

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

13 February 2002

Jerry McWilliams
3508 Allegheny Road
Erie, PA 16508

Dear Jerry,

Four of your submissions that did not fare well with the committee. I'll try to summarize the results carefully:

King Eider, Presque Isle, 18 December 1999: The vote was two favoring acceptance (Couchman, Ickes) and five not favoring (Armistead, Hess, Reid, Sharp, Rodewald).

Armistead spoke for us all in emphasizing a healthy respect for your experience, but those who voted against acceptance felt that female Common Eider was not ruled out conclusively -- partly as a result of the bird's distance away.

Various members listed characters they considered necessary for diagnostic identification, especially details of the bill morphology. Some also expressed the view that features such as entirely reddish-brown plumage, neck thickness, and rounded head were not sufficient, even combined, to be diagnostic.

Speaking only for myself, I thought the white underwing coverts were the sole character likely indicating King, but another member considered the extent of pale feathering on the underwing to be "variable and hard to determine."

A majority of the committee was willing to go no further than "eider sp."

Pomarine Jaeger, Presque Isle, 7 December 1997: This went two rounds, as you may recall. The final vote was yours favoring acceptance, five not in favor, and one abstaining.

The dissenters expressed a variety of reasons for declining to accept the Pomarine ID as conclusive. Hess and Rodewald commented that the description of the head shape seemed to indicate Parasitic rather than Pomarine. Armistead and Couchman felt that a skua species was not ruled out. Reid felt that the description did not include enough information for him to evaluate. Abstaining, Ickes deferred to the others' views.

Jerry, I just read your description again and though some aspects do indicate a Pom to me, I still don't think it is entirely consistent with Pomarine. Your description of the forehead and crown shape didn't seem correct to me, but your second-round comments were so firm that I began to have doubts. After I looked again at the Olsen & Larsson *Skuas and Jaegers*, my conclusion was that neither one of us should have set down a diagnostic difference in the forehead/head shape between Pomarine and Parasitic. In at least a couple of dozen photos, the variation is such that each of our views of Pom and Parasitic head shape is randomly shown both species. Maybe the standard head shapes we've both been talking about aren't of value to support either ID.

Armistead commented: "Certainly the most likely candidate seems to be a Pomarine Jaeger, and observer experience is compelling, but I too would like to have had some attempt at ruling out (the albeit much more unlikely) skua sp. I've seen over-anxious observers call young, dark Poms Skuas and I imagine it could happen the other way around as well."

At any rate, most members had considerable uncertainty about accepting the identification as conclusive.

Parasitic Jaeger, Presque Isle, 28 October 1999: This also went two rounds, with a final vote of three favoring acceptance (Armistead, Rodewald, Sharp) and four not in favor (Couchman, Hess, Ickes, Reid).

Couchman, Hess and Reid believed that despite the white wing flashes Long-tailed could not be eliminated conclusively through 35X at several hundred yards. Ickes felt that he lacked enough information for a judgment.

It may be carrying conservatism too far, but I'm beginning to wonder whether any jaeger except a typical adult with fully grown retrices can be accepted without a photograph.

Thayer's Gull, Presque Isle, 23 January 1998: On second round, the vote was four in favor (Couchman, Ickes, McWilliams, Rodewald) and three not in favor (Armistead, Hess, Reid). As for the dissenters:

Armistead placed it in IV-B, commenting: "I find the description insufficient for a bird that is as variable as it is. The mantle should be darker than typical *smithsonianus* and the primary pattern described overlaps with the pale extreme of Herring Gull."

I changed my first-round acceptance and placed it in IV-A for two reasons that seemed to me did not separate it from Herring with certainty: 1. the gray mantle and forewings "equal in tone" to Herring. Under nearly all lighting conditions except extremely bright sun, the gray of Thayer's has appeared slightly darker to me. 2. ventrally, the "large white mirror showing through near the tips of the outer two most primaries." I cannot recall ever seeing exactly this effect in a Thayer's-type, nor could I find it in checking a number of reference photos.

Reid also placed it in IV-A, commenting: "Probably correct, but I have trouble accepting a very tricky bird to identify when it is at least 1/4 mile away."

This case is interesting and somewhat unusual, in which Herring rather than Iceland kept two of us a little uncertain. Considering your experience with this species and the respect we have for your knowledge in general, George and I especially emphasized that we don't feel dogmatic about our opinions.

Best regards,



P.S. I'm holding the Band-rumped Storm-Petrel record (which has not been accepted) for a third round. I'll send you a separate letter on this.

