

South Polar Skua

Record Number: 96-AB

2 Apr 1995

Classification: NA

Credit Is., Scott Co., IA

*Jim Hodges

P-0495

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Hodges, 1725 E. 11th St., Davenport 52803 [5/26/98]

Herbert J. Hodges, audio tape [transcribed], 8 Apr 1997

PHOTOGRAPH

Jim Hodges, P-0495

NOTES AND LETTERS

Ann Barker, conversation with Peter Harrison, Jun 1995

Thomas H. Kent to Jim Hodges, 11 Sep 1996

Ned Brinkley to Ann Johnson, 12 Mar 1997

Kenn Kaufman to Ann Johnson, 15 Mar 1997

Thomas H. Kent to Ann Barker, 19 Mar 1997

Ann Barker to Tom [Kent], 8 Apr 1997

Pete [Petersen] to Tom [Kent], 11 Apr 1997

Thomas H. Kent to Peter C. Petersen, 16 Apr 1997

Pete Petersen to Tom [Kent], 24 Apr 1997

Peter Pyle to Thomas H. Kent, 22-24 Jun 1997

Thomas H. Kent to Ned Brinkley, 8 Sep 1997

Ned Brinkley to Ann [Johnson], 15 Sep 1997

REFERENCES

Records Committee: IBL 67:83, 68:87

Robbins, M. B., and D. A. Easterla. 1992. Birds of Missouri. Univ. of Missouri Press, Columbia. p 152.

Bull, J. 1974. Birds of New York State. Comstock, Ithica. p 265.

1989. Seasonal Reports. Amer. Birds 43:1333.

VOTE: 3 A-P, 1 A-D, 3 NA

NA, I can't see nor does the documenter describe the extended tail feathers. Nor can I see a difference in the underneath wing color versus the body color that Harrison mentions. The described size "the size of nearby Herring Gulls" is too big for any Skua or Jaeger. The length of this observation is not clear to me. A substantial length of time would make the observation that it avoided other gulls much more meaningful. Who am I to doubt Harrison's assessment of the picture, however since this would be an unprecedented record for Iowa and I don't think it is a Skua or Jaeger I am voting NA.

A-P, Accept as Skua sp. based on photograph and Harrison's comments. The viewing distance and habitat described as "frozen harbor off Miss. River" indicate to me that the bird was in Iowa.

A-D, (Skua species). Not a jaeger. I do wish that we had more information about the sighting.

A-P, Accept as Skua sp. but see no way to identify any further, especially without comments from Mr. Hodges.

A-D or NA, I vote A-D or NA, whichever will result in further

review without immediate acceptance. The circumstances of this record are a bit unusual. The photograph was first sent by Pete Petersen for the appropriate reporting period, but without documentation. Next, I heard that Ann Barker had shown the photo to Harrison. Sometime later (perhaps a few months), the documentation, "comments", and a second copy of the photo were received in an envelope with no return address. The notes from Ann Barker ("as recalled") are undated and were received over one year after the conversation with Harrison. A letter to Hodges went unanswered (was it received?). Although I have no reason to doubt the information that is provided, it would be nice to have it verified and in more detail. Was the documentation (description) written from the photograph? How subjective is Ann Barker's recollection? Why was the original observer hesitant to submit this record? We have one piece of objective evidence (the photo), presumably verified as to location and photographer, and the opinion of a world expert. My initial reaction to the photo was that I did not know what the bird was and would not have thought of skua on my own. The likelihood seemed remote. I wondered whether Harrison was familiar with other types of birds that occur in Iowa and why his purported comments zoomed immediately to skuas and jaegers. I thought about a night heron, but the wing shape and tail are wrong. I have few resources that show skuas. Seabirds by Harrison does not show the wing stripe as being so uniform as in our photo. Other inconsistencies appear to be the pointed appearance of the bill and lack of contrast between the light body and dark underwings. There are three interior North American skua records: Niagara gorge, NY, 3 Dec 1915 (Bull 1974); near Sibley, Jackson Co., MO, 3 Apr 1920, partial specimen considered hypothetical (Robbins and Easterla 1992); and Lake Oche, ND, 13 Jul 1989 (Amer. Birds 43:1333). The New York specimen is lost, but a description was published (Oologist 33:13-14, 1916), and another New York specimen attributed to the Niagara region in the spring of 1886 is lost. The North Dakota bird was photographed (Is there further publication of this record?). What I need to accept this record is a detailed analysis and acceptance by two other authorities on skuas from North America.

NA, The photograph is interesting but I myself do not have the expertise to judge this to be a skua, a jaeger or some other species of pelagic bird. I think we should have comments directly from some experts on this record and see if the observer can get back to us with the information that was requested earlier concerning this record.

A-P (Catharacta Skua sp.), I defer to Harrison (Member of the British Empire!). Incredible record--comments re inland migration interesting.

