

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2019-09-04 12:20:41
Observer's Name	Logan Kahle
E-mail	lqk3@cornell.edu
Phone	4156246212
Observer's Address	212 Giles St apt 8 Ithaca NY 14850 United States
Names of additional observers	Tim Lenz, Sarah Toner
Species (Common Name)	Parasitic Jaeger
Species (Scientific Name)	Stercorarius parasiticus
Number of individuals	2
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Pale morph juvenile and dark morph juvenile
Observation Date and Time	09-02-2019 9:40 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S59460500
County	Erie
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Erie
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Gull Point, Presque Isle SP
GPS coordinates of sighting	(42.1718410, -80.0838910) (where we were watching from; the jaegers were obviously much farther Offshore)
Habitat	Open lake
Distance to bird	.25+ miles
Viewing conditions	Clear with overcast. Good viewing conditions lacking heat haze. Plumage visible at far distance.

Optical equipment used

Swarovski 90mm 25-60x Scope, Nikon 60mm 30 fixed scope, 50mm 20-60x Nikon Scope

Description

Bird 1:

Context/notes: This was our first Jaeger of the lakewatch, initially picked out by flight style (see description below), and then followed for 5 minutes as it arce above the horizon heading from NW of us to NE (when we lost it...it appeared to put down on the water). The bird was too far for evaluation of the extent of white in the primary shafts, but structure, shape, size (in comparison to RBGU) and overall coloration were easily ascertainable.

Description:

The bird was a mid-sized (rbgu-sized) seabird proportioned similar to a rbgu but with thinner, longer wings, more slender body, warm chocolate all-brown overall coloration, white on primaries (barely visible due to distance), narrow tail, and arcing flight (see description under "Behavior").

From Gulls, Terns, etc: The bird was quickly identifiable as a Jaeger after viewing due to flight style (see below), narrow wings and tail, all-dark coloration (no gull or tern even remotely expected in this area shows uniformly dark coloration spare Herring Gull, which would be obviously larger with much slower wingbeats as well as lacking the above marks).

For a juvenile Jaeger at this season, the only two likely candidates would be Parasitic and Long-tailed, as Pomarine normally peaks over a month later (especially juvs). Nonetheless, Pomarine was eliminated by flight style (see below, Pomarines do not arch frequently if at all in my experience), as well as lacking the tubular barrel-chested structure that species tends to exhibit. Long-tailed was more similar to this bird. Dark morph juvenile Long-taileds are very uncommon in every demographic I have experience with (mostly California, some on the East coast). This bird harassed a Ring-billed Gull towards the end of the viewing period (just before it landed) at which point we were able to see relative size: about analogous to the Ring-billed Gull in both length and bulk, though notably longer-winged. A long-tailed would be dwarfed by a Ring-billed Gull and, perhaps more importantly would be unlikely to harass a bird as large as a Ring-billed Gull (Long-tailed's primary "prey" base is harassing Arctic Terns, and they mirror that species' southbound migration for that reason). Furthermore, juvenile Long-tailed Jaegers show very "cold" markings overall which is often visible at a good distance (assuming good light). This bird showed a warmer brown coloration typical of Parasitic Jaeger.

Bird 2:

Context/notes: This was our final Jaeger of the Lakewatch, and the closest by far (perhaps 3x closer than the previous Parasitic). This bird was initially picked up closer than half way out to the horizon, flying originally parallel the coast and then veered away (NW). My immediate initial reaction based on size, flight style and overall coloration was that this was a Parasitic Jaeger, not showing the buoyant flight shown by Long-tailed and not large and bulky enough for a Pom. I asked Tim (who was on a better scope than I) if he could see any white, and he eventually was able to see that there were a good number of primary shafts with white, and of course a large white flash below the wing. The bird flew with choppy, direct wingbeats indicative of this species and showed pale belly, vaguely (but not starkly as in subadults) contrasting to the breast but overall warmish medium-light brown colors.

From Gulls, terns, etc: see structural markers as above. The same applies, as does the white wing patches (which were seen better on this bird, enough to see shafts etc).

From other Jaegers: Aside from season, Pomarine was eliminated by structure and size (as compared to Ring-billed Gulls which the bird flew by). Along with being broad-winged and having generally slower, heavier, more rowing wingbeats than Parasitics (more akin to a Peregrine in my mind) Pomarine would also be barrel-chested and display a "tubular" appearance, being more or less evenly thick from the chest to the undertail coverts. This bird showed a tapered appearance towards the rear typical of Parasitic. From Long-tailed by lack of buoyant flight, greater than two white primary shafts on the upperwing (it was unclear how many, but it was likely 4-5), and overall warmish coloration

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Both birds were initially picked out due to behavior, and then viewed field marks which narrowed the ID down to Jaeger and eventually Parasitic.

Bird 1: Dark morph juvenile. This bird was originally picked out because it was arcing above the horizon continuously, akin to a Pterodroma or shearwater in high wind. The bird was in view for 5+ minutes and maintained this flight style over the entire duration of the observation. Small Jaegers (Parasitic and Long-tailed) exhibit this behavior frequently in high winds, but I have never observed Pomarine or Skuas acting like this. Gulls do occasionally arc in high winds, but they would not sustain this flight for the time period we observed this bird (5 minutes) nor are they likely to arc as extremely as this bird (see video).

Bird 2: Light morph juvenile. Initially picked up by straight, direct flight low to water with strong wingbeats (often noted as being "falcon-like" though I believe this description falls slightly short). The bird maintained this trajectory and, after about one-two minutes was too far to make any new details on.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

See Description

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

Weather/context: We set off this day with the hope that the strong NW winds and rain for blow in/down shorebirds, lake birds (sabine's gulls, terns, jaegers, etc) or any other goodies that may have been passing through. At the tip we found some shorebirds but not good lakewatch birds. As we neared the parking lot, we picked up on several flocks of Common Terns and eventually decided to sit out for a lakewatch. This lakewatch lasted almost an hour and a half, during which time we saw three very distinctly different Jaegers (two Parasitics and one unIDed). While the rain never materialized, the weather through the watch was brisk NW winds, presumably ideal for this spot.

Timing: This is slightly early for finding Jaegers, but not as early as the Pennsylvania records seem to indicate (where most records are October-December!). Along Lake Ontario in New York, where all three species of Jaegers are regular) Parasitics often peak in late September to early October, with records of subadults and juveniles as early as mid-late August. While Long-taileds tend to peak earlier, they are still less numerous than Parasitics even early in the season. It seems that other parts of Lake Erie in Ontario and Ohio share the same New York timing with respect to Long-tailed and Parasitics. One local birder noted that "Long-tailed seems more likely this early in the season" which, as stated above, is directly counter to established patterns in New York, Ohio, and Ontario where Jaegers are regular and expected given the right conditions.

Observer experience: All three observers have much experience with jaegers, and have seen all three species. I have been leading on West Coast pelagics for about 10 years, have been on nearly 60 boats, and am intimately familiar with all three Jaeger taxa, having seen hundreds of each (though only a few inland). Tim has seen many Parasitic Jaegers on the Finger Lakes and both other Taxa on Lake Ontario (along with many on both Coasts) and Sarah has seen several Parasitics in Michigan, and the others on oceans.

Video: The video below is not in any way diagnostic to Parasitic Jaeger. This is of the first (dark) bird. However, the flight style should be evident, showing why this bird is likely (but perhaps not diagnostically) a Jaeger from this video.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

Yes (see above)

Supporting evidence (check all that apply)

Video

Upload images, audio, video or drawings

[IMG_9411.mov](#)

Click to edit

PORC-webform00107