

Parasitic Jaeger

13 Oct 1985

Saylorville Res., Polk Co., IA

\*Engebretsen\*S.Dinsmore\*Myers\*Moore

\*Kent\*Bendorf; IBL 56:125; 56:43, Myers 1986

Record Number: 85-19  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore, 14-15 Oct

Robert K. Myers, 15 Oct

Francis L. Moore, 15 Oct

Carl J. Bendorf, 15 Oct

Bery Engebretsen, 16 Oct

Thomas H. Kent, 17 Oct

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 56:125

Myers, B. 1986. Parasitic Jaeger at Saylorville Reservoir. IBL 56:31.

Records Committee: IBL 56:43

VOTE: 1-I, 5-II, 1-IV

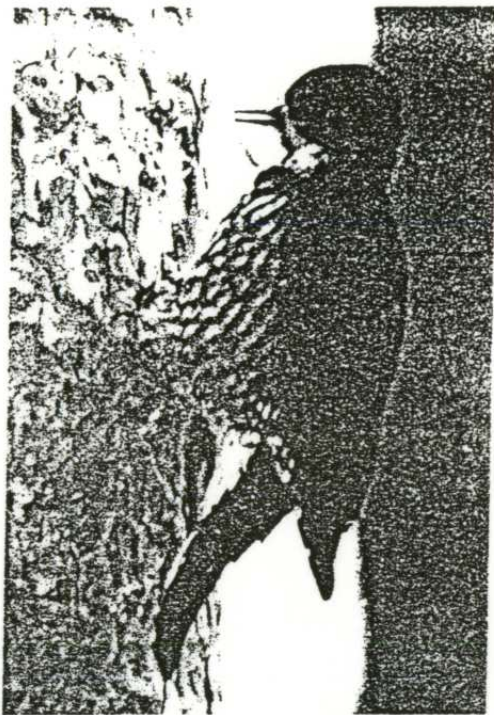
II, Underwing pattern (no white on coverts), size, and behavior are enough for this difficult ID.

II, No photos attempted?

IV, II for Jaeger sp., Back of Moore doc seem to be Myers notes.

I, Spike-like tail feathers were observed.

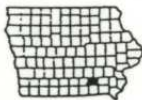
II, Satisfactorily separated from Pomarine (size vs RB Gull main indication). However Pomarine and Parasitic not that different in size (19 vs 21").



*Black-backed Woodpecker southeast of Ottumwa, 28 December 1985. Photo by Nelson Hoskins.*

## BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER NEAR OTTUMWA

NELSON R. HOSKINS

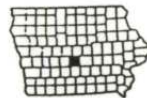


A Black-backed Woodpecker was found at the former YMCA Camp Arrowhead, 3 miles east and 1 mile south of Ottumwa, Wapello County, on 28 December 1985 by Bill and Marge Heusinkveld and later seen by Charles and Darleen Ayres and myself. The bird was in a grove of pine trees, many of which appeared to be diseased and dying. It was active, moving from tree to tree. The back was solid black with heavily barred black and white sides. It had a heavy white line below the eye and yellow cap, indicating that the bird was a male. He ignored us, even when we approached as close as 20 feet. The bird was observed just after noon on a windy, overcast day with temperature near zero. Photos were taken with a 600 mm lens at 1/60th second exposure time.

508 Shaul Avenue, Ottumwa, IA 52501

## CLARK'S GREBE AT BIG CREEK STATE PARK

STEVE DINSMORE

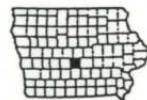


On 12 October 1985, while scanning Big Creek Lake in Polk County, I noticed what appeared to be three Western Grebes. The birds were about one and one-half times as large as several nearby American Coots. The large size, long neck, striking black-and-white coloration, and long thin bills identified the birds as Western or Clark's Grebes. Closer examination revealed that one bird was significantly lighter colored than the other two. It had a lighter back, less extensive darkness on the back of the neck, and a white cheek that included the eye. The dark color on the crown and neck was much grayer than in the other two grebes. I was not able to see the bill color. From these marks, I identified the bird as a Clark's Grebe, formerly the light phase of the Western Grebe. I notified other birders, but the bird could not be found the next morning; however, the next afternoon Francis Moore found a Clark's Grebe above the nearby Saylorville Reservoir dam. This record of Clark's Grebe is the second for Iowa. The other was found on 5 May 1983 (*IBL* 53:48, 54:38).

