

PARASITIC JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: mouth of Walnut Creek, Fairview Twp., Erie, Pa.

Date: December 5, 2012

Time: 9:30 & 10:00 AM

Weather: Cloudy to mostly cloudy, wind NW to 15 mph, temp. 37 F

Viewing distance: about 1/4 mile from shore

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

Details: Presque Isle S.P. was closed this morning for the annual deer hunt, so I went to the mouth of Walnut Creek at the boat access parking lot and conducted my waterbird count from there. At 9:30 AM I saw two immature intermediate morph Parasitic Jaegers moving in a westerly direction flying very close together low over the water. As they approached I could see that they were both rather slim, including their wings and dark overall showing prominent white flashes at the base of the primaries. The entire upperside of the jaegers were dark, except their pale rumps that were finely barred. There was a trace of white showing at the base of the upper primaries, though this was not always easy to see. Their heads looked small and appeared dark as well as the breast. The underside of the belly, flanks, and underwing linings were warm brown with rufous tones and were finely barred throughout the underparts. No contrast between the underwings and the flanks. The undertail coverts were white and barred. There was a single white patch at the base of the primaries, though I could see that the primary coverts were slightly paler than the wing linings, but not contrasting white like the base of the primaries. The flight was rapid as were the wing beats. The wings were rather narrow and bent back sharply at the wrists. When they were on a glide, they held their wings in a downward arch. They were rather sleek looking, lacking the bulkiness of a Pomarine Jaeger. I had brief looks at their pointed central tail feathers that stuck out just past the rest of the tail. They didn't seem to be interested in pursuing the 100 or so Bonaparte's feeding over the water, though the gulls did scatter when the jaegers passed through the feeding flock. At 10:00 AM another immature intermediate morph Parasitic Jaeger passed my watch in the same flight line as the previous two. This bird was a bit closer though and I was able to obtain some relatively poor photos, though you can see the slight pointed tail projections and the lack of contrast between the wing linings and the flanks as well the warm rufous tones of the underside. The relatively small head and narrow wings are obvious in the photos. All of these field marks are characteristic of Parasitic Jaeger. Just in the last couple of weeks I have seen ten jaegers all of them have been immatures showing short pointed central tail feathers. This follows records of the past, that is Parasitics are far more often seen in this part of Lake Erie in late fall than Pomarine Jaegers.





