

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 sypical *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)

333-01-1999

PARASITIC JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus

Location: Presque Isle State Park, Erie County, Pa

Date: October 28, 1999

Time: 9:00 to 9:05 AM

Weather: Clear with winds southerly to about 10 mph

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: Kowa TSN 4 Spotting Scope at 35 X

Viewing distance: several hundred yards

Details of sighting & description: I had been counting waterbirds passing Sunset Point when at 9:00 I spotted a very blackish falcon-like bird with white wing flashes. I immediately identified it as a jaeger as I watched it racing towards a Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*). When it caught up to the gull it immediately started to chase it and was within a foot or two of the Bonaparte's Gull for the next couple of minutes before breaking off the pursuit and landing on the water. A minute or two later another Bonaparte's Gull flew passed and the jaeger took off the water and began chasing it. During the course of its aerial maneuvers I was able to identify the jaeger as an immature Parasitic by the following characteristics: It was not a heavy bird and it was about a third larger than the Bonaparte's, perhaps slightly smaller than a Peregrine Falcon. Pomarine Jaegers are much larger with broader wings and their flight behavior is less falcon-like with fewer abrupt twists and turns. When it glided it would hold its pointed wings below the horizontal and angled back. The entire upper back, wings (except for the white patches at the bases of the primaries) and tail were dark brown. A distinctive white patch was present at the bases of the outer primaries, especially noticeable on the underside. The entire underside looked pale brown (darkest on the upper breast) with heavy barring on the belly, breast, underwing and tail coverts. The tail was wedged shaped, but the bird was too far away to see any tail projections.

I have seen many jaegers at Presque Isle State Park and they always strike me as powerful falcon-like birds that, except in bright sunshine, look very black not brown. Distant basic I plumaged Herring Gulls can look dark, but they never look black and their flight is more labored and leisurely. The Herring Gulls flight is less powerful than jaegers even when they are pursuing other gulls. Even when a jaeger is flying into 40 mph winds their speed and agility is unmatched by any gull.

I saw the same bird or perhaps another the following morning at the same time. The plumage looked very similar to the one I saw yesterday. However it was much closer this time, as close as 300 yards. It was close enough I could see the pointed central rectrices when it spread its tail. I could also see a buffy nape which is typical of immature Parasitic Jaegers.



Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Parasitic Jaeger (Stercorarius parasiticus)

Date of Sighting: 28 October 1999 to 28 October 1999

Location: ERIE

County: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

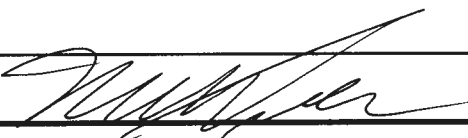
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess				X				
R. Ickes			X					
B. Reid			X					
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS			4	3				
DECISION								

Comments: 4/3 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 2/26/00

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round Two

Species: Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

Date of Sighting: 28 October 1999 to 28 October 1999

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County: ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

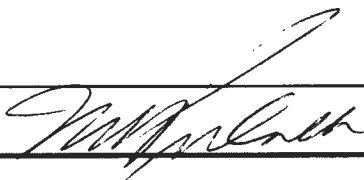
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess				X				
R. Ickes				X				
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			3	4				
DECISION				X				

Comments: 3/4

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 11/4/01