4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50010

## PARASITIC JAEGER AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

BOB MYERS



While scoping the Saylorville Reservoir just north of the dam on 14 October 1985, I noticed a dark gull-like bird 300-400 yards out on the water. Even though the bird appeared as not much more than a brown spot, the thought of jaeger raced through my mind. After working my way up the west shore line in order to get a closer view, I could see the overall dark brown coloration, stocky neck, and slightly upturned wing tips of the resting bird. When the bird flew and began to chase Ring-billed Gulls, the overall dark brown color was confirmed, and prominent, flashing white patches were noted at the base of the primaries, both on the upper and lower surfaces. I concluded that the bird was a jaeger; but which one? The tail streamers were not developed, suggesting a juvenile bird. The bird's size—about as large as Ring-billed Gull—and its rapid flight seemed to eliminate the larger and slower Pomarine Jaeger. The large amount of white in the wing, especially on the upper wing, and the un-tern-like flight ruled out Long-tailed Jaeger. I concluded, therefore, that the bird was a juvenile dark phase Parasitic Jaeger. There are four previous substantiated records of Parasitic Jaeger in Iowa (Dinsmore et al., 1984, *Iowa Birds*).

R.R. 2, Box 153, Perry, IA 50220

85-19

## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Parasitic Jaeger How many? 1 imm.Location? Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County.Type of habitat? large reservoirWhen? date(s): 14-15 Oct, 1985 time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_Who? your name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Artanzas Dr. Ames IA 50010others with you: —others before or after you: Bob Myers, Perry, mob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Bird was about the size of a Ring-billed Gull, but chunkier. Entire body was chocolate-brown color, except for paler undertail coverts and prominent white wing patches at the base of the primaries on the upper wing surface. Underparts were slightly barred with narrow, darker bars. Tail was dark and squarish with a knob projecting about 1/2" or less from the center.

While under observation, the bird frequently harassed nearby Ring-billed Gulls, much like a Jaeger. The birds' ~~slow~~ rapid wingbeats allowed it to move about more like a tern than a gull.

Similar species and how eliminated:

*Pomarine Jaeger* eliminated by larger size, heavier dark barring on underparts, more prominent white wing patches and slower flight - less rapid wingbeats.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Light varied from excellent to poor, depending on the angle from which the bird was seen. Estimated viewing distance varied from 50' to several hundred yards. I used a Bth 20x spotting scope and Nikon 8x23 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I have only seen Pomarine Jaegers in Massachusetts.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

NGS Field Guide to Birds of North America and Harrison's Seabirds

How long before field notes made? immediately this form completed? 7 weeks

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF  
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

85-19

1. Species Parasitic Jaeger (Stercorarius parasiticus) 2. Number 1

3. Location Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., Iowa

4. Date: October 14, 1985 5. Time Bird Seen 9:15 A.M. to 9:40 A.M. <sup>first sighting</sup>  
<sub>seen several times = total = 60</sub>

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of <sup>min.</sup>  
the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Gull-like bird about size of ring-billed gull-(no larger). Bird was basically all dark - chocolate brown (not rusty). Wings were long and angled-see sketch and had white in the primaries (very noticeable). The white was both on upper and lower side of wing. Tail in flight was somewhat wedge-shaped being pointed at end. During closest observation I believe I could see a very short tail streamer (certainly not like guides show for adult). The bird was too far to see this again during other observations. Bill seemed dark. When the bird was resting on the water it showed a short fairly stocky neck. and the tail feathers or wingtips always seemed to stick up a little at the rear of the bird (possibly due to way bird folded the long wings). Birds flight and wing beats were quite rapid. I saw the bird chase ring-billed gulls twice and once it dropped to the water as if to pick up something. White flash in primaries easily seen at long distance. SEE SKETCH-OVER

7. Description of voice, if heard:

Not heard

8. Description of behavior: Bird would rest by itself, not with other gulls, on the water. It flew rapidly, rapid strokes, and would pursue the gulls.

