$O_2(^5\Pi_g)$, ION-PAIR STATES, AND OXYGEN ATOM RECOMBINATION

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Collisions of oxygen or nitrogen molecules with laser-excitated high vibrational levels of $O_2(A^3\Sigma_u^+)$ produce a longer lived excited state, whose resonant multiphoton ionization (REMPI) spectrum cannot be assigned to any known singlet or triplet system [1]. We attribute the lower state of this new transition to the predicted [2,3] but previously unobserved $^5\Pi_g$ valence state of O_2. The regular sequence of vibrational bands observed suggests that the upper state is an ion-pair state of O_2, dissociating to $O^+ + O^-$. Two vibrational levels have been observed in the lower state and ten in the upper state, the latter in the range 97,000 to 100,000 cm^{-1}.

Ab initio calculations [2,3] indicate that, although quite weakly bound, at large internuclear distances the $^5\Pi_g$ valence state should be the lowest of the states dissociating to ground state atoms. Because of its high degeneracy it could be a key intermediate state in O + O recombination [4,5]. We are developing a more detailed and quantitative theoretical model of O + O + M collisions. In addition to the experimental spectroscopy and kinetics results, we will also present preliminary work on spin-orbit resolved long-range potential curves for O_2 and implications for oxygen atom recombination and the role of $O_2(^5\Pi_g)$ in predicting atmospheric nightglow emissions [6].

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Acknowledgments:

This work is supported by the NASA Sun-Earth Connection and Planetary Atmospheres Programs.