

PARASITIC JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Sunset Point, Presque Isle S.P., Erie, Pa.

Date: November 24, 2012

Time: 7:40, 8:39-8:56, & 9:40 AM

Weather: Cloudy, wind NW to 25 mph, temp. 32 F

Viewing distance: about 250 yards to ½ mile from shore

Optics: Swarovski 8 X 42 Binocular and Kowa TSN 884 Prominar spotting scope from 30X to 60X

Details: Since I saw all three birds this morning and I identified all three based on about the same characteristics I will summarize in just one documentation form.

At 7:40 AM while conducting my waterbird count, a dark morph Parasitic Jaeger zoomed past going west. It made a couple of hits at a Great Black-backed Gull and a couple of Ring-billed Gulls as it moved past. The jaeger was about the size of the Ring-billed Gull. The entire body was jet black, though I could see some pale barring on the underwings. The white was very limited and difficult to see at the base of the upper primaries, but was quite noticeable at the base of the under primaries. I saw no second white patch on the underwings. The all dark tail was rounded with very short pointed tail projections (protruding just beyond the rest of the tail), which could only be seen when it banked and spread its tail. The bird behaved much like a Peregrine Falcon, flying fast with quick snappy wing-beats and the overall shape looked sleek with relatively narrow wings bent sharply back at the wrists. The bird held its wings down in an arch on the quick occasion when it glided. The shape, size, and behavior of the second bird at 8:39 AM was like that of the first jaeger, though the plumage was quite different. The second Parasitic Jaeger had a very pale head that stood out against the dark mantle and chest. The rump was distinctly white with just a little dark barring contrasting with the dark tail and mantle. The belly was pale contrasting with the dark breast and undertail coverts. The upper wings were dark with a white patch barely visible at the base of the primaries. The underwings were very pale and heavily barred. The wing linings were so pale that the white at the base of the primaries did not stand out nearly as well as it did on the dark morph bird seen earlier. The tail on this bird also showed pointed tail projections that stuck out only slightly, if at all, beyond the rest of the tail. It flew low over the water often disappearing behind the waves for short periods of time making it a challenge to track. It went back and forth a couple of times before I lost it. After sixteen minutes had passed I saw it or another one flying west. Since the plumage looked so much like the one I watched a few minutes early, I presumed it was the same bird. The third bird appeared at 9:40 AM. The third parasitic Jaeger, matched the same size, profile, and behavior as the first two and the plumage looked very much like the second bird only the head and rump was not nearly as pale and contrasting. I was not able to see the tail projections on this bird, but I feel confident because of the shape, size, and behavior as the first two birds, that it was a Parasitic Jaeger as well.

According to many field guides, as a general rule, Pomarine Jaegers tend to be seen later in the season than Parasitic Jaegers. However, on Lake Erie, both species can be expected well into early winter, especially immatures.