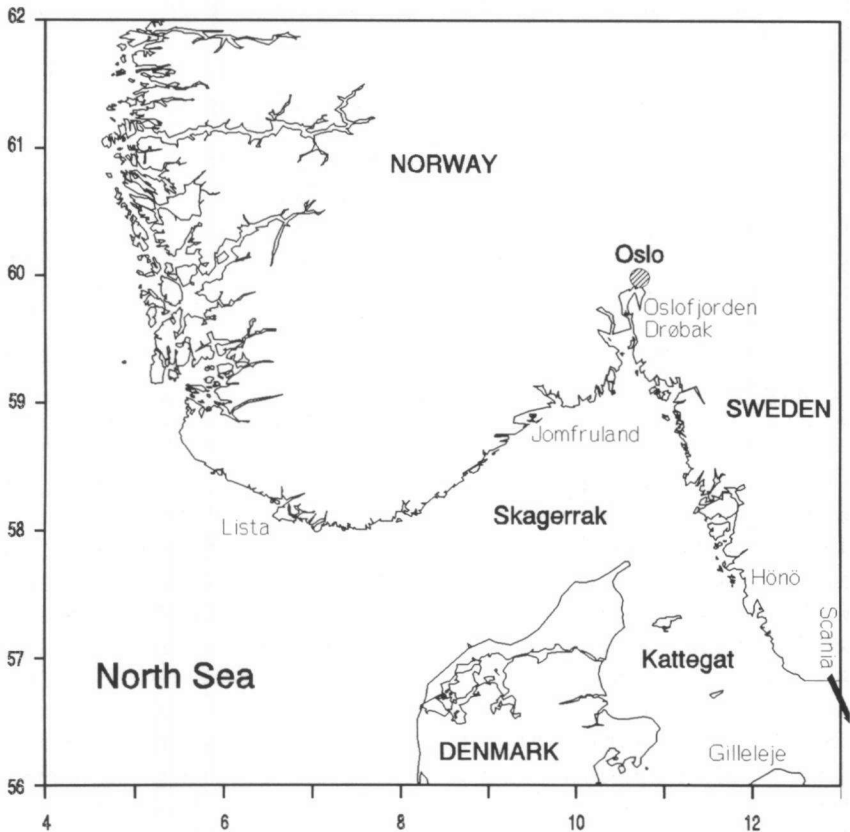


Figure 1. Skagerrak and Kattegat, southern Norway, southwest Sweden and northern Denmark; important place names mentioned in this paper.

Figuur 1. Skagerrak, Kattegat, zuidelijk Noorwegen, westkust van Zweden en Noord-Denemarken; belangrijke plaatsnamen die in dit artikel genoemd worden.

Auk has been spotted until 1983. There were a few sightings of single Little Auks in winter 1983/84 (Oct-March), and an influx occurred in late autumn 1984. Since then, Little Auks have been seen every year in varying numbers, from some tens to probably more than a thousand. Particularly high numbers were observed in winter 1989/90. The Little Auks in Oslofjorden usually arrived late October or in the first two weeks of November, with fewer

sightings in the second half of November and in December. Usually, they are less common after January, but there have been notable exceptions (table 1). Unlike many other seabirds, the occurrence of Little Auks did not coincide with certain local weather anomalies. Whereas other auks and Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* occur in larger numbers after strong southwesterly winds, Little Auks often arrived in completely calm weather.

From the published accounts and the observations during the last decades, it may be concluded that Little Auks have occurred regularly in some series of years and were absent in others. Little Auks were absent as winter visitors from the early 1960s until 1983, followed by another 'cycle' of more frequent occurrence. Because the occurrence of Little Auks in Oslofjorden does not seem to be linked with extreme weather, it is reasonable to believe that the presence in Oslofjorden reflects the occurrence of Little Auks in the Kattegatt/Skagerrak area at large.

LITTLE AUKS ALONG THE SWEDISH WEST COAST Little Auks were fairly rare along the Swedish coast until recently, but numbers have increased since 1983. Small numbers of Little Auks were reported annually in the late 1970s and early 1980s (table 1). Between 1985 and 1992, several thousands of Little Auks were reported each year, but much lower figures were reached in 1993 (457) and 1994 (40). Results for 1995 are not yet published, but 900 Little Auks were seen one day at Hönö (figure 1).

