RASPREDELENIYE NITRATOV I NITRITOY V VODE
SEVERNOY CHASTI INDIYSKOGO OKEANA

(Distribution of Nitrates and Nitrites in
the Water of North Indian Ocean)

by

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ABSTRACT

The general distribution of dissolved mineral nitrates and nitrites in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea and in the open northern part of the Indian Ocean is given. Mean values of nitrates: 1 µg-at N/l in surface water, sharply increasing to 2-26 µg-at N/l with depth. After achieving these concentrations the content of nitrate changes little.

Nitrites as a thin layer were dissolved in the thermocline layer and under it in quantities depending on zooplankton (up to 2 µg-at N/l).

In the Arabian Sea the second maximum of nitrites was discovered (up to 5 µg-at N/l in 150-1500 m); it can be explained by the reduction conditions of these waters.

The author
DISTRIBUTION OF NITRATES AND NITRITES IN
THE WATER OF NORTH INDIAN OCEAN

The distribution of nitrates and nitrates dissolved in sea water
depends to a large degree upon hydrological, biological and physical-
chemical conditions. In the layer, where the process of photo-
synthesis occurs, the content of dissolved forms of mineral nitrogen
may decrease as a result of its consumption by phytoplankton. On
the other hand, a cycle of transformations occurs as a result of
mineralization of organic matter; the last phase of the metamorphosis,
according to Bruyevich (1954), includes the oxidation of ammonium
and nitrates with intermediate formation of nitrites. This is a
spontaneous process since it is accompanied with a decrease of free
energy. The formation of nitrites in lieu of reduction of nitrates
requires additional use of energy or is spent in specific reducing
conditions.

The following expeditions worked in the investigated area of the
Indian Ocean: Mabahiss (1933-1934), Discovery II (1931-1939),
Dana (1928-1930), Ob' (1955-1957), Vityaz' (1959-1961). In the
Mabahiss (Thompson, Gibson, 1937) and Discovery II (Discovery
Reports, 1941-1947) expeditions the nitrates were determined by
the colorimetric method with strychnine, in the Ob' (Ivanenkov,
Gubin, 1960) with diphenylamine, in the Vityaz' (reports on 31st
and 33rd cruises) with diphenyl benzidine. In all the expeditions
the nitrites were determined by the Griss-Ilosvay method.

All the water area of the Indian Ocean, which was investigated during
the 33rd cruise of the Vityaz', was divided into the following
regions: the Arabian Sea, open part of the Indian Ocean and the
Gulf of Bengal with contiguous Andaman Sea.

The Arabian Sea (October-November). The distribution of nitrates
in the Arabian Sea depends on the following factors: rather high
biological activity in comparison with other areas of the Indian
Ocean (the production of the Arabian Sea approaches to that of our
Far Eastern Seas)*; the presence of clearly pronounced density dis-
continuities, the presence of a vast layer of oxygen minimum and
the zone of hydrogen sulfide (Ivanenkov, Rosanov, 1961) in inter-
mediate water.

*See the study of Naukno and Ponomareva on p. 250 of this
collection of papers.
Nitrates are, as a rule, absent from the surface layer. A sharp increase in the concentration of nitrates reaching 15-20 mkg-at/l is observed under the discontinuity layer (25-50 m along the coast and 50-75 m in the central part). Nitrates increase with depth to 18-24 mkg-at/l.

Vertical Distribution of Oxygen, Nitrates and Nitrites (mkg-at/l)

<table>
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<th>Gulf of Bengal</th>
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<td>St. 4890</td>
<td>St. 4934</td>
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<td>lat. 30°00'N</td>
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<tr>
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*Depth, m*
FIG. 1. Distribution of nitrates (mkg-at/l) at the depth of 100 m.

