

Pomarine Jaeger

10 Nov 1996

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

*S. Dinsmore, *J. Dinsmore

up to 3 birds; IBL 67:22, 82, P-0526, Dinsmore 1997

Record Number: 96-54

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Stephen J. Dinsmore (10, 11, 16, 22 Nov) [4/6/97]

Jim Dinsmore (11 Nov)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 11 Nov 1996, P-0526

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 11 Nov 1996, IBL 67(3)cover; 67:94

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:22

Records Committee: IBL 67:82

Dinsmore, S. J. 1997. A late fall influx of Pomarine Jaegers in Iowa. IBL 67:94-96.

Dinsmore, S. J. 1997. [cover photo]. IBL 67(3).

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, The double white flash in the underwing, which my pelagic-going friends maintain is diagnostic for Pomarine, is really evident in the closest photo.

A-P, Descriptions, especially size comparisons in flight to RB Gulls and close viewing, convincing.





Pomarine Jaeger P-0526
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
11 Nov 1996 Stephen J. Dinsmor

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< >019 41-02 21NN-32RU 887

Pomarine Jaeger P-0526
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
11 Nov 1996 Stephen J. Dinsmor

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< >002 41-01 NNDNN-16RU 887

Pomarine Jaeger P-0526
Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA
11 Nov 1996 Stephen J. Dinsmor

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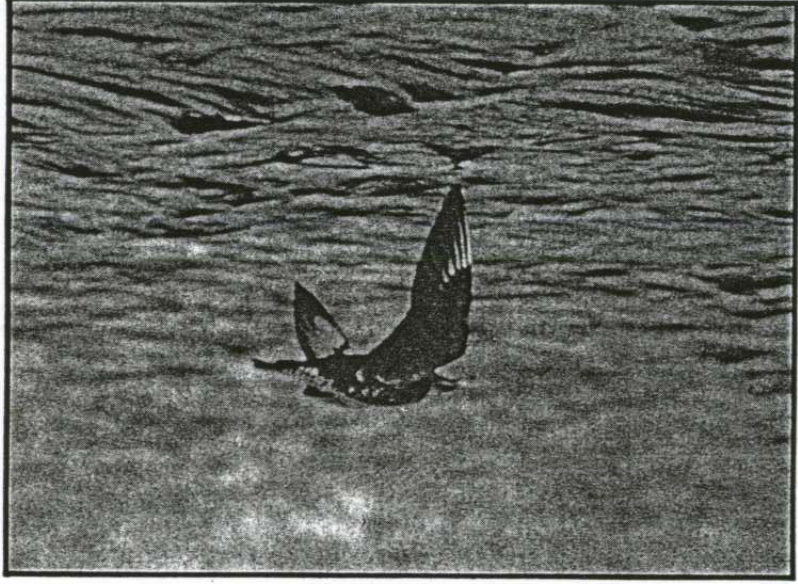
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 t 1997 Iowa Ornithologists' Union

IOWA BIRD LIFE

Summer 1997 Volume 67 Number 3



IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

96-54

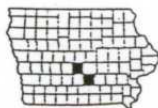
City; *Kayleen A. Niyo (KAN), Ames; Babs K. Padelford (BKP), Bellevue, NE. Loren J Padelford (LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Peter C. Petersen (PCP), Davenport; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; *Curtis L. Rector (CLR), Holstein; Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; *Pauline Rowe (PR), Des Moines; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; *Amy Sprunger-Allworth (AS), Wapello; Ed Thelen (ETh), Spirit Lake; Rob Thelen (RTh), Carroll; Marie Tiemann (MT), Shenandoah; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Phil J. Walsh (PJW), Des Moines; *Tim Waltz (TW), Spirit Lake; and Hank Zaletel (HZ), Nevada.

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A LATE FALL INFLUX OF POMARINE JAEGERS IN IOWA

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

In November 1996, an noticeable movement of jaegers occurred in the upper Midwest. Most of the birds were identified as Pomarine Jaegers, although a few Parasitic Jaegers were also reported. During this period, I observed no fewer than five different jaegers in Iowa, at least four of which were Pomarines. Here I will summarize these sightings and other records of Pomarine Jaegers in Iowa.