9. Habitat - general: Saylorville Reservoir- large impoundment on Des Moines River.

specific: Always out in main deeper part of lake.

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:

Pomarine Jaeger and Long-tailed Jaeger are possible.

See explanation on back as to why I believe this was Parasitic Jaeger.

11. Distance (how measured)?

Closest = 100 - 150 yds. (eyeball)

Other sightings were up to one-third mile.

12. Optical equipment:

25 and 40X scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

Day was overcast and we saw bird from several angles - fairly good light

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

None- just in the guides-

15. Other observers: Gene and Eloise Armstrong came on my phone call and Steve Dinsmore saw it later in afternoon.

16. Did the others agree with your identification? Armstrongs = yes

Dinsmore thought possibly a Pomarine because it showed much white in wings

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

Several were coming on Oct. 15 but at this time I don't know of their success.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Many- everything I have but these didn't influence description but did convince me the bird was a Parasitic Jaeger.

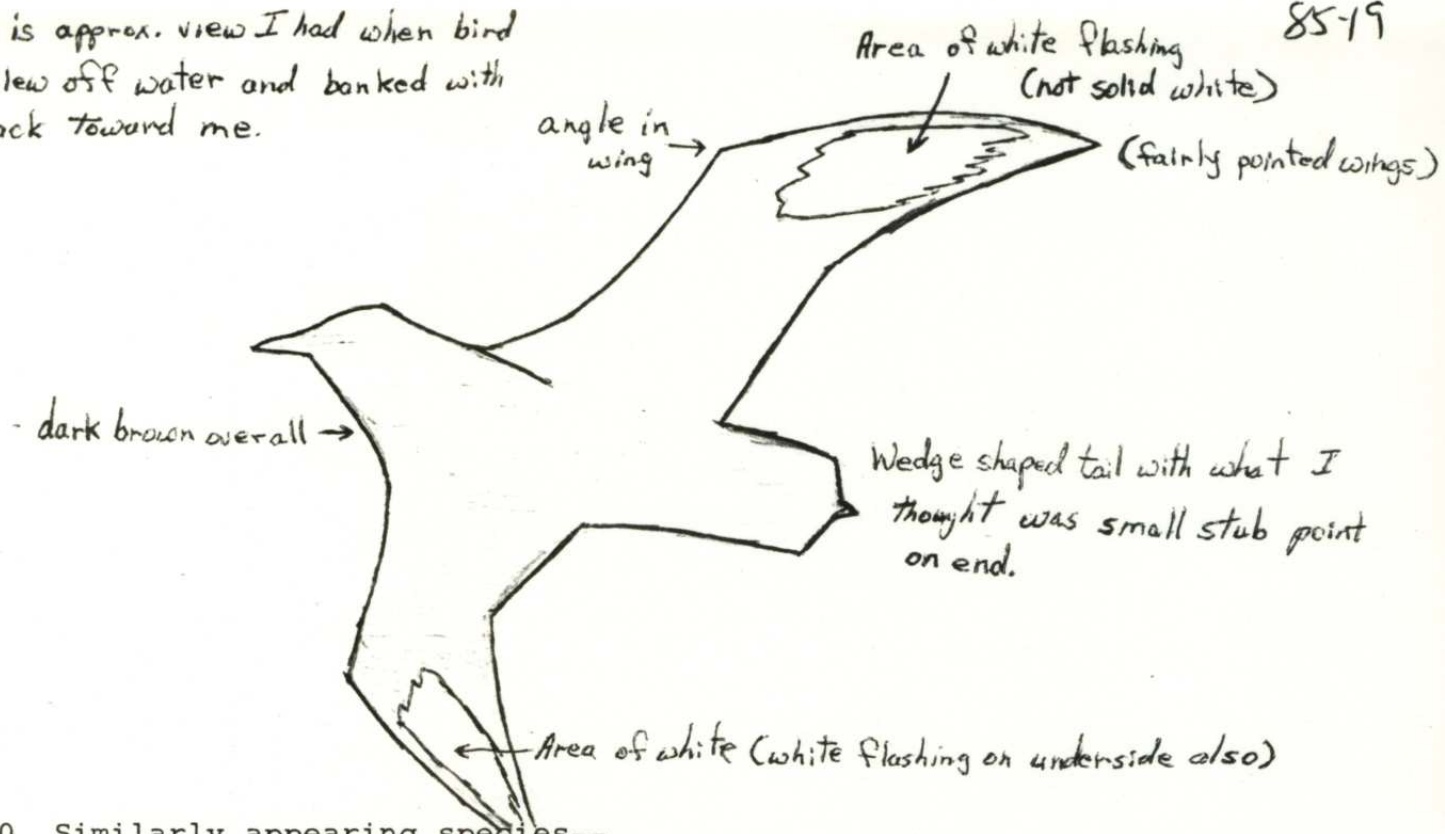
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