RE-VOTE (at meeting of 20 Sep 1997 with letters from Pyle and Brinkley): 7 NA

□

96-AB

Skua
Credit Is., Scott Co., IA
P-0495
2 Apr 1995 James Hodges



2 April, 1995 - "size - a bit smaller than
Herring Gull" Credit: Ish. Dan. H.S. Hodges

Great Skua
Credit Is., Scott Co., IA
2 Apr 1995 James Hodges fide
P-0495

392 7905 0-05 25 0
+03-01-03-03 NN -34 1158

REORDER ENVELOPE

FOR REPRINTS ENLARGEMENTS AND OTHER REORDER SERVICE

Great Skua
Credit Is., Scott Co., IA
2 Apr 1995 James Hodges fide
P-0495

INSTRUCTION

Use order form on reverse
Insert this Reorder Envelope in
Regular Service Envelope

Are doesn't know what it was - maybe Great Skua?

FROM NEGATIVES

Select correct frame number. (See diagram explanation on flap.) Indicate quantity desired next to appropriate frame number on Order Form. Enclose *Full Negative Strip*.

PRINTS FROM SLIDES

Indicate quantity desired next to appropriate slide number on Order Form.

COPY PRINTS AND OTHER SERVICES

Describe service desired and quantity in Special Instructions Box.

COMBINATION ORDERS

For combinations of different print sizes from *same negative or slide* add service times for each size together to determine delivery date.

AVOID Service Delays by entering separate orders for each size or service.

Two! This is a very small photo taken by Jim Hodges. I am trying to get them to do a shot.

Hand
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96-AB



This Envelope is Recyclable

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

96-AB

What species? Skua (sp.) How many? 1

Location? Credit Island, Davenport, IA.

Type of Habitat? frozen harbor off Miss. River

When? date(s): 2 April, 1995 time: 9:30 A.M. to —

Who? your name and address: Jim Hodges, 1725 E. 11th St., Davenport, IA. 52803

Others with you: ----

Others before or after you: ----

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Gull-like bird, the size of nearby Herring Gulls.

Wingspread about triple the body length.

Coloration gray-brown overall, mottled.

White bar at base of primaries and outer secondaries.

Tail rounded, body very heavy, bill heavy.

Seen only in flight, fast flyer, avoided by gulls.

Similar species; how eliminated: No Jaeger or Gull has a comparable white streak down the primary bases into the secondaries. Lack of a dorsal view made species id. impossible.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? ----
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Clear day, sun position variable as bird in flight. Distance est. 100', 10x40 binocs.
500mm. tele ph.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Skua never seen.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Seabirds by Harrison.

Harrison shown photo by Ann Barker, see attached.

How long before field notes made? 1 week this form completed? 1 year, awaited Harrison input

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

Comments by Peter Harrison, M.B.E. about photo of Gull-like bird photographed over Credit Island April 2, 1995: (as recalled by Ann Barker)

It is certainly either a South Polar Skua or a Great Skua; not a Jaeger. Plumage (mentioned pattern of white in the wings) suggests the South Polar Skua. From underneath, the slight difference in body and underwing color and the slight projection of the two central tail feathers is more characteristic of South Polar Skua. The South Polar Skua would be migrating past this latitude at about this time of year, but it is much less likely than the Great Skua to take an interior (Mississippi River) route. Possibly it could see the Great Lakes. Great Skuas are far more likely to migrate over land if they can see large bodies of water.

He repeatedly asked whether any observation had been made of the mantle. If Mr. Hodges could give any impression of the mantle color at all, whether it was uniform in color as in the South Polar Skua or more mottled in appearance (Great Skua), this would be diagnostic.

September 11, 1996

Jim Hodges
1725 E. 11th Street
Davenport, IA 52803

Dear Jim,

Thanks for sending the documentation and photo of Skua species. It will be sent out for review to the Records Committee with the next batch of records.

To facilitate the review, it would be helpful if you could provide the following bits of additional information.

Exactly where was the bird seen? Which side of Credit Island? How far up?

Approximately how long was it observed?

Is this the only photo?

It would be helpful if we could borrow the negative or slide in order to make more prints and slides for review and for the permanent file. The original(s) can be returned within a few weeks.

I think it is highly likely that this record will be sent for outside review, and it will probably take some time.

Thanks for sending this most interesting observation.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

GREBES TO CRANES — The first breeding confirmation of Clark's Grebe for North Dakota was obtained when an adult and two young were photographed in Kidder June 26 (KE). American White Pelican nests totalled 1709 at Bowdoin N.W.R., MT (DP), and 1041 at Drywood L., Roberts, SD (DS). The 2 active Great Blue Heron nests found along the Forest R. June 4 (DOL) represented the first definite nesting for the Red River valley of North Dakota; 19 ground nests of this species were at Drywood Lake. Two Little Blue Herons at J. Clark Salyer N.W.R., ND, June 3 (RM) provided the 14th record for the state.

Trumpeter Swans of unknown origin summered at 3 North Dakota locations. Singles were in Grand Forks (DOL) and Burleigh (RH), and up to five were on Chain L. at Lake Alice N.W.R. in Ramsey (GBB). None of the birds was tagged; speculation is that they came from the flocks at LaCreek N.W.R., SD, or Hennepin, MN, but other origins, such as the Yellowstone area, cannot be ruled out. The occurrences raised hopes that this magnificent species may begin breeding in the state once again. An imm. Tundra Swan spent the summer with the Trumpeter in Grand Forks. A Greater White-fronted Goose was unusual at Upper Souris N.W.R. June 20 (DB). Snow Geese, which summer more frequently, were seen at 6 different sites in the Dakotas. A total of 24 Mallard broods was at the Fargo lagoons July 17 (MB). A Lesser Scaup brood near Tappen, ND, July 7 was the earliest ever for the state (DK). The Surf Scoter at the Fargo lagoons July 9 (MB) furnished a most unusual summer observation.