On 10 November 1996, I was scanning Saylorville Reservoir from Cherry Glen Recreation Area when I noticed a very dark, gull-like bird chasing Ring-billed Gulls along the west shore of the lake. After a few seconds, I discerned the white color at the base of the primaries and concluded the bird was a jaeger. From 9:35 a.m. to 12:33 p.m., I tried to get closer to photograph the bird, but without a boat this was difficult. I left without identifying the bird, although I tentatively concluded the bird was probably a Parasitic Jaeger. I returned on the 11th and found two jaegers near the marina, both of which were Pomarine Jaegers. The last sighting was of two juveniles on 22 November.

I took most of the following notes on the 11th, with some additional information later gleaned from photos. The first bird (intermediate phase juvenile--seen on all visits) had a wingspan slightly greater than that of Ring-billed Gulls it chased on numerous occasions. In normal flight, the wings seemed fairly broad-based and the flight was lumbering, much like that of a Herring Gull. The dark bill was fairly stout, very similar in size and shape to the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The bill was bicolored: the distal one third was dark while the basal two thirds was lighter-colored. The bill also showed a strong hook at the tip. The eye and a small area around the eye were dark. The head and neck were light brown, contrasting with a darker brown mantle. The mantle was speckled with fine, buff-colored spots. The underparts were the same color as the head with darker barring on the belly and flanks. The undertail coverts were very light brown with darker barring. The tail was dark brown. The central rectrices were barely longer than the rest and were blunt-tipped. I studied the wing pattern in great detail. The upperwings were dark brown with buff edges to the wing coverts, particularly the secondary coverts. The bases of the three outer primary shafts showed a lot of white



Pomarine Jaeger at Saylorville Reservoir, 11 November 1996. Photo by Stephen J. Dinsmore

while the next three shafts showed smaller amounts of white. The undersides of the bases of primaries showed a lot of white, and there was a prominent white crescent on the underprimary coverts. When perched on the water, the bird's wingtips barely extended beyond the central rectrices.

The second bird was first seen on 11 November, although it may have been present on the 10th. The size and structure were identical to those of the first bird, although this bird was much darker. The white color in the primary shafts was slightly more extensive, with prominent white color on the basal half of the outer five shafts. Other than the white primary shafts, the upperwing appeared dark and lacked the obvious buff mottling of the first bird. The vent also showed more white color, and the underside of the basal half of each rectrix was white. When viewed from underneath, the wing and tail patterns recalled an immature Golden Eagle. The rump was barred. The belly was dark brown and unbarred. The underwing pattern was similar to that of the first bird, except that I noticed a fine, lighter mottling on the secondaries and their coverts. On the basis of these marks, I concluded it was a dark phase bird. It was clearly not an adult because of the short central rectrices. It was either a subadult or a juvenile that lacked barring on the belly. Both birds were present on the 16th. On the 22nd, there were two intermediate phase juveniles together above the dam, one later seen below the dam harassing gulls. The combination of size, wing shape, amount of white in the primaries, shape of the central rectrices, and bill size were used to rule out juvenile Parasitic and Long-tailed jaegers.

On 16 November 1996, I saw a juvenile Pomarine Jaeger above the dam of Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. When I arrived at the overlook on the south side of the dam, one of the first birds I saw was a dark, gull-like bird chasing Ring-billed Gulls in the middle of the lake. The dark coloration, size, shape, and white in the primary shafts identified the bird as a jaeger. I studied the bird from 1:12 to 1:55 p.m. The structure and plumage were similar to those of the Pomarine Jaegers seen earlier at Saylorville Reservoir except for the pattern on the underparts. The underparts were dark chocolate brown, except for a very slightly paler belly with dark barring. Based on the very dark coloration and barred underparts, I concluded the bird was a dark phase juvenile. On the 27th I saw two jaegers together above the dam. Both birds were juveniles and appeared similar in plumage. However, because of the distance and poor light conditions, I could not determine their color phases. On the 30th, Jim Sinclair and I observed three jaegers together above and below the dam. One bird was very dark and lacked barring on the belly. This was probably the possible subadult seen earlier at Saylorville. The other two birds were juveniles, one dark phase and one intermediate phase. The last sighting was of a juvenile on 14 December above the dam.

