Back-crossing of a Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) and a Common Murre–Thick-billed Murre Hybrid (*U. aalge* × *U. lomvia*)

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Although the closely related Common and Thick-billed murres (*Uria aalge* and *U. lomvia*) are sympatric over much of their ranges, Tschanz and Wehrlin's [1968, Fauna (Oslo) 21: 53] observation from the Norwegian island of Vedøy is the only record of possible hybridization between the two species. These workers found a mixed pair with an egg that hatched into a chick that lived at least 10 days. They also observed adult murres with white gape marks much thinner than those of Thick-billed Murres, which they thought to be hybrids.

In June–July 1980 we observed a breeding attempt by a Common Murre and an apparent *aalge-lomvia* hybrid at Cape St. Mary's, Newfoundland (46°49′N, 54°11′W). The breeding site of this pair was a narrow ledge near the top of an 80-m cliff, which could be viewed from a distance of approximately 30 m.

The apparent hybrid displayed the following characteristics: white gape mark similar to that of *lomvia* in position, length, and pigment density, but about one half as wide; the point of the white breast plumage on the neck more acute than that of *aalge,* but broader than that of *lomvia*; and back and head coloration intermediate between the brownish *aalge* and the black *lomvia*. The key feature here is the gape mark, which was distinctly lanceolate in shape, and thus unlike the narrow gray or pale white line that sometimes appears on the upper mandibles of Common Murres (Sergeant 1951, Proc. 10th Intern. Ornithol. Congr.: 578; pers. obs.). Plumage color is variable in both species and is affected by lighting, and neck pattern changes with posture. Our observations of other birds at the colony indicated that these characters came close to meeting in the two species, and the apparent hybrid may have overlapped with some pure-bred birds in these features.

The pair was first observed for 1 h on 8 June, when the Common Murre was incubating an egg with its partner beside it. On subsequent visits on 14 and 30 June and 6 July no egg or chick was seen, although the site was consistently attended by one or both members of the pair and the adults were observed to bring fish on several occasions. On 12 July and later visits, neither parent was present. These observations do not indicate that the egg did or did not hatch, because a young chick could have hidden from our view behind a small rock promontory, which partially obscured the site, or beneath its parent's wing. However, if a chick did hatch, it could not have remained undetected in these hiding places until fledging age.

Thick-billed Murres comprise roughly 10–15% of the Cape St. Mary's murre colony, but their breeding is restricted to narrow ledges and the inner margins of broad ledges where they can lean against rock walls while incubating (Williams 1974, Ornis Scandinavica 5: 113; pers. obs.). Common Murres use these habitat types but also occupy broad ledges and flat-topped pinnacles. The ledge used by the apparent back-crossing pair was narrow and was bounded by a low rock wall and would be suitable for breeding by either species.

Hybridization between Common and Thick-billed murres could be more extensive than the single previous record suggests, because most murre investigations have been conducted in areas of allopatry. Tschanz and Wehrlin (1968) found several apparent hybrids in their study area, and we also noted two murres of intermediate characteristics loafing on ledges at Cape St. Mary's in addition to the mated bird described above. Unfortunately, a thorough examination of this colony for hybrids and mixed pairs is not possible because of the great distances from which most of the breeding ledges must be viewed.

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