Osprey was once again present at Icelandic S.P. (TH), where they have become regular in summer. Unexpected were summer sightings at Upper Souris (GM) in North Dakota, and in Meade (EM), Clay, and Lincoln (DR) in South Dakota. Ospreys were also seen along the Marias R. in Montana (HM) for the first summer in many years. These areas should be checked for breeding in the future. The 22 Turkey Vultures in Newton Hills S.P., SD, July 8 (GWB) were unusual, as the species is not known to breed in the area. A Rough-legged Hawk at J. Clark Salyer refuge June 2 (RM) furnished the first June record for North Dakota. A Merlin nest with young was found in Harding, SD, June 26 (MM). Sora and Am. Coots were hit particularly hard in the areas with low water levels. Sandhill Cranes were present throughout and presumed nesting at J. Clark Salyer N.W.R. (MZ). Twelve also summered at L. Alice, one was at Tewaikon N.W.R. June 5 (JL), and two were in Kidder, ND, June 23 (GBB). An imm. Whooping Crane that arrived in McLean, ND, June 11 was the first to spend the summer in the Region since the species was extirpated as a breeder.

SHOREBIRDS TO TERNS — The two Black-necked Stilts in Burleigh June 30 provided the 16th record for North Dakota (DL); there was a sighting at Lostwood N.W.R., ND, June 20 of possibly the same two birds seen in May, but no evidence of nesting was found. Migrant shorebirds once again provided some of the more interesting observations of the summer season. The Hudsonian Godwit in McHenry, ND, June 17 (RM) and the White-rumped Sandpiper in Clark, SD, June 30 (BH) furnished the latest spring dates ever for the respective states. A Ruff at the Fargo lagoons July 9-17 (GN) was the 5th for North Dakota, and the 2nd in July at that location. Montana had its 11th Hudsonian Godwit in Carter July 27 (SW) and its 18th Short-billed Dowitcher at Spidel W.P.A. July 15 (LM). Comments from several observers indicated an earlier return of fall migrant shorebirds involving larger than normal numbers. Earliest ever fall dates (including ties) for South Dakota included Greater Yellowlegs in Lake (DR) and Grant June 26, W. Sandpiper July 6 at LaCreek, Semipalmated, Least, and Baird's sandpipers in Todd July 2 (PS), and Pectoral Sandpiper in Brookings July 10. As most of these dates are well past the time when these species have occurred in North Dakota, it is possible that early migrants pushed a few hundred miles farther south because of poor

The bird of the century for the Region was a skua, most probably a South Polar Skua, discovered in the upper reaches of L. Oahe near Linton, ND, July 13. Imagine the surprise of Randy Kreil and Chris Grondahl, Jr., who were censusing Piping Plovers and Least Terns, when they found a large, dark, barrel-chested, gull-like bird with a hooked bill feeding on a still living Ring-billed Gull! The bird allowed very close approach and close-up photographs indicate a dark morph bird of this species aged at more than one year. Some experts feel that the N. Atlantic Great Skua has not been absolutely ruled out, and the photos are still circulating. There have been only two previous inland skua sightings from North America, at Niagara gorge and at Kansas City.

habitat conditions. Earliest ever arrivals in North Dakota were a Solitary Sandpiper June 22 and 20 Semipalmated Sandpipers July 3 at Long Lake N.W.R. (MR), and a Red Knot, very rare in fall, at Grand Forks July 18 (EF).

Last year L. Alice in Ramsey, ND, was reduced to a giant mud flat; this year an area of approximately 2 square miles had 12 to 18 inches of water and a solid growth of hardstem bulrush, attracting between 5000 and 15,000 pairs of nesting Franklin's Gulls. An imm. Sabine's Gull near Lewistown, MT, July 20 (LM), the 10th for the state, was particularly unusual at that date. There are no South Dakota breeding confirmations of Caspian Tern, so a copulating pair at Angostura Res. June 25 (RR) and two along the Missouri R. in Yankton July 17 (DR) were of interest. Two pairs of Least Terns nested successfully in Ft. Peck L., MT, for the first time (CC); they had previously nested in the state only along the river downstream from the dam. Very high releases of water from Garrison Dam by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flooded most Least Tern habitat along the free-flowing portion of the river in North Dakota.