SIGHTINGS IN 1996 On 29 October, some 5000 Little Auks were counted at Lista, just to the west of the southernmost tip of Norway (figure 1). One day later, 2200 Little Auks were observed in two hours from Jomfruland (to the SW of Oslofjorden). On 31 October, a new record was set for this area with 8500 Little Auks moving →S between 08:20 and 13:00 h. On 1 November, another 1100 Little Auks were seen in three hours, followed by 1200 on 2 November and 600 on 3 November. On the last day, the visibility was very poor due to fog, so that many birds may have been missed (Roy T. Magnusson and Rune Solvang, Internet). At Lista, a total of 11 500 Little Auks was recorded between 31 October and 2 November.

In Oslofjorden (Moss-Borre-Sande), over 100 Little Auks were recorded between 25 October and 27 October. The local ornithological society in Asker & Bærum (west of Oslo) made its annual boattrip in the inner Oslofjord on 2 November, and over 200 Little Auks were observed. On 3 Nov, 150 Little Auks →S and 20 →N were seen past Snarøya in 30 min time (close to Oslo on the west side). The Little Auks had penetrated deep into Oslofjorden, during

Table 1. Numbers of Little Auks recorded in Oslofjorden (S Norway), 1960-96.
Tabel 1. Aantallen Kleine Alken in Oslofjord (Zuid-Noorwegen), 1960-96.

winters	presence	peak numbers	early/late sightings
1950s-1980/81	(none)		
1981/82	9 Feb	1 ♀ found dead	
1982/83	(none)		
1983/84	23 Oct-12 Mar	1 singles on 5 dates	
1984/85	3 Nov-8 Dec	165 7 Nov	1 on 9 Mar
1985/86	20 Oct-2 Jan	300 1 Nov	2 on 29 Mar
1986/87	26 Oct-17 Dec	100 1 Nov	
1987/88	8 Nov-10 Dec	10 8 Nov and 10 Dec	1 on 3 Oct
1988/89	9 Oct-11 Dec	30 12 Nov	1 on 5 Mar, 3 on 12 Mar
1989/90	23 Oct-1 May	550 20 Nov	
		500-1000 29 Dec	1 on 19 May, 1 on 4 Jun
		900 3 Feb	
		150 16 Apr	
1990/91	3 Nov-15 Apr	100 29 Dec and 25 Mar	
1991/92	25 Oct-22 Nov	10 16 Nov	
1992/93	25 Oct-13 Nov	1 singles on 2 dates	
1993/94	6 Nov	1	
1994/95	(none) ¹		
1995/96	28 Oct-25 Dec ²	50 28 Oct	
1996/97	late Oct →?	200 2-3 Nov ³	

¹ Probably none, but no full report published yet, ² incomplete; no full report published yet,

³ highest count so far; influx continued when this issue of *Sula* went in print. Sources: compilation by Per Gylseth from local bird reports.

Table 2. Numbers of Little Auks recorded off the Swedish west coast, 1975-1996.
Tabel 2. Aantallen Kleine Alken langs de Zweedse westkust, 1975-96.

1975	11	1982	11	1989	4000
1976	8	1983	65 ²	1990	3900
1977	11	1984	735 ³	1991	1330
1978	48 ¹	1985	1875	1992	2305 ⁴
1979	15-18	1986	1080	1993	457
1980	17	1987	1385	1994	40 ⁵
1981	17	1988	1490	1995	> 900 ⁶
				1996	> 11 400 ⁷

¹ 36 dead, oiled; ² trapped in fishing net, ³ highest Swedish total so far, ⁴ 7500 on 28 October 1984 in Norway, ⁵ 405 at Vedholmen (Bohuslän) 3 Nov 1992, ⁶ the lowest number since 1982, ⁷ total not yet published, but 900 were seen one day at Hönö, ⁷ 10 103 at Hönö on 1 Nov, 1300 at Hermanö 4 Nov. Sources: Vår fågelvärld 1975-91, Fågelåret 1992-94; Hans Börjesson.

calm weather. There had been moderate southerly winds for some time. Migrating Little Auks seem to follow the coast around the southern tip of Norway and along the coast of Skagerrak in a northeasterly direction. Probably, most of these birds turned south along the Swedish coast, but sub-

stantial numbers have moved through the narrow sound at Drøbak in Oslofjorden this year. An estimated 1000 Little Auks were seen near Oslo during the first days of November.