On 17 November 1996, James J. Dinsmore and I observed a juvenile jaeger at Spirit Lake in Dickinson County. We watched the bird from 1:45 to 2:43 p.m. as it rested on the water in the middle of the lake. It briefly raised its wings twice, allowing us to see a fairly large white patch at the base of the outer primaries, formed by white bases to the primary shafts. Structurally, the bill seemed rather large, having a similar appearance to the bills of Pomarine Jaegers seen earlier in central Iowa. Otherwise, the bird was very dark brown overall except for paler flanks, chest, and nape. When the bird rose to the top of wave crests, I detected some horizontal darker barring on the chest. The only size comparison was to a Red-breasted Merganser; the jaeger was at least as long as the merganser and was slightly chunkier and bigger-headed. The dark brown coloration and barring on the chest indicated the

bird was probably a juvenile. Because of the slightly paler nape and underparts, I concluded the bird was an intermediate phase. The bird was likely a Pomarine Jaeger for two reasons: the large size and the large-billed appearance.

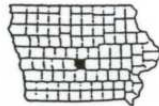
Using differences in plumage, I tried to determine the total number of birds present. At Saylorville, there were at least three birds; the possible dark subadult and two intermediate phase juveniles. There was also the dark phase juvenile present at Red Rock from 16-30 November. That makes a minimum of four birds between the two areas. There may have been more as it is not known if the intermediate phase juveniles seen at both reservoirs were in fact the same individuals. However, the possible dark subadult seen at Saylorville moved to Red Rock Reservoir later in November. These records represent the second and third reports of Pomarine Jaeger in Iowa. The only other record is of two juveniles from 28 September-2 October 1988 at Saylorville Reservoir (S. J. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 59: 20-21, 1989).

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RUFF IN POLK COUNTY

BERY ENGBRETSSEN

We tend to view our agricultural monocultures of corn and soybeans as not particularly good birding habitat, but on 10 May 1996 I stopped briefly to view some shorebirds near the road in a wet, last year's beanfield between Grimes and West Des Moines in Polk County. In the mixed flock, one bird immediately stood out because of what appeared to be a rather smallish head on a plump body. It was clearly larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers and somewhat larger than the Lesser Yellowlegs nearby. The bill was black, a bit longer than the head with the slightest downward curve. All of the back and tertial feathers were light tipped with dark and then lighter brown bands away from the tips. The tertials were long, obscuring the tail and seemed to blow about loosely in the breeze. The underparts were mostly white except for some scattered dark bars. The legs were pale yellow. I was somewhat puzzled by this rather nondescript shorebird until it obligingly stretched its wings above its head revealing white underwings and a U-shaped patch of white around the base of the tail. At this point I knew I was observing a Reeve (or was it a Ruff?).



As noted previously (Sinclair, *Iowa Bird Life* 66:65-66, 1996), this species is highly variable, even in basic plumage. After reviewing field guides, I finally concluded this was actually the male of the species (Ruff), but noted that upon review the Records Committee could not agree as to its sex. It probably must remain *Philomachus pugnax*, sex unrecorded. This once again confirms the highly variable nature of this species.

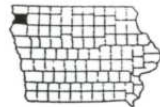
This is the eighth record of this species to be confirmed in Iowa. I suspect that a fair number may pass through our area undetected, since this bird was quite plain, in a mixed flock, and not in a highly birded area--a soybean field.

12825 NW 127th Court, Des Moines, IA 50325

RED-THROATED LOON IN NORTHWESTERN IOWA

JOHN VAN DYK

In the early afternoon of 19 April 1996, I discovered a Red-throated Loon in a large gravel pit five miles south of Sioux Center in Sioux County. The gravel pits, located just east of Highway 75 and north of Highway 10, form relatively large bodies of water and are good places for migrant waterfowl.



