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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed Dec. 6, 1934

"HURRICANE BIRDS"

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In a book by F. A. Ober entitled "Camps in the Caribbees" published in 1880, we read as follows:

"Immediately preceding the hurricane, there arrive off the Caribbean coast (of Dominica) vast numbers of birds called, from their cries 'Twa-oo'. They are said to be the harbingers of hurricanes and only appear during the calms immediately before a storm. They cover the water in large flocks and come in from the desolate sandy islands where they breed. They are the sooty tern (*Sterna fuliginosa*), but are known to the natives as 'hurricane birds.' When I arrived in Dominica the sea was black with them, but on the morning after the storm they had disappeared, to a bird, as completely as though blown into another sphere."

I have seen a number of other references to the belief that these birds are heralds of tropical storms but I have never heard of any scientific investigation of the matter. The U. S. Biological Survey states that it is unable to refer me to any scientific literature on the subject. Perhaps the belief is a pure superstition but perhaps, on the other hand, like a good many other notions in the domain of weather folk lore, it contains some small grain of truth.

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