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Bibliography on Nitrogen 15

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Bibliography on Nitrogen 15

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Preface

This literature survey, concerning the nitrogen isotope N^{15} , was made as an aid to a study to extend the optical spectroscopic method of isotope analysis to the measurement of N^{15}/N^{14} ratios. It is not intended to be a complete bibliography of this extensive field. For convenience, the bibliography is grouped according to subjects. Therefore, some references appear in more than one group.

A. V. ASTIN, *Director.*

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Bibliography on Nitrogen 15*

M. W. Chapman and H. P. Broida

References to the literature on nitrogen 15 that has appeared from 1919 to 1952, inclusive, with a few later references, are given. The citations relate to the abundance of N^{15} naturally occurring, its physical properties, methods of concentrating it, methods of N^{15}/N^{14} measurement, and the synthesis and uses of N^{15} compounds.

1. Natural Abundance of N^{15}

Since 1929, when N^{15} was discovered by Naude in the band spectra of NO [1(19)],¹ there have been many measurements of the abundance ratio (N^{14}/N^{15}) of nitrogen isotopes. A summary of values measured for the abundance ratio and of listings in tables of isotopes from 1930 through 1952 is given in table 1. The table was compiled from the bibliography, section 4.1. It shows the date when each value was reported and the reference.

In 1937 the Committee on Atoms of the International Union of Chemistry made its first report [1(2)]. N^{15} was listed as having an abundance of 0.38 percent. Each following report of this com-

mittee gave the same value through the sixth report in 1942 [1(3)], which listed only changes to be made in the previous report. This value was still quoted as the standard when Schaffer [1(29)] issued A New Table of Isotopes in 1949. However, the table by Hollander, et al. [1(11)], based on values recorded in the literature or by private communication through approximately December 1952, gives a new value of 0.365 percent as measured by Nier [1(21)] in 1950. This value is the one presently used by the authors.

Apparently plants and animals do not fractionate nitrogen isotopes during anabolism and catabolism as is the case with hydrogen in plants.^{2,3} This is the conclusion that Schoenheimer and

TABLE 1. N^{15} relative abundance

Year	Source	Reference	Abundance		Comments
			(N^{14}/N^{15})	$\left(\frac{N^{15}}{N^{15}+N^{14}}\right) \times 100$	
1930	Naude-----	1(20)	700	0.143	Estimate.
1930	Herzberg-----	1(10)	800	.125	Estimate.
1931	Birge and Menzel----	1(8)	320	.312	Calculation using Mecke's values for oxygen isotopes and bringing the writer's figure for N^{14} mass into agreement with the chemical atomic weight.
1931	Urey and Murphy----	1(38)	347	.288	From ratio of $N^{15}O^{16}$ to $N^{14}O^{18}$ from measurement of absorption bands and assuming Mecke's value of 630 for ratio of O^{16} to O^{18} .
1932	Murphy and Urey----	1(18)	346	.289	Same as above, but more measurements.
1934	Vaughan, Williams, and Tate.	1(39)	265	.377	Direct measurement of ratio, using mass spectrometer.
1935	Wahl, Huffman, and Hipple.	1(40)	265	.38	Confirmed measurement of Vaughan, etc.
1937	Aston, et al.-----	1(2)	-----	.38	International table of stable isotopes.
1939	Schoenheimer and Rittenberg.	1(30)	-----	.368	Referred to as the natural abundance.
1949	Schaffer-----	1(29)	-----	.38	Table of isotopes.
1950	White and Yagoda----	1(42)	-----	.371	Refers to Vaughan 0.376 as natural abundance but measured 0.371 for air.
1950	Nier-----	1(21)	273	.366	Ratio measurement from room air directly, using mass spectrometer.
1950	Nier-----	1(21)	274.5	.364	Recomputation of data of Urey and Murphy on assumption $O^{16}/O^{18}=500$.
1952	Palmer-----	1(24)	264	.379	Not a precision measurement.
1953	Hollander-----	1(11)	-----	.365	Quotes value by Nier in 1950.

*The work covered by this Circular was sponsored by the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission.

