

Jaeger species
24 Nov 1999
Hitchcock N.A., Pottawattamie Co., IA
*Mark Orsag
IBL 70:145

Record Number: 99-31
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Mark Orsag, 944 Forest Ave. Apt 4, Crete, NE 68333 [4/14/00]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: none

Records Committee: IBL 70:145

VOTE: 5 NA, 2 A-D

NA (Pomarine Jaeger), A-D (Jaeger sp.), This is clearly a Jaeger, and probably a Pom. However, the identification was based exclusively upon size (compared to Ring-bills) which may not be that definitive. According to my sources, all jaegers are longer than Ring-bills, while only Pom. has a wingspan equal to Ring-bill--the other two being somewhat shorter. I agree that the Pom. should appear larger and heavier bodied than the accompanying ringbills, and is larger and heavier bodied than other Jaegers, but am not convinced that we have enough here to identify this one to species.

NA, The identification of immature jaegers, especially the separation of Pomarine and Parasitic, is very difficult even for experienced observers. The identification of this bird as a Pomarine was based on the size of the bird as seen in flight with Ring-billed Gulls at a considerable distance from the observer. While Pomarines are slightly larger and heavier-bodied than Parasitics, I'm not comfortable accepting a record based only on size. Other important distinguishing features, which were not visible on this bird, include the shape of the central tail feathers, the amount of white on the wings, and the bill size. A-D, Jaeger species, based on the bird's gull-like shape, dark coloration, and white primary patches.

NA, This brief description is most likely of a jaeger, but the tail, central rectrices, and white wing patches description does not eliminate dark morphs of the other two jaeger species. I would accept Jaeger (sp.).

NA, While I believe Pomarine Jaeger is the likely identity of this bird, there just aren't enough supporting details to nail this one down to species. The size comparison is very suggestive (it is the only criterion used), but wingspan measurements of Pomarine Jaegers overlap the largest Parasitics. All the field marks for jaegers are tough to gauge without previous experience. Another possible mark in the documentation supporting Pomarine Jaeger is the lighter/mottled uppertail coverts, as Parasitics lack the Pom's stronger barring. Without regular experience, photos, other observers' contributions, or more supporting details, I would accept this record as Jaeger species A-D. The observation of thermalling behavior by this bird is unusual for a

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jaeger. However, there aren't many records of jaeger migration over land that aren't in conjunction with large inland bodies of water. A jaeger migrating mid-continent is going to experience conditions alien from those off-shore, where the bulk of non-breeding jaeger observations take place. In the familiar company of gulls, opportunistic use of inland thermals is probably to be expected, just normally unseen by birders.

NA, Details are brief. Where are translucent wing patches just inside tips of wing? Were they at the base of the primaries? On upper or lower surface or both? Does noticeably larger than Ring-billed Gulls mean longer body or longer wings or both? Separating Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers on size is very difficult, This record may be correct, but the distance great and ID very difficult.

A-D, Observer very good with birds in flight (experienced hawk watcher). Relationship in size to R B Gull as well as date strongly indicate this species.

Documentation Form
Unusual Bird Sightings in Iowa

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Species: Pomarine Jaeger (immature)

Location: Hitchcock Nature Area Hawkwatch

Habitat: Missouri River Valley Floodplain

Date:

Time:

Length of observation:

(See following page)

11/24 2:45pm 10 minutes

Name and Address: Mark Orsag

944 Forest Ave. apt 4

Crete, NE 68333

Other Observers: Sue Mattix

Description of bird: Dark, gull-like bird with long very thin, pointed wings and a heavy stovepipe-like body. Wingbeat was very high and seemed somewhat more fluid than that of a gull. Bird was totally dark except for identical white and translucent patches just inside the tips on each wing. Tail was vaguely wedge-shaped; protruding central tail feathers were uncertainly glimpsed. There appeared to be some lightness/mottling on dorsal surface just above the dark tail.

Similar species and how eliminated: Dark immature gulls were eliminated by flight pattern, body-to-wing shape profile (as above), and the well seen identical translucent patches on the wings.

Other jaeger species were eliminated by the bird's size. It thermalled above a wetland area beyond HNA's "Westridge" with a group of Ring-billed Gulls. Size comparison was perfect—revealing a noticeably larger, heavier-bodied bird.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no

If yes, explain: n/a

Viewing conditions (light, distance, optics): Distance was maybe a quarter-mile to half a mile, maybe a bit less at one point. Light was good with good color/contrast showing through both "scopes". Sue's is a Bausch and Lomb, my tripod mounted binoculars are the 30x90s detailed at the end of the Ferruginous Hawk documentation. We each viewed the bird through both "scopes".

Previous experience with this species and similar ones:

Sue had never seen a jaeger before. I had seen one once at Cape May, NJ years before (maybe 1982?). I had not been able to identify that one as to species. Pomarine Jaeger was thus a life bird for both of us.

References and persons consulted before writing description: All the Birds of North America by Jack Sibley (1997)

How long before field notes made?

Immediately/1 month later (sorry!)

This form completed?

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