

Jaeger species

4 Sep 1976

Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie Co., IA

Thomas A. Hoffman

Hoffman 1976

Record Number: 93-EO

Classification: A-D

REFERENCE

Hoffman, T.H. 1976. Parasitic (?) Jaeger at Lake Manawa Iowa. Nebr. Bird Review 44:58-59.

VOTE: 2 A-D Parasitic, 3 A-D Jaeger sp.

A-D, The behavior and general features indicate a jaeger. It was all dark except for some white in primaries, and it was about the size of a Ring-billed Gull. It is hard to judge whether this is a dark phase adult or juvenile. Without a telescope, fine details might be difficult to see. Dark-phased Long-tailed is very rare, as is that species in the Midwest. The size and probability favor Parasitic over Pomarine. I could easily go with A-D for jaeger species. /thk

A-D, At the risk of being inconsistent with my other Jaeger votes, I am voting A-D since the description is generally supportive and the observer gives the impression of having experience with all three species, although this experience may have come from a book. I am much less inclined to consider identification by probability. /ric

A-D Jaeger sp., Father Hoffman is an excellent birder (he has even been to New Zealand!) but there is not enough detail to confirm identification to species. /wrs

A-D for Jaeger sp., NA for Parasitic, The year and amount of description allows us to compare this record to modern day records of jaegers; not enough detail to be conclusive as to species. /cjb

44:58-59, 1976

Nebraska Bird Review

PARASITIC (?) JAEGER AT LAKE MANAWA, IOWA

On Saturday, 4 September 1976, I stopped about 10:00 AM at Lake Manawa on the way back from some birding along I-29 south of Council Bluffs. I was really looking for fall warblers, and I parked at the far end of the bath-house parking lot and moved along the trees out onto "eagle point" at the northwest corner of the lake. I had given the lake a general overlook and was just beginning to take a second look at a small group of gulls directly south of me on the far side of the lake when something disturbed them, and they took off in my direction. One of them was clearly being chased by a dark bird. These two flew almost directly over my head (right into the sun) not 50 feet above me. By then it was clear the pursuing bird was a jaeger. It was quite dark with white streaks along the outer primaries and magnificently agile in the air. Perhaps startled by me, it abandoned the gull (Ring-billed — they were very similar in size) and flew west where it began pursuing a couple of Common Terns which had been resting on the white posts that are standing in the water there. Again it gave me a magnificent performance in fine light within a quarter mile from me. After several minutes of that it flew off in a southwest direction, and I lost it.

I remained there on the point, hoping for another look, and several minutes later I noted what seemed like a black or very dark gull resting on the water, all alone, quite far to the west from eagle point. By this time of day boats were beginning to appear with some frequency on the lake, but the dark bird seemed to ignore them. It was too far away to get any identification with my 7-power glasses, so I returned to the car and drove to the west shore to try for a better look with 10-power glasses. By the time I located it it was clear that the bird had moved back toward eagle point, and so I returned there, this time with the more powerful binoculars. Moments after I reached the point a boat flushed the bird, and it was clearly the jaeger. Again it moved west, and again, for some five minutes at least, it pursued the Terns along the west shore of the lake. Then it took off in a westerly direction and eventually I lost sight of it.

The whole period of observation lasted about forty-five minutes, of which ten to fifteen were occupied with observation of the bird in flight in good to very good light. Its actions were absolutely characteristic of descriptions of jaegers in all the literature and of movies that I have seen. It was a dark-phase bird, in mature plumage (no sign of any mottling), but the two central tail feathers were either worn off or broken off (leading to

an erroneous first impression that the bird must be immature). I am relatively sure, from its actions, its size and shape (not heavy like a typical Pomarine, nor as small as a Long-tailed — it was close to the size of the Ring-billed Gull), and place (Parasitics are more common inland than the other two), that it was a Parasitic Jaeger. Unfortunately, others who were at the lake earlier, and many who went later that day and the following day, failed to see the bird. Increasingly heavy boat traffic on the lake by the time I left at 11:00 AM would undoubtedly explain the disappearance of the bird after that time.

I consulted Peterson's *Field Guide to Western Birds* (p. 22 cautions about broken central tail feathers in mature birds) and *Field Guide to the Birds*, Pough's *Audubon Water Bird Guide* (which has the most helpful illustrations), Robbins et al *Birds of North America*, and Will Russell's "Field Identification Notes" *Birding* 7 (1975) pp. 106-110.

— Fr. Thomas A. Hoffman, S. J., Omaha