CUCKOOS TO BLUEBIRDS — A Yellow-billed Cuckoo remained on territory June 10 through July 1 in Grand Forks, ND (DOL), which is n. of the normal range. Barn Owls were confirmed nesting in Jackson, SD (KG). An E. Screech-Owl with two fledged young was seen near Billings, MT, June 8 (WR). Burrowing Owls were found in 2 counties in e. South Dakota where they are rare (JDW, RP), and were present in good numbers in the Westby, MT, area (TN). The Common Poorwill nest found in Harding, SD, June 23 (MM) provided the 3rd breeding confirmation for the state. Two calling Whip-poor-wills in Roberts, SD, all summer (AS) were 100 mi n. of the normal breeding range. The 3 Chimney Swift nests found in Brookings, SD, July 8 (DR) provided only the 2nd definite breeding confirmation for the state, but the species is abundant in towns throughout the e. part of South Dakota. A Red-bellied Woodpecker in Tripp, SD, June 20 was farther west than expected. Active Red-naped Sapsucker nests were found in Custer (NW) and Lawrence, SD (BH), in June.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher at Fargo (LF) July 23 was the earliest fall migrant for North Dakota by 13 days. A Say's Phoebe was feeding young in Hutchinson, SD, June 25 (RB), e. of the normal range. A pair of Purple Martins remained at a nest box in Plentywood, MT, through the end of June (TN), but breeding could not be confirmed. The 4th record of Violet-green Swallow for North Dakota was obtained in the N. Unit of Theodore Roosevelt N.P. June 15 (GBB). The first breeding confirmation of the species was obtained at this site July 8 (DOL), when adults were photographed carrying insects into a nesting cavity in a cliff along the Little Missouri R. It was thought that a 2nd pair nested nearby. The Violet-green colony appeared to be reduced to one pair in Ft. Peck, MT, where they are apparently being displaced by N. Rough-winged Swallows (CC). Two active Barn Swallow nests were

enough to show their distinctive characteristic, the *sharp* middle tail feathers a few inches longer than the others." Harris also makes the following intriguing comment, "The older river men state that this bird was not uncommon in the days when the river was filled with refuse from the packing houses."

Fall Migration: Besides the above mentioned record, there is only one additional record with specifics. Widmann (1907) states that J. Kastendieck collected a bird (not located) from a millpond near Billings, Christian Co., in Aug 1905. Although these are the only two definite fall records, the following sightings were believed to pertain to this species: 1, 6 Sept 1971, Squaw Creek (FL, MBR, LG, R. Rowlett-BB 39[1]:6); 1, late Oct, Smithville L. (T. Schallberg-BB 55[1]:11); 1, 3 Nov 1968, Swan L. (JHA et al.-BB 36[4]:12); 1, 3 Nov 1972, Browning L. (FL-BB 40[1]:8).

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Status: Accidental transient.

Documentation: Specimen: none extant (see below).

Habitat: Rivers, lakes, and sewage lagoons.

Records:

Spring Migration: One record: specimen (no longer extant), spring 1910, Bean L., Platte Co. (Holland; Harris 1919b).

Fall Migration: Two records: adult, 12 Sept 1974, Maryville SL (MBR, DAE; Robbins 1975); 2, 3 Oct 1916, Missouri R., Jackson Co. (B. Bush; Harris 1919b).

[Skua sp. (*Catharacta* sp.)]

Status: Hypothetical.

Comments: Harris (BL 22:170) identified and reported that a skua was collected by a fisherman on 3 Apr 1920, along the Missouri R., near Sibley, Jackson Co. "The head, wings and feet" were saved; however, apparently the specimen is no longer extant. In the absence of a specimen and precedent set by the misidentification of other purported interior specimens of skua, which upon reexamination proved to be jaegers (e.g., Johnsgard 1980), we treat the Missouri record as hypothetical. There are only two verified skua reports for the interior of North America, in New York (A.O.U. Check-list 1983) and North Dakota (R. Kreil, C. Grondahl-AB 43:1333).

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

Status: Very rare transient along Mississippi R.; casual elsewhere; accidental summer and winter visitant.

Documentation: Specimen: first-year male, 28 May 1977, Thomas Hill Res. (JR-BB 44[4]:26; MDC B0128).

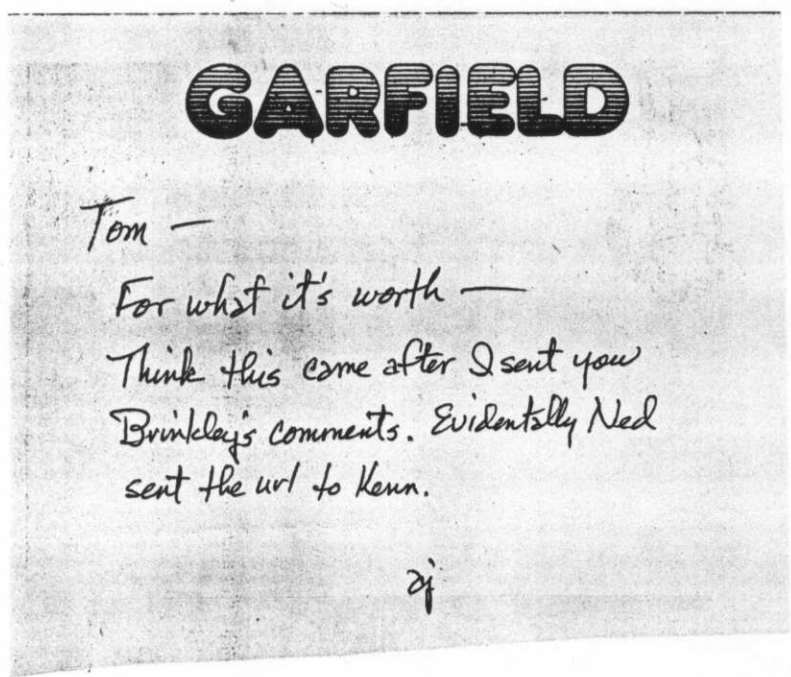
Ann Johnson

From: Kenn Kaufman
Sent: Saturday, March 15, 1997 1:29 AM
To: 71634,221
Subject: Re: Skua