I took field notes on spot and typed this next day.

Signature: Robert K. Myers Address: R.R. 2, Box 153

Date: October 15, 1985 City, State: Perry, Iowa 50220

This is approx. view I had when bird first flew off water and banked with its back toward me.



10. Similarly appearing species--

A juvenile dark phase Pomarine would also show much white in the base of primaries (top and bottom) and the tail wouldn't have any long streamers. The Pomarine should however be a larger bird (Herring Gull size). The Pomarine's flight should be slower and more labored than this bird was. A juvenile dark phase Long-tailed Jaeger would not show as much white on dorsal side of primaries as this bird did and the flight pattern should be almost tern-like which it was not. Long-tailed Jaegers should also appear to be more grayish than the bird in question- even in dark phase.

Further note on size-- As the jaeger rested on the water, double-crested cormorants would sometimes swim into the field of view and they appeared to be at least one-third larger than the jaeger. A pied-billed grebe also swam near once and the jaeger was probably 1/4 again longer than the grebe.

## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

85-19

What species? Parasitic Jaeger (Stercorarius parasiticus) How many? 1 dark phase juvenileLocation? North of the Lakeview area of Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co.Type of habitat? Flying over Open water on Saylorville Res., landed twice while watchingWhen? date(s): October 15, 1985 time: 8:25 am to 10:30 amWho? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703others with you: Carl Bendorf, Iowa City; Tom Staudt, Iowa City; Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, Booneville; Denny Thompson, Des moinesothers before or after you: m. ob.

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

I looked for the bird at both overlooks at the dam and did not see it so drove down to the boat ramp at the Lake View area. We saw a very dark gull shaped bird at quite a distance from our location. As we watched the bird flew up and down the lake and eventually came to within about 200 yards or more of us at the closest. While watching it using my telescope I observed the following: The bird was a dark chocolate brown color overall. It had gull-like flight and could fly at pretty fast speed if it decided to do so. There was a whitish crescent in the base of the primaries in the underwing and it stood out very clearly. In the upper wing there was some white showing at the base of the primaries, probably only the first four to five of the shafts of the primary feathers had this white color. It was easy to see but was not as prominent as in the underwing. When the bird got to within its closest distance to us I could clearly see two of the central tail feathers extending beyond the rest of the tail in two rather sharply pointed feathers. The tail was a darker brown than the body, and the wings were somewhere in between the tail and body color. At one time it flew beside two Ring-billed Gulls which gave me a good comparison in the size of this bird and the Ring-billed Gulls. The bird was just a little larger than both of the Ring-billed's were. A Pomerine or Long-tailed Jaeger should have showed a larger size in comparison to the Ring-billed's. I never got to see to bird chase any other gulls so did not see this type of behavior. The bird did land on the water twice and its high ride in the water was striking. It sat in the water very buoyantly and had its tail up in the air as it sat on the water. The bird also seemed as though it had a more buoyant and faster flight than the Ring-billed Gulls.

