

333-01-2005

Parasitic Jaeger

Stercorarius parasiticus

Location: Presque Isle State Park, Erie County, Pa.

Date: July 17, 2005

Time: 9:15 to 10:45 AM

Weather: mostly cloudy, wind southerly

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: Zeiss 10 X 40 binocular.

Viewing distance: as close as 25 feet.

Viewing conditions: good

Details of sighting and description: I had walked to Gull Point to conduct the International Shorebird Survey, so I wasn't expecting anything like a jaeger in the middle of the summer. Perhaps this bird was carried here by Hurricane Dennis. However, this storm was quickly reduced to a tropical storm as soon as it made landfall in the Florida panhandle. It drifted north and stayed over Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana for several days before passing over Pennsylvania this weekend. As I approached the tip of the point I noticed that the gulls were flying around and were dispersing in all directions. It wasn't long before I spotted a dark falcon-like bird chasing a Herring Gull. I recognized it as a jaeger immediately, though I was still very surprised. It was in a plumage I had never seen before. According to Olsen and Larsson's, Skuas and Jaegers, the plumage of this jaeger was closest to a second summer bird. Jaegers between the ages of hatching year and adult can be very challenging. Birds of this age group are not often encountered in inland North America.

I knew that using plumage alone was not going to be very useful, so I paid particular attention to its size, shape, and behavior in order to identify it to species. It gave me plenty of opportunities to study it in flight as it would often pass by me within 25 feet. I also took the opportunity to take many photographs for later study. It was frequently seen chasing Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, especially the former. It was also seen pursuing Sanderlings and even a couple of American Avocets that were eventually driven away. Compared to Herring Gull in size it was noticeably smaller and compared to Ring-billed Gull it was slightly smaller. The flight of the jaeger was fast and erratic, often switching back to chase gulls or shorebirds making it difficult to take photos. Except for the rump and uppertail coverts, the entire upperside of the jaeger was dark brownish-gray and upon closer inspection there appeared to be some scapulars that were pale edged. The rump and uppertail coverts were pale with some dark barring. The outer primary shafts were white. It was difficult to get an accurate count of how many primary shafts were actually white, since depending upon the angle of the bird or position of the primaries, anywhere from three to five shafts appeared to be white. Sometimes at certain angles a small white patch could be seen at the base of the upper primaries (the difference in the amount of white in the primary shafts is evident in the photographs). The underside of the wings appeared white or creamy and heavily barred. There was an extensive amount of white on the undersides of the primaries (about half the distance up from the base of the primaries). There was also a noticeable amount of white in the under-primary coverts, which is more typical of Pomarine Jaeger, but according to Olsen and Larsson, Parasitic jaegers at this age can be nearly identical to Pomarine Jaeger. The underside was white with a complete heavily smudged or spotted breast band. The head and neck were mainly pale buff with a dusky and not well defined cap that included some dark feathering around the eye. The bill was of moderate length and the basal 2/3 was gray and the outer third or tip was black. The upper flanks had some blotches or remnants of bands closest to the base of the wings. The lower flanks and the undertail coverts were boldly barred. The tail was dark and rounded, but there were no tail projections. Some photos show the central rectrices to appear pointed, but certainly not rounded or blunt tipped. The legs were gray and the feet were black. I was able to determine that this jaeger was a Parasitic because the size, shape, and behavior seemed consistent with Parasitic Jaeger juveniles that I have seen in the past. It was slightly smaller than a Ring-billed gull, so it was too small to

be a Pomarine Jaeger, plus this bird did not have broad-based wings, the body was not particularly heavy, the bill and head was too small, and the central rectrices were not blunt-tipped. Long-tailed Jaeger was considered, but this birds wings did not appear to be narrow enough, the central rectrices were not blunt-tipped and there was far too much white in the primaries. The white flash at the base of the underside of the primaries on a Long-tailed jaeger would not extend half way up the primary, like this bird, and it should not show a white patch on the under-primary coverts. Long-tailed Jeagers have small bills with more black at the tip (at least 50% of the bill length). The flight of this jaeger was not light and buoyant, which is more typical of Long-tailed Jaeger.

The photographs I took should clearly show plumage characteristics and body and wing shape and in some photographs, size comparison with nearby gulls.

























Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Parasitic Jaeger Stercorarius parasiticus

Date of Sighting: 17 July 2005 to 17 July 2005

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County : ERIE

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 2005

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

Written Description: Yes

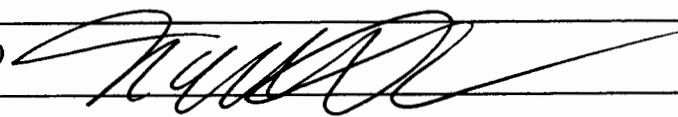
Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV-A | Class IV-B | Class IV-C | Class V | Abstain |
|-----------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|---------|---------|
| R. Wiltrout T. Johnson | X | | | | | | | |
| A. Guarente | X | | | | | | | |
| P. Guris | X | | | | | | | |
| J. Stanley | | | | X | | | | |
| E. Witmer | X | | | | | | | |
| J. Heller | X | | | | | | | |
| M. Sharp | X | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | 6 | | | 1 | | | | |
| DECISION | X | | | | | | | |

Comments: 6/1

Signature (Secretary) 

Date: 9/5/06