Sender: kennk@ix.netcom.com
Received: from dfw-ix9.ix.netcom.com (dfw-ix9.ix.netcom.com [206.214.98.9]) by arl-img-4.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515) id CAA19003; Sat, 15 Mar 1997 02:28:24 -0500
Received: (from smap@localhost) by dfw-ix9.ix.netcom.com (8.8.4/8.8.4) id BAA22118 for <71634.221@compuserve.com>; Sat, 15 Mar 1997 01:28:22 -0600 (CST)
Date: Sat, 15 Mar 1997 01:28:22 -0600 (CST)
Message-Id: <199703150728.BAA22118@dfw-ix9.ix.netcom.com>
Received: from tuc-az1-15.ix.netcom.com(204.32.173.47) by dfw-ix9.ix.netcom.com via smap (V1.3) id sma022101; Sat Mar 15 01:28:16 1997
From: kennk@ix.netcom.com (Kenn Kaufman)
Subject: Re: Skua
To: Ann Johnson <71634.221@compuserve.com>

——Dear Ann: Thanks for the info on the skua. I looked at the image and could only echo most of Ned Brinkley's comments — it certainly does look like it could be a skua (assuming it's angled slightly away from us, making the wings look slimmer than they really are). But I've seen scads of skuas in the Deep South, and I've never seen that much translucence of the secondaries. Hmmmmm. What are the chances that we'll see a similar bird on the Missouri River this May?

Kenn K.



March 19, 1997

Ann Barker
Lost Creek Woods
25368 250th St.
Princeton, IA 52768

Dear Ann,

I am enclosing a preliminary review of the skua record, including a recent letter from Ned Brinkley to Ann Johnson that the committee has not seen yet.

We will be circulating the record again, and it is likely we will seek a third reviewer. This record is of considerable importance, not only because it would be a first state record, but also as a third Midwest record.

The committee has raised a number of questions relating to the secondhand nature of some of the evidence and expert testimony. We are especially puzzled by the failure of Hodges to respond to my letter.

I would like to include your written reply with the next circulation of this most important record.

I haven't seen you for awhile. I hope your travels have been enjoyable and productive.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

LOST CREEK WOODS

TREE FARM
WILDLIFE SANCTUARYBill and Ann Barker
(319) 289-317525368 250th Street
Princeton, Iowa 52768

April 8, 1997

Hi Tom -

Pete had the negative of Jim Hodges' for the Skua photo, and it is enclosed, along with one of the two prints I had made. I'm keeping the other print in case you want me to send it to Peter Harrison for his direct comments. Let me know.

I have an inkling why Hodges isn't responding - call me if you'd like what I know.

I suppose I should clarify in writing that my recollections of Peter Harrison's comments on the photo were dictated to a tape recorder only about 10 minutes after they were given to me in June 1995.

Hope this helps.

- Ann



QUAD CITY AUDUBON SOCIETY
A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

1108 Jersey Ridge Road • Davenport, Iowa 52803

(319) 323-2520

11 April, 1997

Dear Tom;

Enclosed is a tape from Jim 'Hodges' in reply to your letter of 11 Sep. 1996. It clarifies many points but does not really answer your specific questions.

Where seen - which side of C.F.?

D oc. clearly states frozen harbor - area between the island & Iowa shore - ~~also~~ certainly an Iowa record.

How far up - D oc. states 100' est. - it was apparently directly overhead.

How long obs. - He didn't really "observe" it in the sense we are used to thinking of - he just photographed it - I guess 2 min.

He feels he has more photos but the house is not exactly organized.

I hope all this helps.

I have asked Jim D. twice for the wholesale price & min. order number for birds in Iowa. Perhaps you can advise. I would like to get 5 - can be brought to A. C. if you are going.

Waterfowl migration has been great - in Apr. So Kelly & I had 32,000 waterfowl at Chic, Ill & Lock 15 area.

So long,
Pete

Transcript of audio tape made by Herbert J. Hodges and sent to T. H. Kent by Peter C. Petersen
Transcribed by T. H. Kent, 14 and 16 April 1997.

1997, and this is Herbert J. Hodges, 1725 East 11th Street, Davenport, Iowa 52803, telephone 319-323-7701, and I have decided to depose myself relative to unfinished business concerning the proper identification of a gull-like bird in Scott County, Iowa.

This morning I visited with Pete Petersen concerning this matter, and I thought it well to make a matter of record of some first-hand comments and observations, some first-hand evidence relative to this particular birding observation. I am of sound mind, of an age 68 years, and I have been in the pursuit of birds, particularly of biology, for some 55 years. I am not a life lister. I am not motivated by adding to species lists that I have observed. My interest is more in breeding biology of birds. But this matter needs to move toward some kind of resolution. It's rather interesting that I am not making arguments that this is an observation of a given species, but rather my argument is that this bird was definitely not a Herring Gull or a Ring-billed Gull, of which I have great familiarity. I do not have substantial familiarity with other types and species of this nature.