Similar species and how eliminated: Long-tailed Jaeger has a slighter build and the juvenile is not this dark. Pomerine Jaeger shows more white in the upper and lower bases of the primaries; Pomerine would also appear larger and more heavy bodied than Ring-billed Gull.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

Bright overcast with excellent viewing conditions, seen from approx. 200 yards at closest using Leitz 10X40 binoculars and Celestron C90 33X and 55X telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen one Parasitic Jaeger before on coast of Virginia.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS Guide, Harrison.

How long before field notes made? Time of observ. this form completed? 6 hrs.

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM

CARL J. BENDORF  
825 7TH AVENUE  
IOWA CITY IA 52240

SPECIES: JAEGER SPECIES NUMBER: 1  
LOCATION: Saylorville Reservoir COUNTY: Polk  
DATE: 15 October 1985 TIME: 8:30 AM TO 9:05 AM

HABITAT: Calm and clear morning; bird seen over open reservoir; many ducks and gulls in area.

DESCRIPTION: Bird was first seen with 20X scope in flight over reservoir. At this point bird was perhaps 1 mile away. For the next thirty minutes, bird mainly flew around, only occasionally landing on water.

The general size and shape of bird was the same as the many Ring-billed Gulls in the area. There was never an immediate size comparison, but this bird was certainly not any larger than a Ring-billed Gull. The flight was direct with constant and steady wingbeats. The wingbeats were fairly shallow with the wings raised and lowered about the same distance above and below the plane of the bird, perhaps 30 degrees. Occasionally the bird glided in a straight line, but it never soared in circles.

The wings were not broad and wide, but also were not sharply angled or falcon-like. Again they were consistent with the shape of a Ring-billed Gull.

The first impression of the color was an all dark bird with bold white flashes in the wings. On further examination, some other features were noted:

- Bill was dark, not noticeably large or small.
- Main body color was uniform chocolate brown above and below
- Upper wing surface perhaps a little darker than the back, with a distinct white area on the outer primaries. This white area seemed to be present on at least three to four of the outer primaries.
- The underside of the wings were a little darker brown than the belly, but there was a very striking white flash in the base of the primaries. This white area corresponded roughly to the position of the white on the upper wing, but it was much more extensive and formed almost a white crescent on the under wing surface.
- The tail, both above and below was noticeable darker than the back or belly color and from above it darkened toward the tip. At one point when the bird banked against the sky there was a suggestion of a very small projecting tail feather shape in the center of the tail.

When the bird sat on the water (at a great distance) it appeared uniform dark brown with a medium sized dark bill. The neck was short even when extended. The rear end of the bird appeared to be tilted upwards, perhaps an illusion of how the wings were held. (Used 45X at this point).

SIMILAR SPECIES--COMMENTS: Skuas should be larger, heavier, with a more pronounced white flash on upper wing surface. Probably also too unlikely to even consider.

Obvious similar species would be other jaegers. The lack of obvious tail projections would make this bird a juvenile and the uniform dark color indicates a dark phase bird.

Long-tailed Jaeger: This species would appear to be eliminated primarily for two reasons. First, the build and flight style of this bird was too heavy for Long-tailed which is shaped and flies more like a tern than a gull. "Normal flight usually light and floating with distinct tern-like buoyancy, thus lacking direct falcon-like wingbeats and purposeful directness of (Parasitic Jaeger)." Seabirds p. 327. Furthermore, " Unlike (Parasitic Jaeger), only outer one or two primary shafts are white forming thin white edge to outer wing." Seabirds p. 326. Thus the flight style and shape of this bird and the more extensive white on upper wing seem to rule out Long-tailed Jaeger.

Pomarine Jaeger: Separation of this from Parasitic is more difficult and relies more on shape and flight style. The Master Guide to Birding mentions only one point in separating the juveniles; that the Parasitic has narrow based wings and Pomarine has broad based wings. This is difficult to quantify, but with my impression of shape of this bird as a Ring-billed Gull, I would say that the base of the wing of this bird was not any broader than that of the wing itself. Seabirds also mentions that the flight of the Pomarine differs from Parasitic in being "slower, more purposeful, steady, flapping beats which, with broader wings and deep, barrel-chest ... allows reasonably quick and accurate identification (with comparative experience)." p. 324. The Master Guide to Birding also brings this out on p. 36., "Identification of dark-phase (Pomarine) juveniles is extremely difficult and subjective, and must rely on their large size, broad-based wings, and strong,slow wingbeats."