As I approached the quarry from the west, I noted from a distance that a variety of birds was present: about 45 Double-crested Cormorants, several Pied-billed Grebes, some Lesser Scaups and Gadwalls, a small flock of Franklin's Gulls, and six American Avocets along the shore. I scanned the water with my binoculars, and noted the loon some distance away from the cormorants. As soon as I saw the bird, I recognized it as a Red-throated Loon: a slender loon smaller than the cormorants, with grayish upturned bill and its head tilted upwards, as if it were scanning the sky. Every few minutes or so the bird would dive and come up some distance away. I parked my car at the edge of the gravel road alongside the lake, and used my Zoom Baiscope through the lowered car window. The sky was overcast, and the water calm. The light was excellent. The loon at times would emerge only 30 yards from my car, allowing me an excellent view. I observed it for about 40 minutes.

The loon was noticeably smaller than the nearby Double-crested Cormorants. Its upturned bill was distinctive, even from a distance. The slender profile gave the bird a snakelike appearance. Whenever it emerged, its head was slanted upwards. The back was gray flecked with many white spots. The back of the neck and head were gray. The face was white. The reddish eye was located at the juncture of the white face and the gray crown. A light spot in front of the eye gave the eye a distinctly separated appearance. The bird's flanks, just above the waterline, were mottled light and dark.

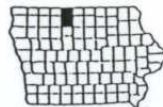
After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me and flying low over my car. It circled the lakes as it gained altitude, and at first I thought it might land again. But then it headed to the northwest. I followed the bird in my binoculars as long as I could. As it disappeared from sight, I could not help but mumble: Happy landings! Thanks for stopping by!

736 East 1st Street, Sioux Center, IA 51250

RED KNOTS AT UNION SLOUGH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

MATTHEW C. KENNE

I arrived at the little bridge one mile north of the headquarters of Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County, at about 9:00 a.m. on 25 August 1996. The sheetwater and mudflats there had been the best location for migratory shorebirds on the refuge for several weeks. Almost immediately, I noticed two large, pale shorebirds with approximately 200 other mixed species 100-150 yards away.



DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Pomarine Jaeger
Number: 3 (2 juveniles, 1 possible subadult)
Location: Saylorville Res. Polk Co., IA
Habitat: large reservoir
Date: 10,11,16,22 November 1996
Time: 9:35 a.m.-12:33 p.m. on the 10th and 10:55 a.m.-4:05 p.m. on the 11th
Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014
Others who saw bird: James J. Dinsmore

Description of bird(s): On the 10th, I was scanning the lake from Cherry Glen Recreation Area when I noticed a very dark, gull-like bird chasing Ring-billed Gulls along the west shore of the lake. After a few seconds, I discerned the white color at the base of the primaries and concluded the bird was a jaeger. For the next three hours, I tried to get closer to photograph the bird, but without my boat this was difficult. I tentatively concluded the bird was probably a Parasitic Jaeger, based mainly on size, flight behavior, and the rusty color to the body. However, I returned on the 11th and soon found two jaegers near the marina. I approached and photographed the birds from my boat and concluded both birds were Pomarines.

The following notes were written mainly on the 11th, with some additional information later gleaned from photos. The first bird (bird A-seen on all visits) had a wingspan slightly greater than that of Ring-billed Gulls it chased on numerous occasions. In normal flight, the wings seemed fairly broad-based and the flight was lumbering, much like that of a Herring Gull. The dark bill was fairly stout, very similar in size and shape to the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The bill was bicolored: the distal one third was dark while the basal two thirds was lighter-colored. The bill also showed a strong hook at the tip. The eye and a small area around the eye were dark. The head and neck were light brown, contrasting with a darker brown mantle. The mantle was speckled with fine, buff-colored spots. The underparts were the same color as the head with darker barring on the belly and flanks. The undertail coverts were very light brown with darker barring. The tail was dark brown. The central rectrices were barely longer than the rest and were blunt-tipped. I studied the wing pattern in great detail. The upperwings were dark brown with buff edges to the wing coverts, particularly the secondary coverts. The bases of the three outer primary shafts showed a lot of white while the next three shafts showed smaller amounts of white. The undersides of the bases of primaries showed a lot of white, and there was a prominent white crescent on the underprimary coverts. When perched on the water, the birds' wingtips barely extended beyond the central rectrices. I concluded this bird was an intermediate phase juvenile.