When I first observed this bird that morning, and it is unfortunate that I am not a lister, or I would have spent more time trying to identify the bird. But when I did observe this particular bird, it stuck me without question that this was something unusual, something unique in my experience, having birded in this area for a lifetime. There were two things that struck me. First of all, the speed at which this bird moved itself compared to what you normally see with the Ring-billed and Herring gulls. And number two, an unusual form of that bird and different kind of plumage. Because I knew it was some different and I am unusually with a camera, and this case was no exception. I was using a Minolta auto-focus camera with a 500 mm lens—a mirror lens. I at once set the controls on rapid shots—multiple shots—and started to shoot the bird—just kept the camera running and the bird in focus automatically. After the film was developed, and I could see in the slides indeed that this was something different, I had photographs of the bird printed so I could examine it perhaps in a better light. This still indicated to me something unusual, and so I took the prints and also the slides to Pete Petersen in Davenport, Iowa, who I have known for a lifetime and who is generally acknowledged in this area as the resident expert on birds worldwide, to determine what species this might be. And his conclusion was the same as mine that it definitely was not Ring-billed or Herring gull, and it was not any of the other gulls of the area that he is familiar with, much more familiarity with them than I would have. And so he started to do some questions of what the bird might possibly be. I left with him the prints and my observations and statements, and we formed a document to put it in that particular format that others might then in pursue in examination of the record.

I did receive from Tom Kent in Iowa City a request for additional first-hand information, and I have not responded to that request primarily because I am becoming more and more a recluse, and I felt the matter was well in hand with Pete, who has experience and knows how to pursue these matters. So I owe an apology, of course, to Mr. Kent for not responding to his letter, but there was a pressure of many things in life and the loss of my wife. I'm just moving into a different type of [...].

But the matter needs to be resolved, and it is for this reason that I decided to make this deposition, which I will give to Pete within the next few days, and I will start the quest among my slides, because I have been reorganizing the slide collection, which now amounts to thousands of slides. And when I find the slides of this particular bird, I will give them to Pete. As I told Pete this morning when we met and talked about this subject, trying to bring it to some form of closure, that these slides are a gift to him, and he can do with them as he wishes and I have no expectation that they are going to be returned to me, but I thought that the experts on whatever this bird might be, skua or otherwise, by working with the first-hand material might give them sufficient detail and form that they can better make a conclusion of some kind and recommendation in terms of a record for the state of Iowa for this bird.

And I am reminded as I pursue this matter what Justice Hickey wrote fifty years ago in the first edition of *Guide to Bird Watching* where he emphasized, and as I read that book as a young man, he emphasized that the first step in good bird identification is to know well the local a-fauna so that when you do see something unusual you know it doesn't fit and you might be on the trail of a find. And this is exactly what happened to me. I knew it was something unusual, and for that reason, rather than take field glasses and try to observe the bird and make the record in writing or on tape, I just decided to just start shooting that bird and hopefully picking up sufficient characteristics so that someone who is more knowledgeable of this matter could use that kind of documentation to make a better and final identification, if possible. So for that reason then, I am simply making a record of first hand.

Let me say as a matter of record, I have no idea what that bird was. I certainly have never seen it in this area, and I am not a wide traveler where I seek out birds throughout the world such as Peter has so I could compare it to anything. And so for that matter I make this record merely to be of service to others who are spending time trying to identify that particular bird.

Thank you very much.

This is now dated April 8th, 1997.

April 16, 1997

Peter C. Petersen
325 McClellan Blvd.
Davenport, IA 52803

Dear Pete,

I transcribed the tape that Jim Hodges made concerning the skua record (enclosed). A few sentences were difficult to make out and sound a little awkward, but I checked it several times and did the best I could to make it as it was recorded.

His first-hand account clearly connects the photograph to a bird that he saw, and I agree with you that the location is clearly in Iowa.

I hope that he finds the slides and that you will allow us to duplicate them. I have the feeling that with multiple views and multiple experts we might be able to firmly substantiate a specific identification.

There are a few matters for the record that are not entirely clear to me, and perhaps you can make them more explicit.

You sent me a print in 1995 and in 1996 I received an identical print, the documentation, and Ann Barker's notes in an envelope without return address. Hodges says that he brought to you prints and slides and that "we" formed a document. If that were true, I would have thought that you would have sent the documentation in 1995 along with the print that you sent. So—when was the documentation put together and who typed it? Ann said that she gave you the notes—so did you give them along with the 2nd print to Hodges to mail to me or did you mail them to me? I suppose this doesn't make any difference, but anyone looking at this record (including the committee) wonders about why it was delayed and whether the photo could be a fluke.

Do you recall seeing the slides and how many there were?

All we really needed from Hodges was verification that he took the photo at the stated location, the date, that the bird was only seen in flight, and access to the slides to make more prints. Otherwise, the photo speaks for itself.

What an interesting story!

