

PARASITIC JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

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

Date: October 28, 2013

Time: 9:45 AM

Weather: Variably cloudy, wind NE to 10 mph, temp. 45 F

Viewing distance: about 3/4 mile from shore

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

Details: While conducting the waterbird count from a high hard pan sand dune just east of Sunset Point I spotted two immature light morph jaegers flying west fast and low. They stayed about 25 to 50 feet apart the whole time they were in view. They were both the same size and plumage. They were sleek looking much like a Peregrine Falcon. The wings were not broad at the base as in Pomarine Jaeger. They occasionally would glide on downward arched wings crooked back a bit, but most of the time their wings were in motion. One jaeger pursued a Bonaparte's Gull for a brief moment as it attacked it with much aerobic movement with lots of twists and turns. There was a single white flash at the base of the under primaries with obvious underwing covert barring. The uppertail coverts appeared to have some barring, but it didn't jump out at you. The bellies of both birds were pale with some barring across the chest and flanks. Their entire uppersides were dark with just a small amount of white showing at the base of the upper primaries. Because of the distance of the birds, details like the central tail feather shape and face and head patterns could not be discerned. The ID was based primarily on flight behavior, shape, and size of the birds. Pomarine Jaeger is more robust with broad based wings with a relatively short broad outer arm or hand. Pomarines flight is usually more direct with slower wingbeats. Pomarines don't rapidly twist and turn as they pursue a gull. Immature Long-tailed Jaeger is more slender with long thin wings and a more graceful or tern-like behavior. Their under and uppertail coverts are strongly barred and their bellies are dusky. Long-tailed Jaeger would not be likely this late in the season, since most migrate across the continent in late August and through early September. I am fairly familiar with both Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, since I have observed and photographed both for many years, especially during my waterbird counts that I have been conducting for over 25 years.