



334-01-2003

Rare Bird Documentation for PORC:

Species: Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Number: 1

Sex, age, plumage: Intermediate juvenile

Date/time of observation:

I found the bird on 31 August 2003, shortly after the noon hour. It was seen regularly until nightfall. The following day, the bird was viewed off and on from approximately 6:45 a.m. until about 10:30 a.m., often at extremely close range.

Location:

Lake Nockamixon fishing pier at Nockamixon State Park, in upper Bucks County, PA.

Observer(s):

Bill Etter

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The Long-tailed Jaeger was subsequently viewed by many observers. Photographs and video footage were obtained.

Habitat: The bird was seen on, over and around Lake Nockamixon, mostly within one mile of the fishing pier. Nockamixon is a man-made 1,450 acre lake in northern Bucks County.

Conditions: Conditions on Saturday, 31 August were spectacular: a warm, bright, late summer day. Conditions on 01 September were less than desirable. A front had moved in overnight, resulting in pre-dawn showers, hazy drizzle in the early a.m., and generally overcast conditions throughout the day. Precipitation ceased late morning through mid-afternoon, but the day remained gloomy.

Distance / Optics:

The bird was tentatively identified as a jaeger species from a distance of about one-half mile using 8x24 binoculars, then a 20x spotting scope. Fortunately, the bird slowly moved toward me over the course of the next thirty to forty minutes, alighting upon the water as close as 200-300 yards. Passes while in flight were even closer.

Description:

While sitting in my car on the fishing pier, I made a scan of the lake with binoculars and noticed a dark gull-like bird about one-half mile to the southwest. At first glance, I presumed it to be a young Herring Gull, but I scoped it anyway. Upon doing so, my first impression was that it didn't sit in the water like a Herring Gull would. My second was

that it sat more like a Lesser Black-backed Gull, but the distinct, nearly uniform grayness of the bird was inconsistent with LBBG at any age. Lastly, the head and bill seemed too small for any expected gull. At this point, I grew quite interested, regretted that I didn't have a reliable field guide at hand, and resolved not to blink. Within moments, the bird left the surface of the water, flying in a sort of loop, and landed right back where it had come from. I'd had a good fix on it when it moved, and noticed, with much excitement, the projecting central tail feathers.

The bird slowly made its way toward me in a series of short flights, revealing ever-increasing detail. As it progressed closer, it became evident that the bird was not so uniformly dark as it had appeared; the head was paler than the back. The bird was not brown like a juvenile Herring Gull (as it had appeared from a distance), but an intricate mix of light and deep grays, and even silver. The crown and nape were pale, as was the barring on the back. The contrasting dark and silver barring beneath the tail was particularly striking as the bird rested upon the water. The tail was about the same length as the primaries. The head was smallish and rounded. The bill was also relatively smallish, and appeared to be a pale silver-blue at the base, and black from the middle to the tip.

In flight, the bird generally moved at a leisurely pace with slow, stiff, bouncy wing beats. The underwing was dark with a bright streak through the dark primaries. Its eyes were very dark. The legs were grey.

The best indication of the bird's size occurred when an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull tried to drive the jaeger from the area. The LBBG was significantly (and, to me, surprisingly) larger, probably by 20-30%.

Identification:

Long-tailed Jaeger, juvenile, Intermediate morph.

From a distance, the bird seemed to generally resemble several juvenile North American gull species, all of which can be eliminated primarily by the shape of the bird's tail, as well as by several other characteristics described above, such as head shape, bill size, grayish barring on the back, vent and belly, and the light streak beneath the black-tipped primaries. All such gulls, as well as skuas, are further eliminated by the diminutive size of the bird as directly compared to Lesser Black-backed Gull. Overall coloration of the bird, as well as size, eliminates Pomarine Jaeger. Overall coloration seems to also eliminate Intermediate juvenile Parasitic Jaeger. Light juvenile Parasitic Jaeger is close in many aspects, but the general hue of this bird, particularly in the barring, was distinctly grey to silver, not brown or buff. Furthermore, the bill was very small, and the topside of the primaries lacked any apparent light streak or coloration. The tail on this bird at rest appeared nearly as long as the wings. Even allowing for extensive variation among individual birds of either species, all characteristics mentioned above point toward Long-tailed rather than Parasitic Jaeger.

Behavior: As I watched the jaeger for that first 30-40 minutes, it moved about at short distances regularly and rather lazily. As mentioned, a Lesser Black-backed Gull gave chase, which resulted in a much quicker, more deliberate flight style. The bird also chased several Cabbage Whites, which were plentiful over the lake that day. One cabbage in particular proved hard to catch, which resulted in a rapid and rather impressive aerial display from the jaeger. The bird spent most of its time floating on the water, often while preening, and afforded excellent views. There were a number of boats on the lake that day, but the jaeger didn't seem particularly cautious of close approach. Several boats passed close by it, and the bird simply bounced up and down in their wake without reaction or attempt to move.

The bird's behavior on the second morning amazed all observers, as it actually landed on the road on at least two occasions, ostensibly in search of earthworms, which it was reported to have eaten.

Vocalizations: None

Supporting evidence: None obtained by me, but video and photographs were obtained by several other parties over two days. The committee should receive sufficient supporting evidence. Pictures have been posted on the internet at <http://www.users.fast.net/~becard/>.

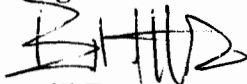
Previous experience: I've had no previous experience with any jaeger species.

Certainty of identification: I am confident in my identification of this bird.

References consulted: I checked The Sibley Guide to Birds as soon as other birders arrived with a copy, confirming the identification. I've since checked several other books, as well as numerous sources on the internet.

Date of report: 07 Sep, 2003.

Signature of observer:



Bill Etter
Perkasie, PA

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Date of Sighting: 31 August 2003 to 1 September 2003

Location: LAKE NOCKAMIXON

County : BUCKS

Observer(s): Bbill Etter, mult obsrvers

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Bill Etter, Elaine Ryan

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
G. Armistead	X							
D. Heathcote								
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
R. Leberman	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	6							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

C/D

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

2/2/05