Best regards,

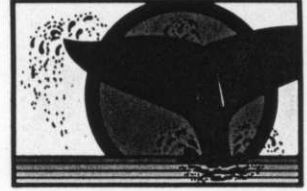
Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246



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96-AB

April 24, 1997

Dear Tom;

In answer to your letter of April 16:
We held the doc. until Ann got us Harrison's
comments - it took about 14 months despite
5-6 requests. Wanted to make the page package
as complete as possible + you had the photo, the
key item, already. I didn't have the doc. in
mid-May, 1995. It was done about late May '95 as
I recall. Hodge came in & filled out what he
could, mostly from the photo. Had it typed &
sent as soon as Ann got us the Harrison note.
I think he put this in the mail, but not postpaid.
The photo is no fluke. There was one more as
I recall, but all he has brought so far are gulls.
The photo printed was clearly the best one.
I will pass along any slide that show the
Shua.

Sincerely,

Pete
Peterson

Thomas H. Kent
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246

22-24 June 1997

Dear Tom,

Thanks for sending the material on the "skua" (record 96-AB) from Iowa. Here are my and others reactions, chronologically:

22 June (1030; before looking at the opinions of others with seabird experience): My first take on the photograph was that it was possibly a *Pterodroma* petrel, perhaps an Atlantic Herald Petrel (which has more white in the wings than the Pacific birds). The wings appeared too long (proportionally) and the bill too slender for a skua. The white under the wing appeared wrong for a skua, based on my field experience only. I have never seen a skua with that pattern. On the other hand, I have never seen a *Pterodroma* petrel with that pattern, either. Both skuas and *Pterodromas* (e.g., Herald, Kermadec, Solander's, etc.) have white patches at the base of the primaries which taper off much more abruptly, before or by the secondaries in most cases. The Iowa bird appears to me to have the pale going through the outer portions of the primaries, almost reaching the tips, and too distal to fit the normal pattern of either skuas or the *Pterodroma* I am familiar with. I wonder if the wing stripe is an aberrancy. The description sounds better for skua than for *Pterodroma*, but based on the the wing-stripe position as shown in the single photo only, I would definitely leave the bird unidentified.

22 June (1200; after reading the opinions of others with seabird experience): I am a bit surprised by the certainty (of at least Peter Harrison and Ned Brinkley) that the bird was a skua. I am tempted to defer to their wider experience with skuas, although, from my own experience, my first opinion remains unchanged. The photographs of skuas in Peter's photo guide shows much more dark between the wing patch and the tips of the primaries. I can't get passed the pale being so close to the tip of the wing.

22 June (1300): I showed the photo to Steve Howell, concealing the fact that it was identified as a skua. Steve's first hit was very similar to mine, that it was possibly a *Pterodroma* (he thought Herald Petrel). When I mentioned that it was identified as a skua he thought it odd, and concurred with me that it looked too slender for a skua and had the wrong wing pattern. Steve wondered in the end, if it might have just been an aberrant 1st-year Herring Gull with an abnormal pale or translucent wing stripe. He concurred with me that it should definitely be left unidentified, based on the photo and description only.

22 June (2000): Sophie Webb, who has recently seen many skuas in Antarctica, felt that it did not look like any skua she has ever seen. The wings were too narrow, especially at the bases, and the wing stripe was wrong.

22 June (2100): Keith Hansen's first reaction (without knowing anything about the bird) also was that it was possibly a *Pterodroma* (he thought Solander's


Petrel). He was also surprised that it was identified as a skua. Keith fully concurred with the opinions of Steve and myself.

24 June: I showed the photos to Rich Stallcup and David DeSante, separately, concealing the identification as skua in each case. Both initially thought it was a *Pterodroma* petrel. The wing shape in the photo certainly suggested this to all of us, and I think the fact that the wing-stripe pattern is wrong for birds we know made us all think it was something more exotic. When informed about the identification, both came to the same conclusion that I did (without my help) that the shape of the bird was wrong (too long-winged, etc.) and that the pale or translucent patch was wrong for a skua. Rich felt that it was a leucistic wing stripe, something he has seen before in seabirds (Northern Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater) and gulls. Neither Stallcup or DeSante had any other ideas about the bird's identity.

So we are pretty unified in our independent conclusions that the bird does not look like a skua to us and is most likely a bird with an anomalous wing stripe. Without the other photos turning up, we recommend that the identification be left uncertain. If these other photos do turn up, we all would be most interested in seeing them.

Hope this helps, and good birding.

Sincerely,


Peter Pyle

96-AB

September 8, 1997

Ned Brinkley
Univ. of Virginia
108 Cocke Hall
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Dear Ned:

Jim Fuller called me yesterday with a request from Ann Johnson that you wanted to see the photos of the possible skua that you previously reviewed from an image on the internet.

We do not have the original photo, but we do have the negative made from it. Attached are color xeroxs of three different prints made from this one negative. The enlarged ones were those that were first submitted and the bottom one I had made after receiving the negative. I also enclose a print of the last one. From the last print, the eagle and telephone pole suggest to me the possibility that this was a double exposure.

Also enclosed are a documentation and transcript from the observer (Hodges) and all of the reviews that we have received so far. We have not heard yet from Brian Patteson.

