

With our nets and gear we're faring
On the wild and wasteful ocean.
It's there on the deep that we harvest and
reap our bread
As we hunt the bonny shoals of herring.

1. Oh, it was a fine and a pleasant day,
Out of Yarmouth harbour I was faring
As a cabin boy on a sailing lugger,
For to go and hunt the shoals of herring.

2. Oh, the work was hard and the hours
were long,
And the treatment surely took some bearing.
There was little kindness and the kicks were
many,
As we hunted for the shoals of herring.

3. Oh we fished the Swarte and the Broken
Bank;
I was cook and I'd a quarter-sharing.
And I used to sleep standing on my feet
And I'd dream about the shoals of herring.

4. Oh, we left the home grounds in the
month of June,
And to canny Shields we soon was bearing,
With a hundred cran of the silver darlings

Notes:

Written by Ewan **MacColl** for the **BBC**, series
Singing the Fishing, 1960.

It was about the herring fishery and fishermen, and
the song was designed specifically to highlight the
life-story of **Sam Lerner** (1878-1965) who had
spent a long life as a herring fisherman. He first
went to sea in 1892, when he was just a boy.

According to **CEFAS** strategic report 003, **North
Sea Fish and Fisheries**, 2001:

Atlantic herring are found throughout the shelf
waters of northwestern Europe from the northern
Bay of Biscay to Greenland, and east into the
Barents Sea. During daytime, herring shoals
remain close to the sea bottom or in deep water to
a depth of 200 m. At dusk they move towards the
surface and disperse over a wide area.

Although most fish species have a single spawning
season in the North Sea, herring is an exception.
Sub-populations of North Sea herring spawn at
different times and localised groups of herring can
be found spawning in almost any month.

Fishing for herring is mainly undertaken with purse
seines and trawls offshore and to a smaller extent
by fixed nets in coastal waters.

That we'd taken from the shoals of herring.

5. Now you're up on deck, you're a
fisherman.
You can swear and show a manly bearing.
Take your turn on watch with the other
fellows
While you're searching for the shoals of
herring.

6. In the stormy seas and the living gale.
Just to earn your daily bread you're daring.
From the Dover Strait to the Faroe islands
While you're following the shoals of herring.

7. Well I earned my keep and I paid my way
And I earned the gear that I was wearing;
Sailed a million miles, caught ten million
fishes,
We were following the shoals of herring.

[Night and day the sea we're daring,
Come wind or come winter gale,
Sweat or cold, growing up, growing old,
While we hunt the bonny shoals of herring.]

Sung by Ewan MacColl at youtu.be/6Ov81aogaxg.

While North Sea stocks are fished throughout the
year, landings are greatest in the third quarter of
the year, predominantly from the Orkney/Shetland
area, Buchan, northwest of the Dogger Bank and in
coastal waters of eastern England.



[from
swarm photo by
[Eistreter](#),
Wikimedia, 2010]

Notes on the words

Swarte and Broken Bank - fishing grounds within
the Outer Norfolk Bank - see overleaf.

Shields - the port of South Shields.

cran - a British unit of capacity for fresh herring
before cleaning, from the Gaelic crann, a measure
for herring. Since 1852 the quantity needed to fill
37½ gallons. A cran typically contains about 1200
fish, but can vary from 700 to 2500.
Under the Herring Industry Board's rules, and
Weights and Measures Regulations, any herring
not sold by the cran must be sold by weight.
[Lots more at <https://sizes.com/units/cran.htm>]

silver darlings - herring

Shoals of Herring



Map of the **North Sea** - including sea depths and the EZZs (2010 or earlier)

by Halava, 2010, via Wikimedia commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ANorth_Sea_map-en.png

See also **The current state of knowledge on the ecology and interactions of North Sea Herring within the North Sea ecosystem** at [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net) with maps such as

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/fig4_40123711

(use triangles at either side to see previous / next map)