

PARASITIC JAEGER

Stercorarius parasiticus

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

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

Date: November 11, 2013

Time: 7:15 to 7:25 AM

Weather: Cloudy, wind SW to 15 mph, temp. 40 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 an immature light morph jaeger flying low and directly towards me across the lake. The rapid wing beats and alternate glides gave it an appearance of a Peregrine Falcon, except that the wings were strongly bowed down when gliding. After a few seconds it quickly banked to the east and pursued a Bonaparte's Gull. It chased it for a few seconds then took off after an adult Ring-billed Gull. It chased it high above the water before dropping back down and flying east. It began picking up speed trying to catch up to another Ring-billed Gull. The gull shot skyward with the jaeger directly behind it. When the gull and jaeger were about 100 feet or so above the water the jaeger broke off from the gull and plunged straight down to the water where it chased another gull in a westerly direction. After a minute or so of chasing gulls around it continued fly east and out of sight. Having direct comparison with a Ring-billed Gull on at least two occasions I could see that it was perhaps slightly smaller than the Ring-bills with body dimensions very similar. Both species appeared rather slim in the body and wings. The jaeger was all dark above with some white showing at the base of the primaries. The underwings were barred and it appeared to have just a single white patch at the base of the primaries. The belly was heavily barred on a background of pale rusty brown. I could not see any tail projections. The wings were not broad as in Pomarine Jaeger. The ID was based primarily on flight behavior, shape, and size of the bird. 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. A Pomarine Jaeger next to a Ring-billed Gull would look noticeably larger and heavier with broader wings. 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 Pamarine 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.