FIG. 2. Distribution of nitrates (mkg-at/l) at the depth of 600 m.
The distribution of nitrates with depth is different in the zone of hydrogen sulfide, or near it, and in the zone where the effect of hydrogen sulfide is not felt. The water contaminated with hydrogen sulfide or lying near the hydrogen sulfide zone contains somewhat less nitrates in the layer of 200-500 m.; here nitrites begin to appear (see table, St. 4865). In zones not contaminated with hydrogen sulfide the nitrates reach maximum concentration at a certain depth; lower, the concentration remains almost unchanged (see table, St. 4814).

The distribution of nitrate over the water area of the Arabian Sea is shown for water levels 0, 100 and 600 m., which makes it possible to evaluate their content in the layer of greatest biological activity (0 m.), under the first density discontinuity layer (100 m.) and in the zone of their maximum concentration (600 m.). At the surface and in the upper layer of 25-50 m. the quantity of nitrates over the greater part of water area is practically zero. Only in the areas of maximum vertical intermixing does the quantity of nitrates reach 0.5-1.5 mkg-at/l in the layer of 0-50 m. (see Fig. 3 in paper by Kabanova, on page 90 of this publication).

At the depth of 100 m. (Fig. 1), the following quantities of nitrates were observed: 16-18 mkg-at/l in the central part of the Arabian Sea, 20-22 mkg-at/l off the coast of India and in the Gulf of Aden, 5-15 mkg-at/l in the Somali Current area.

The intermixing caused by the Somali Current increases somewhat the quantity of nitrates in the overlying layers (50-100 m.) and decreases in the underlying layers (100-150 m.).

At the depth of 600 m. (Fig. 2) the concentration of nitrates off the Somali coast increases to 22-24 mkg-at/l (at St. 4997 the value was 32 mkg-at/l). In the remaining part of the Arabian Sea the quantity of nitrates tends to increase at this depth level in west-east direction from 18 mkg-at/l in the western and central part to 24 mkg-at/l off the coast of India. It need be noted that the distribution of phosphates is similar in this area.*

Below the depth of 600 m. the quantity of nitrates is practically stable.

The vertical distribution of nitrites in the Arabian Sea has the

*See study by Rozanova on p. 102 in this issue.
following characteristics. At the surface in layer, 0-25 m., the nitrites are absent, in the density discontinuity layer, 25-75 m., the first intermediate maximum of nitrites appears, which was not established at the depth of 100-150 m. In the zone of hydrogen sulfide and in adjacent areas at the depths of 150 to 1500 m. the second intermediate maximum of nitrites was observed.

The finding of the first intermediate maximum of nitrites at the depth of 25-75 m. is not a peculiarity of the Arabian Sea; and is associated with the oxidation of organic matter of decomposing plankton organisms. The presence of the second intermediate maximum of nitrites is a phenomena typical only of the Arabian Sea (and areas similar to it) and is associated with peculiar reducing conditions in the intermediate layers of this sea. These layers have a negligible quantity of oxygen (less than 15 mkg-at/l) and are characterized by a decrease of the oxidation-reduction potential (Mokiyevskaya, 1961) and the appearance of hydrogen sulfide (Ivanenkov, Rozanov, 1961). The layer of the second intermediate maximum of nitrites is at the same time a layer of somewhat diminished quantity of nitrates, which can be explained by their partial reduction to nitrites.

The first intermediate maximum of nitrites (Fig. 3) in the form of a thin layer appears in density discontinuity layer and underneath. In the northern part of the Arabian Sea, the concentration of nitrites reaches 0.10-0.20 mkg-at/l, in central part 0.020-0.50 mkg-at/l, off the coast of India it exceeds 0.50 mkg-at/l, and in the western part of the sea, off the Arabian coast, the value exceeds 1.00 mkg-at/l. In the Somali Current area, the concentration of nitrites in the layer of first intermediate maximum reaches 2.00 mkg-at/l. A good correlation between the quantity of nitrites and zooplankton biomass (not phytoplankton, because the animal albumin liberates a large quantity of nitrogen when being decomposed) was noted in this layer. The autumn season is the Arabian Sea is characterized by a very large plankton biomass (exceeding 1 g/m³ in wet weight)*; as in other areas of the World Ocean, the richest layer is 0-100 m.