I have not included the correspondence, which was mainly directed at verification of the sighting. We are convinced that Hodges saw and photographed the bird in Iowa on the date indicated. Hodges has been a reliable local birder for over 50 years (I first met him about 1950), but he does not now interact much with the birding community, which accounts for the strange delays in dealing with this record.

We appreciate your willingness to have another look at this record and will be looking forward to your comments.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246

cc: Ann Johnson

96-AB

9/15/97

Hi Ann --

This is more on the seabird seen on 25 April 1995 on the Mississippi River. Could you acknowledge receipt of it so I know you have it -- and give a copy to Tom Kent (and ask that this be passed on to Peter Pyle and others at PRBO who have been reviewing this record?). Gracias.

The sentiment from California is unclear: it seems to be (1) either a bird species (order not specified) with an aberrant white wing stripe or (2) a gadfly petrel, either a Herald [Atlantic form is mentioned] or a Solander's.

I wonder: were we all working from the same material? It's clear that the CA folks were not looking at the image on the WWW, as they didn't see a butterscotch-bellied bird. The image Tom mailed -- the photograph made from the negative -- shows a much darker brown bird, as well as showing much more fine structural detail than I was able to download from the web. Let me add to/modify my earlier comments, all of which were based on the web-image (the last time I opine on a bird record based on web-images, at least with the lousy monitor I have!):

1) I *know* beyond any doubt that *Pterodroma a. arminjoniana* is not the taxon involved in this record. I have seen several dozen off Hatteras in this decade. The IA bird has (I will refer to its differences from "Trinidad Petrel"):

- a) a heavy LONG bill -- all wrong
- b) flight feathers that have very crisp black outer webs and white inner webs -- wrong for this bird, which would show the MOST white concentrated at the carpal joint and (if any at all) white in the greater and median coverts -- NOT in the secondaries themselves. I have studied these feather tracts very critically on almost 30 birds of this species taken at Trinidad (off Brazil), as well as on live birds, and I think it is safe to say that these plumage features are consistent in this sample. Many of the Smithsonian skins are flat-winged, and I have photos of ALL of them, so I'm happy to provide hard material on this contention.
- c) it has a very robust belly, a very large, prominent head and a very sturdy, round, shortish tail for a Trinidad, which would have much less cephalic mass/projection, a longer and narrower tail (caudal projection more tapered-- the IA bird does not appear to be "fanning" the rectrices at all), and a slimmer body overall.

2) I am almost as certain that *Pterodroma arminjoniana heraldica* is not the bird in question either. In the museum tray, the only I've seen this taxon (probably a separate species?), the birds look even less imposing than the Atlantic birds; certainly the bill is not NEARLY as long as the bird photographed in IA. Also, what is true of underwing patterns in the Atlantic form is even more to the point for the Pacific bird, which has a white protopatagium (or marginal coverts; "least" lesser coverts) on the underside of the wing. This would probably be visible, in addition to the above-mentioned coverts.

3) Providence/Solander's Petrel I don't know in the field at all; most of what I've read has to do with ID of Murphy's Petrel, or in the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand, and Antarctic Birds. The big stumbling block to me here appears to be the pattern of white in the underwings again -- one sees NO dark tips to greater under-primary coverts at all, with contrasting white bases to BOTH primaries AND those coverts (producing a doubled white flash, as in Pomarine Jaeger). Though there is some suggestion that the head is slightly darker than the belly (as in worn *P. solandri*), this is the only thing I can find that supports that ID.

The photographs in the new Enticott and Tipling book (Seabirds of the World: The Complete Reference) of Solander's show the doubled area of white very well (though in a marginal photo) and

also show and comment on another feature: a "distinct wedge-shaped tail" --obviously, this is not the tail of a Wedge-tailed Shearwater, but the tapered shape is clear in the photos and wrong, so it seems to me, for the IA bird. Solander's also seem to have a good deal of white at the base of the bill -- this is lacking in the IA bird and would be visible in the photograph if it were there.

4) I do not think there are any other possibilities among the Pterodroma.

5) Now for the crow-eating part. The pattern of white described for the flight feathers (above) does simply not match any Skua (Catharacta) I have seen in field, museum tray, or book. Skuas have loads of white in the bases of the primaries, VERY little -- usually ZERO --white in the outer third (unlike this bird) of the primaries, and in all cases I know of NO WHITE showing in the bases of the secondaries.

I think the body/structure of the bird is still okay for Catharacta inasmuch as it is stout, both heavy- and long-billed, and has a relatively short, rounded tail. I just can't make the secondaries -- or really, even the pattern of white in the primaries -- work for skua, just as I can't for gadfly petrels.

The structure of wings referred to by Pyle and others is, I believe, an artefact of the single photograph: the wings are thrown as far forward of the body as they will go, making the wings appear narrower than I believe they "are" in relaxed posture. I have hundreds of flight shots of birds (seabirds, raptors) such as this, with wings thrown forward; it really does a number on "typical" jizz for some birds.

6) I do not think this bird is a gull, and I really don't know what seabird is involved here. I do believe it is some sort of vagrant, but without more/superior images, I'm stumped. It may indeed be some sort of aberrant seabird.

Not much use, probably, but that's about as much as I can do with the "actual" photo now in hand. Hope y'all have better luck with the five new state additions in the last several weeks!!

Ned Brinkley