Erling Jirle (based on the Swedish hotline Club 300 and Skaanesvararen) reports 'an incredible influx of Little Auks' along the Swedish west coast, during which all previous records were broken. The first flight, on 30 October, comprised thousands of Little Auks at Hönö and 626 in Scania. On 1 November another flight occurred on which, with 10 100 individuals at Hönö and 2600 at Hovs Hallar (Scania), all Swedish records were broken. On 2 November, the numbers had decreased to around 500 at the best localities. Large numbers of Little Auks were also seen in the Kattegat, with 800 on 30 October and 1484 on 1 November at Gilleleje (T.E. Ortvad, Internet).

Inland sightings in southern Scandinavia include one Little Auk on 2 Nov in Nordre Øyeren (20 km from the sea east of Oslo, 6 Little Auks on 3 November in flight from Maridalsvannet (10 km from the sea north of Oslo), and two were reported from the inner parts of the county Buskerud (far from sea). One of the records was received from someone out on his Sunday walk in the forest: a smashing noise behind him on the path appeared to be the fatal crash of a Little Auk. Another individual was swimming in a small lake in the forest. Also from Sweden there are reports of Little Auks from many inland localities, and sightings were reported from all around southern Sweden, and from Blekinge and Øland in the Baltic Sea (Mats Svensson, Internet).

Late October/early November 1996, Little Auks were observed in 'higher than usual' numbers in the Wadden Sea area in The Netherlands, but only small numbers were observed along the mainland coast (N.F. van der Ham & P. Wolf *pers. comm.*) and further to the south along the French coast (P. Le Marechal, Internet). Early November, 'lots of' Little Auks were observed along the Scottish east coast, including some weakened specimens (A. Webb *in litt.*). So far, the records from other parts of the North Sea are insignificant in comparison by the mass movements reported from the Skagerrak/Kattegat area.

The first reports from Norway and Sweden point at an impressive influx and wreck of Little Auks. Although thousands of Little Auks are recorded annually at Lista (SW Norway) during 1990-96 (Lista Bird Observatory; N.H. Lorentzen *in litt.*), and even 88 000 on one day in November 1988, it is highly unusual to see such large numbers penetrating into Oslofjorden and the Kattegat. The compilation of sightings in Sweden and in Oslofjorden is

consistent with data elsewhere in the North Sea, which indicate an increase in wintering numbers of Little Auks in the North Sea since the early or mid-1980s. A full report of this influx may be expected in due course.

Reports were used as published on the internet or sent to us directly by e-mail by Torkild Jensen, Morten Gunther, Per Gylseth, Nick F. van der Ham, Erling V. Jirle, Nils H. Lorentzen, Roy T. Magnussen, Pierre le Marechal, Troels Eske Ortvad, Andy Webb, and Pim Wolf.

SAMENVATTING De laatste dagen van oktober en de eerste dagen van november 1996 stonden in zuidelijk Noorwegen en langs de Zweedse westkust in het teken van een nieuwe invasie Kleine Alken. Zowel in Zweden als in Noorwegen werden de 'zeetrekrecords' gebroken (8500 op 31 oktober op Jomfruland en op 1 november 10 100 exemplaren bij Hönö; zie figuur 1 voor plaatsnamen). Een inderhaast samengesteld overzicht van de waarnemingen in Oslofjorden en voor de Zweedse westkust toont dat er sinds 1983 aanmerkelijk veel meer Kleine Alken in deze gebieden voorkomen dan daarvoor (tabel 1, 2). Opvallend klein waren de aantallen in 1993/94 en 1994/95. Voor wat betreft Oslofjorden, een beschutte baai juist onder Oslo, kon er geen verband worden gevonden tussen het voorkomen van Kleine Alken en de weersomstandigheden. Het verschijnen van deze vogels wordt dan ook als een afspiegeling van de overwinterende populatie in het Skagerrak beschouwd. Een compleet overzicht van de meest recente invasie zal nog moeten worden samengesteld.

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Haftorn S. 1971. Norges fugler. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.

Løvenskiold H.L. 1947. Håndbok over Norges fugler. Oslo.

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