The largest plankton biomass was observed in the Gulf of Aden and in the western part of the sea, i.e. in places with maximum concentration of nitrites. A similar connection was noted earlier (Bruyevich, 1954) in other areas of the World Ocean.

*See study by Naumov and Ponomareva on p. 249 in this issue.
Below the layer of first intermediate maximum the nitrites disappear or their quantity decreases to less than 0.10 mkg-at/l. In layer, 150-1500 m, nitrites appear again, sometimes with breaks, the quantities ranging from 0.20 to 0.50 mkg-at/l. In the hydrogen sulfide zone the second maximum of nitrites fluctuates around 1.00-5.00 mkg-at/l (Fig. 4).

In the central part of the Arabian Sea the second maximum of nitrates is observed at a depth of 150-200 m. Off the Arabian coast and in the northern part of the sea it lies at a depth of 400-500 m.

The presence of second intermediate maximum of nitrites indicates the water distribution of the Arabian Sea in southern, eastern and open sectors. The same character of distribution of Arabian waters was noted by K. D. Sabinin* when studying the maximums of s. linity.

In the open northern sector of the Indian Ocean (December-January) a slightly different pattern in the distribution of dissolved mineral forms of nitrogen was observed. Poor production of the open water of the Indian Ocean, as well as smaller vertical density gradients, slow down the increase in the concentration of nitrates with depth in comparison with the Arabian Sea; thus the absolute values of nitrates are here smaller (see table, St. 4890).

Negligibly small quantities of nitrates (less than 0.5 mkg-at/l) are observed in the surface layer, except for several spots in the areas of upwelling. In the surface layer of the eastern part of equatorial zone of the Indian Ocean the quantity of nitrates reached 1-2 mkg-at/l.

At a depth of 100 m. (see Fig. 1) of the western sector of equatorial zone one can distinguish a subzone with small concentrations of nitrates in the area of Somali Current (10-15 mkg-at/l), a subzone with upwelling water west of Maldine Islands (20-25 mkg-at/l) and a subzone of upwelling on lat. 5°S north of Chagos Archipelago (20 mkg-at/l). In the eastern part of equatorial zone, the concentration of nitrates at the same depth is somewhat smaller than in the western part. The largest quantities of nitrates (15 mkg-at/l) are observed SW of Ceylon and in area adjacent to the Gulf of Bengal. South of the zone of equatorial divergence one can observe a gradual decrease in the quantity of nitrates, diminishing to negligible quantities (less than 1 mkg-at/l) south of lat. 16-17°S, which is associated

*In this article p. 51.
with the deepening of density discontinuity layer in this area. At 
the depth of 600 m. in the open part of the Indian Ocean, the con-
centration of nitrates reaches maximum and is, as a rule, preserved 
to the bottom. In Fig. 2 one can clearly see the location of upwelling 
in the south equatorial divergence zone where the quantity of nitrates 
exceeds 26 mkg-at/l; southward the quantity decreases.

The first intermediate maximum of nitrites in the open portion of 
the ocean, which is associated with the first density discontinuity 
equals 0.25-0.50 mkg-at/l (see Fig. 3). An increase in the con-
centration of nitrites in the areas of Maldives Islands, Ceylon and 
Chagos can be explained by the large biomass of plankton in these 
areas. In western part of equatorial zone the first intermediate 
maximum of nitrites lies at a depth of 50-80 m., in eastern part 
it lies at a depth of 80-100 m. South of equator, the upper boundary 
of this layer rises to 30 m. in the south equatorial divergence zone; 
on lat. 20-25°S it gradually deepens to 150 m.