The second bird (bird B) was first seen on the 11th, although it was probably also present on the 10th. Size and structure were identical to those of the first bird. In general, this bird was much darker than the first bird. White color in the primary shafts was slightly more extensive, with quite a bit of white on the outer five shafts. Other than the white primary shafts, the upperwing appeared dark and lacked the obvious buff mottling of bird A. The vent showed more white color, and the undersides of the basal half of each rectrice was white. When viewed from underneath, the wing and tail patterns recalled an immature Golden Eagle. The rump was barred. The

belly was dark brown and unbarred. The underwing pattern was similar to that of bird A, except that I noticed a fine, lighter mottling on the secondaries and their coverts. On the basis of these marks, I concluded the bird was a dark phase bird. It was clearly not an adult because of the short central rectrices. It was either a subadult or a juvenile that lacked barring on the belly.

Both birds were still present on the 16th. I saw both together near the dam in the morning, and the darker bird was in the marina late in the day. On the 22nd, there were two intermediate phase juveniles (birds A and C) together above the dam, one later seen below the dam harassing gulls.

Similar species and how eliminated: The dark coloration, gull-like shape, and white color in the primary shafts identified both birds as jaegers. Initially, I thought the bird I saw on the 10th was a Parasitic, mainly because of the size and seemingly bright, rust-colored underparts. However, better viewing conditions later showed that the underparts were instead a pale brown color and lacked any hint of rusty color. Long-tailed Jaeger was easily eliminated by size, shape of the central rectrices, and the greater amount of white in the wing. Parasitic Jaeger was more difficult to rule out. The combination of size, wing shape, amount of white in the wing, shape of the central rectrices, and bill size was used to rule out juvenile Parasitic Jaeger.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were o.k. on the 10th, although the bird was distant most of the time. Estimated viewing distance was >500m on the 10th but as close as 5m on the 11th as I approached both birds with my boat. On the 22nd, I was within 10m of the bird below the dam.

Previous experience with species: I have quite a bit of experience with all three species of jaegers from pelagic work off North Carolina and Massachusetts. I have also seen Parasitic and Pomarine jaegers previously in Iowa.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America
Kaufman Advanced Birding

How long before field notes made: written during initial observation

How long before this form completed: written 12 November 1996

96-54

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species Pomarine Jaeger **How many?** two
Location? Saylorville Reservoir
Type of habitat? large lake
When? date(s): 11 November 1996 **Time:** 3:15-4:00 p.m.
Who? your name and address Jim Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Drive,
Ames, IA
Others with you Stephen Dinsmore
Others before or after you ??

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

Large, heavy bodied gull-like birds. Seen flying over lake and chasing gulls. Identified as jaegers on basis of mainly brown color, distinct white patches seen especially on underside of primaries, smaller white patches seen on upper surface of wing near base of some of outer primaries, long, pointed wings, powerful and rapid flight, and their behavior of chasing and diving at gulls.

No tail streamers were noted.

Bird identified as Pomarine on basis of size and flight pattern. Both jaegers seen chasing Ring-billed Gulls on several occasions. At those times, the jaegers were clearly somewhat larger than Ring-billed Gull (ca. 10% larger), both in body size and in wingspread.

The wing beat pattern of the jaegers was somewhat slower and more deliberate than that of Ring-billed Gulls.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: viewed with 10X binoculars at distances of less than 100 yards to 1/4 mile away

96-54

Previous experience with this species and similar ones: Have seen Pomarine Jaegers in Iowa and several other states.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made?
this form completed? several days later