

Sock

by Neville Hockley

Sleep deprivation is a funny thing

Just three nights into our Atlantic crossing, with early days for a three-week passage, our minds and bodies were still adjusting to the challenges of a 24/7 watch routine, only a few hours of sleep a night and the constant movement of Dream Time, our 38-foot Cabo Rico, running wing-to-wing on the high seas after two weeks of rest in Cape Verde.

The sock story begins in the

comfort and support, and as she puts it, to stop her from “rolling around like a pencil.” We have a lee cloth, but over 13 years and 42,000 nautical miles of world cruising, Catherine prefers her pillow method.

At any rate, with no moon and a sky still heavy with sand blowing across from the Sahara by the strengthening Harmattan winds, the only visible light across our expansive stretch of sea came from the soft glow of our navigational instruments in the cockpit and the tri-color masthead light drawing great sweeping arcs in the night sky 60 feet above the waves. After an hour or so into my watch, and during a routine scan of the horizon, I noticed a black sock lying on the cockpit cushion. This seemed just a little odd to me because I hadn’t noticed it earlier. But, not giving it much thought, and thinking

it was one of Catherine’s, I reached down and picked it up.

It was a fleece sock, soft and warm, which also felt a little strange since Catherine had been off watch for more than an hour. But fleece is a great insulator and can hold heat for a long time. I turned to stow it below, and that’s when I felt it move. A little startled, I dropped the sock, which landed softly back on the cushion and, while considering it, the wind seemed to catch it and carry it down into the cabin.

I followed the sock down below where I found it piled up on the floor at the bottom of the

companionway, and it was staring at me with a tiny unblinking expression. A little confused, I watched as it seemed to unfold itself on the dark floor and miraculously, before my tired eyes, started to move.

Not wanting this sock to disturb Catherine, who thankfully was now fast asleep within a cocoon of soft pillows, I carefully placed a towel over it, gathered it up gently and carried it back up to the cockpit for inspection under the chartplotter light.

I unfolded the towel to find not a sock, but a tiny bird bundled up inside. Exhausted, it somehow managed to circle down to Dream Time in the night and between rigging, sails and a whizzing wind generator, land on the cushion next to me without a sound.

It seemed comfortable, or indifferent, with me holding it lightly in my cupped hand while I arranged a towel into a cozy nest under the dodger by the chartplotter. For the remainder of my shift, the two of us sat quietly together in the cockpit, nodding our tired heads in sympathy with the swell, both a little exhausted from our travels — although, no doubt, his migration is certainly more impressive than ours.

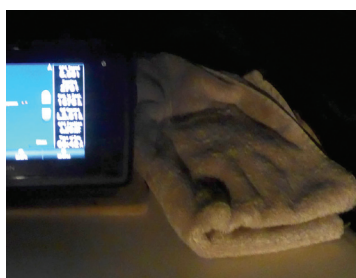
A little before sunrise I went to check on Sock, for that was his name, but somehow, just as his arrival and without a fuss, he had flown off, carried away by the wind. ■

Neville and Catherine Hockley voyage aboard their Cabo Rico 38, Dream Time. To read more about their world voyage, visit www.zeroXTE.com.



Above, Dream Time, crossing the Atlantic.

Right, the black smudge on the towel, photographed by the light of the chartplotter, is the “sock” in question.



Neville Hockley

early hours of the morning during my five-hour sunrise shift. My wife, Catherine, was already busy down below after her party shift — the 2000 to 0300 watch — burrowing into a pile of cushions and pillows strategically placed to give her the most