¹ Figures in brackets are the subsection and literature reference numbers in the bibliography, section 4, beginning on page 3.

² T. Titani and M. Harada, The concentration of heavy isotopes in carbohydrates, *Bul. Chem. Soc. Japan* **10**, 205 (1935).

³ E. W. Washburn and E. R. Smith, The isotopic fractionation of water by physiological processes, *Science* **79**, 188 (1934).

Rittenberg reached in 1939, based on the evidence of equal distribution of nitrogen isotopes in air and organic compounds [1(30)]. The only exception noted was an increase in N^{15} concentration by more than 50 percent as found by White and Yagoda in 1950 for very old radioactive minerals [1(42)]. They later suggested the explanation [1(45)] that nitrogen may have been a component of the minerals at the time of formation, and that the ratio of N^{15} to N^{14} increased as a result of more rapid diffusion of the lighter isotope. The possibility of such an increase also being true for chemically bound nitrogen in crude oil and coal deposits was investigated in 1951 by Smith and Hudson [1(32)], but no increase over atmospheric nitrogen isotopic content was found.

Isotopic separation takes place in the atmosphere due to settling in the earth's gravitational field, and has been detected above 40 kilometers. This possibility was pointed out by Lindemann and Aston [1(16)] in 1919, and was tested in 1948 and 1950 by McQueen [1(17)] when air samples were collected from the altitude range 40 to 60 kilometers and were analyzed for percent separation using a 60° Nier-type mass spectrometer. The method of analysis compared the ratio of the intensities of the $N^{14}N^{14}$ molecular ion beam (mass No. 28) to that of the $N^{14}N^{15}$ molecular ion beam (mass No. 29) in the sample to that in a standard sample collected at ground level.

2. Methods of Concentrating N^{15}

The usual methods of separating and concentrating isotopes [2(4)] are chemical exchange, gaseous diffusion and mass diffusion, which are more frequently used for large scale production, and gas centrifuge and thermal diffusion, which are more frequently used for small scale production. Among other methods that have been used for separation of nitrogen isotopes are the electric discharge and electrolysis. Two reports giving general descriptions and comparisons of different methods of separating and concentrating isotopes were published in 1947 by Benedict [2(4)] and in 1948 by Vick [2(51)].

The method of obtaining the highest concentration of N^{15} noted in the literature is that of Clusius, who inserted an electric discharge in the gas stream of a thermal diffusion column, thereby dissociating the molecules into atomic nitrogen. In 1947 he and Becker used this method to isolate $N^{14}N^{15}$ to 98.9 percent [2(9)] and in 1950 he used it to produce 99.8 percent pure $N^{15}N^{15}$ [2(7)].

3. Methods of Measurement

Methods of measurement of N^{15} include the mass spectrometer, gas density, crystal suspension, microwave spectroscopy, and optical spectroscopy.

The bibliography listed in section 4.3 includes some articles that give little information about the method of measurement but do state the accuracy obtained or the size of sample required.

No evaluation was made of the different methods of measurement on basis of precision, reproducibility, or accuracy obtained because of the numerous difficulties involved. Seldom are these values given in units that allow comparison with another method of measurement. Also the description of how the data were analyzed to obtain the value or an actual tabulation of the data is seldom complete enough for recalculation. Average deviation, for instance, has no absolute significance as does standard deviation of the mean or coefficient of variation.⁴ In general, however, the accuracy of an isotope measurement depends on the isotope concentration of the sample being analyzed and the precision of the instrument. Nier in 1948 [3(46)] points out that absolute ratios are not as important in tracer work as are changes in the ratio as compared to standards. Thus some sources of error are automatically eliminated and a higher degree of accuracy is obtainable.

The mass spectrometer is the instrument most widely used for analyzing N^{15}/N^{14} ratios. It requires that the sample be in gaseous form, usually N_2 . This is not the form in which the isotope is introduced into most experiments, nor the form in which it is usually reclaimed. The chemical procedure for changing the sample to gaseous form was outlined by Sprinson and Rittenberg [3(40)] in 1949.