The second intermediate maximum of nitrites, which is associated with 
the water of Arabian origin, is far less clearly pronounced in the 
open part of the ocean than in the Arabian Sea (see Fig. 4). South-
ward it is traced approximately to lat. 10°S; in the eastern part 
of equatorial zone this maximum is observed in layer 200-500 m. 
deep extending a narrow band south of Ceylon toward Sumatra (0.10-
0.16 mkg-at/l).

Gulf of Bengal and Andaman Sea (February-March). The distribution 
/100 pattern of nitrates and nitrites in the Gulf of Bengal and Andaman 
Sea is much like the pattern in the Arabian Sea (See table, St. 
4934). There are, however, substantial differences: the presence 
of considerable quantities of nitrates in surface layers, the absence 
of second intermediate maximum of nitrites, etc. The mean magnitudes 
of nitrates and nitrites in the Gulf of Bengal are smaller than in 
the Arabian Sea.

The quantity of nitrates in the surface water of the greater part 
of the Gulf of Bengal is about 1-1.5 mkg-at/l. In the eastern part 
of the Gulf of Bengal and in the Andaman Sea the quantity is some-
what greater—namely, 2.0 mkg-at/l (see Fig. 3 in the paper by 
Kananova printed on p. 90 of this issue).

At the depth of 100 m. in the central part of the Gulf of Bengal 
the quantity of nitrates equals 15 mkg-at/l, toward the coast of 
India it decreases to 10-13 mkg-at/l (see Fig. 1).

At the depth of 600 m. in the central part of the gulf the quantity 
of nitrates equals 22 mkg-at/l, but off the coast of India it is less
FIG. 3. Distribution of magnitudes of the upper intermediate maximum of nitrites (mkg-at/l).

FIG. 4. Distribution of magnitudes of the second intermediate maximum of nitrites (mkg-at/l).
than 20 mkg-at/l (see Fig. 2). In the northern part of the Gulf of Bengal and in the central part of the Andaman Sea the concentration of nitrates reaches 23 mkg-at/l.

The upper intermediate maximum of nitrates in the central part of the Gulf of Bengal does not exceed 0.25 mkg-at/l; it reaches 0.50 mkg-at/l in the southern part and 1.00 mkg-at/l in the northern part of the gulf. The quantity of nitrates in the layer of first intermediate maximum of the Andaman Sea fluctuates from 0.25 to 0.50 mkg-at/l (see Fig. 3).

The second intermediate maximum of nitrates was observed by us only in one area of the Gulf of Bengal near the coast of India at a depth of 200-500 m. (0.10-0.20 mkg-at/l). In this area small quantities of hydrogen sulfide (0.05 ml/l) were found (Ivanenkov, Rozanov, 1961). In the Andaman Sea the second intermediate maximum of nitrates was absent.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The general character of the distribution of nitrogen in the northern part of the Indian Ocean is as follows: very small quantities on the surface (usually less than 1 mkg-at/l, a sharp increase beneath the density discontinuity layer (to 20 mkg-at/l and insignificant increase with depth (to 24-26 mkg-at/l). When reaching this concentration, which can be considered a maximum in the quantity of nitrates, the fluctuations are very small indeed. Such a pattern of the distribution of nitrates can be explained as a result of their consumption by phytoplankton in the surface layer. However, the influx of nitrates into the photosynthetic layer from deeper strata is impeded due to a sharply pronounced stratification of water. The presence of high concentration of nitrates immediately beneath the density discontinuity layer is created by the mineralization of the unstable organic matter of dead organisms which are readily oxidized in the surface layer. Similar data on the distribution of nitrates were also obtained on other expeditions, notably on the Mabahiss, Discovery II and Ob'.

2. Nitrites appear in the form of a thin layer under the first density discontinuity layer; their quantity increases with an increase in the production of zooplankton in the surface layer.

3. The second intermediate maximum of nitrites is created by specific reducing conditions in the intermediate water of the Arabian Sea.
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