Record Nos. 145-02-1999 (King Eider), 332-01-1997 (Pomarine Jaeger), 333-01-1999 (Parasitic Jaeger), 348-01-1998 (Thayer's Gull)

332-01-1997

POMARINE JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus POMARINUS

Location: Presque Isle State Park, Erie County, Pa

Date: Decemeber 7, 1997

Time: 10:30 to 11:00 AM

Weather: Cloudy (stratus), wind northerly to 14 mph. Visibility good.

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: Zeiss 10 X 40 Binocular and Kowa TSN 4 Spotting Scope at 30X

Viewing distance: as close as 100 yards and as far away as 1/2 mile

Details of sighting & description: I was driving along the channel approaching the end of the road near the lighthouse when I saw about 100 Bonaparte's Gulls suddenly take off. I stopped the car and looked through them for Little Gulls, kittiwakes or something different as they flew past, but saw nothing but Bonaparte's. I continued driving towards the lighthouse when I suddenly got a glimpse of a dark bird drop below the wall of the channel. I pulled off and parked and as soon as I got out of the car, I peered over the edge of the channel wall and saw a very dark jaeger sitting on the water. The following characteristics identify this bird as an immature dark morph Pomarine Jaeger. The bird looked large and heavy and was completely dark gray-brown and somber looking with no outstanding bright markings. There was no apparent barring anywhere on the bird. The head seemed proportionately small for the size of the body: in Parasitic Jaeger (*S. parasiticus*), the head seems proportionately large for the size of the body. The bill seemed rather long and thick and was pale to medium bluish gray except the tip which was black contrasting sharply with the rest of the bill. The tip or the nail was heavy and strongly hooked with the hook extending down below the lower mandible. The jaeger had a gradual sloping forehead and a rather high crown, not a flat crown with a steep forehead which is more typical of Parasitic Jaeger. The entire head and neck were an even dark gray-brown. There was no spotting or streaking on the face head or nape, it was very plain and unmarked. I could not see any pale edges to any of the wing coverts or tertials. The folded primaries were dark brown and were not especially long, extending only slightly past the tip of the tail. There was no scalloping on the tips of the primaries which is typical in Parasitic Jaeger. The bird was on the water for only a minute or two before it took off. When the bird flew, the neck seemed to be drawn straight back into the chest which seemed to accentuate the bulk of the chest. The wing beats were slow, very much like a Herring Gull or Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). The bases of the wings were broader


332-01-1997

than near the bend of the wing. The underside of the outer half of the wing showed two distinct white patches. The largest white area covered about the bottom half of all of the primaries. A smaller white crescent patch was below the bases of the primaries formed by the white bases of the otherwise dark primary coverts. The remainder of the underwings were dark gray-brown. The bases of the upper primaries showed a white patch, but the bird was too far away to count the number of white primary shafts. The tail was short, wedge-shaped and broad and was entirely dark grayish-brown. The central rectrices were broad, rounded-off at the tips, and extended only slightly past the rest of the tail.

I was able to get three quick photos of the bird as it flew out of the channel and towards the lake. However, I don't expect they will be good enough to identify. The Pomarine Jaeger continued to fly away before it disappeared in a flock of gulls. I went back to the car and grabbed my scope and when I returned about five minutes later I could not locate the bird again. When scanning the lake for last time after 15 or 20 minutes of searching, I spotted it pursuing a small flock of Bonaparte's Gulls. By this time it was about 1/2 mile away, but I was still able to see the large robust size, slow but powerful wingbeats, overall blackish plumage with contrasting white based primary patches. Finally it flew around the north end of Gull Point and landed on the water where I lost sight of it for the last time.

I have seen only two other Pomarine Jaegers in Pennsylvania which were juveniles. I have seen Pomarine Jaeger in sub-adult and adult plumages off the coast of North Carolina. This is only the fifth record of this species in Erie County.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

Date of Sighting: 7 December 1997 to 7 December 1997

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County: ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman					X			
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess				X				
R. Ickes			X					
J. McWilliams			X					
B. Reid			X					X
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			4	1	1			2
DECISION								

Comments: 8/2/97 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 9/28/97

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round Two

Species: Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

Date of Sighting: 7 December 1997 to 7 December 1997

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County: ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

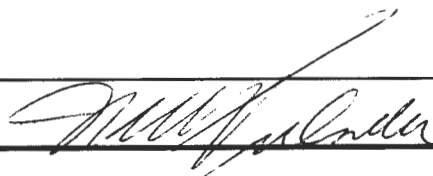
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman				X				
G. Armistead				X				
P. Hess				X				
R. Ickes								X
J. McWilliams			X					
B. Reid					X			
P. Rodewald				X				
TOTALS			1	4	1			1
DECISION				X				

Comments: 1/6/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 10/21/01