Winter [3(47)] published in 1948 a description of the operation and history of the mass spectrometer. He states that for an abundance ratio of 1 percent or greater, an accuracy of 1 percent can be obtained with practice and, using extreme care and expert personnel, an accuracy of 0.3 percent can be obtained. The time of measurement is about 45 min per sample, which could be reduced somewhat by using an automatic recorder. Brown in 1951 [3(4)], reporting on his work with adenine, states that the size of N_2 sample preferred was about a milligram. Rittenberg [3(30)], 1942, found that the mass spectrometer he used could detect 1 part in 10,000 of 50 atom percent N^{15} diluted with normal urea, and it was felt that results with the mass spectrometer were not affected by the purity of the sample. Later it was realized, however, that CO and NO present either in the sample or in the decomposition products of the ion beam can cause errors difficult to detect [3(14)].

Roberts [3(33)] published in 1948 a report on the gas density, liquid density, and thermal conductivity methods of isotope analysis. He points out that the mass spectrometer is expensive and requires a high degree of operational skill and that the alternate methods of analysis that he describes, although they may be incapable of the accuracy of the mass spectrometer and may demand exceptional care in the chemical purification of samples, are nevertheless relatively cheap to initiate and involve techniques well within the

⁴ W. J. Youden, *Statistical methods for chemists* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, N. Y., 1951).

range of the chemist. The measurement of isotope ratios by atomic weights is time-consuming, requires large samples, and is not sensitive to small variations in concentration.

Research on the development of the microwave spectrograph for analysis of nitrogen 15 in ammonia was reported in 1950 by Southern, et al. [3(39)]. N^{15} could be determined to approximately 3 percent of its concentration in the range 0.38 percent to 4.5 percent. The minimum sample size was 0.00015 mole of gas, which was mostly recoverable. A standard curve was used for calibration. Each total analysis required 2.5 hr, including 20 to 30 minutes for the analysis itself and 2 hr between samples.

The optical spectroscopic method of N^{15} analysis is the one in which this laboratory is primarily interested. Following is a brief résumé of the work done on it as noted in the literature.

In the discovery of N^{15} and measurement of its abundance ratio, Naude [3(23,24)] and Urey and Murphy [3(44)] in 1929 and 1931 used the continuous spectrum from a hydrogen lamp, passed the light through NO in a variable pressure tube, and photographed the isotopic separation with a Hilger E1 quartz spectrograph. In 1939 Kruger [3(19)], in order to follow the progress of his work on concentrating N^{15} , excited N bands with an electrodeless discharge and used the isotope separation of band heads as a guide. Only rough accuracy was needed. In 1947 Clusius and Becker [3(7)], also following the progress of isotope concentration, excited N_2 in a hollow cathode tube and observed the (2,0) band of the 2d positive system of N_2 at 2977.5 Å. In 1948 Holmes [3(15)], in measuring atomic nitrogen isotope shifts, obtained high intensity and eliminated most background N_2 bands by exciting a mixture of N_2 in He with an electrodeless discharge of about 30 mc. In order to get the lines sharp enough to resolve the isotope structure, the cross section of the tube was made a thin rectangle and the discharge was immersed in liquid nitrogen. The lines were then observed with a Hilger E478 spectrograph in series with a Fabry-Perot interferometer. In 1950 Hoch and Weissner [3(14)] excited N_2 gas in an electrodeless discharge tube of pyrex at 3 to 5 mm pressure. They were developing a method insensitive to most impurities, particularly those undesirable for the mass spectrometer, as well as one that works with a much smaller sample. They observed the (1,0 and 0,1) violet emission bands of the 2d positive system of nitrogen with a Hilger spectrograph. From the plates obtained, intensities were measured with a Moll microphotometer and the relative accuracy obtained was 2 to 3 percent. In 1952 Dieke [3(8)] obtained a patent for a method in which the nitrogen is incorporated into cesium uranyl nitrate to enhance the spectral line separation and a fluorescence spectrum is produced with an arc light. This is observed with a light-sensitive tube to obtain an electric current as indication of the relative amount of N^{15} present.

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