Thus, based on what I have described, it is not absolutely conclusive just what species of jaeger this was. I feel that Long-tailed in not indicated and that Parasitic fits a little better than Pomarine.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: clear morning light coming from our right.

DISTANCE: 3/4 to 2 miles (Estimated) EQUIPMENT: 20X45 scope, 7X binos

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR SPECIES: Saw all three jaegers one month before in California. Also saw difficulty local experts there had with identification.

REFERENCES, PERSONS CONSULTED BEFORE WRITING DESCRIPTION: Looked at NGS, and Harrison while studying bird.

FIELD NOTES MADE? Dictated while watching bird.  
THIS FORM DONE? 5 hours.



## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Parasitic Jaeger (1 imm, dark phase), 17 October 1985  
Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., Iowa

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: many before

Time: 7:30-7:33 AM, 8:10-8:15 AM

Habitat: open reservoir

Description: 7:33 at Lake View boat ramp: "An all dark gull-like bird on water. Gulls showed white. While watching, bird took off and headed toward dam. Bird all dark. Rather rapid wing beat compared to one gull seen at same time. About size of Ring-billed Gull. All dark, except when (it) banked, I caught a white flash in the primaries. On the water, I could see the long, probably hooked bill even though the bird was a considerable distance across the lake--probably half way to the road on the opposite side."

8:15 at east side of dam: "The jaeger came in over the Franklin's Gulls--I saw them all fly up and about a minute or two later I picked up the jaeger right over my head chasing a Franklin's Gull. It was an inch or two longer than the Franklin's Gull--definitely looked larger than a Franklin's Gull. It chased the gull for a minute and came back directly over my head and I got a good look at the light base to the primaries. It was not bright white or large, but definitely a light base to the primaries. I saw no secondary white on the wing coverts. I could see the little tail feathers sticking out just barely beyond the slightly rounded but square-ended tail. The bird was otherwise all dark. On the upper side of the wing there was some paler brown to the feathering, but no white. I did not detect any barring on the under side of the bird, but it was difficult to assess whether it was present or not. At least the breast did not seem to be barred to me. The head was dark with typical jaeger shape. The body seem bulky, but the bird was quite maneuverable. When it was going up the lake, it sailed considerably. It chased up some coots, hovered over the water, and eventually landed on the water I believe. When I tried to get my scope on it, I couldn't find it again. The flight pattern was maneuverable; the bird changed directions rapidly and hovered."

Conditions: overcast, 40 feet to 1/2 mile; 10x binoculars (close); 20x scope (at distance).

Similar species: The overall dark color appears to exclude Long-tailed Jaeger. The dark color, white base to primaries, behavior, and head and bill shape eliminate all but dark phase immature Parasitic or Pomarine Jaegers. Features that favor Parasitic Jaeger include: (1) size--the bird did not seem enough larger than a Franklin's Gull to be a Pomarine; (2) head and bill

shape--the bill and head were small, the bill being quite thin; (3) the light at the base of the primaries was limited and grayish with no light on the underwing coverts; (4) If there was barring, it was not as evident as it should be on a Pomarine and I could see no barring on the upper tail; (5) The flight was more rapid and agile than the usual Pomarine.

Agreement: Steve Dinsmore was leaning toward Pomarine. Apparently he saw some barring. Others were uncertain. I assume I got the closest look.

Previous experience: Have seen all three species at close range on breeding grounds in Alaska including dark phase of each. Have watched all three species at a distance in Washington and California where I didn't consider myself an expert.

References/time used: Field Guides used before, between, and after sightings.

Time of notes/typed: Notes dictated immediately after each sighting and typed 7 days later.

## BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Jaeger sp. (? Pointed) 2. Number: 1Location Saylorville4. Date: 10/16/85 5. Time Bird seen: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Bird was seen at a great distance. In sending this report to comment on size, during its flight of about 5 min or so, it chased a ring-bill gull for sometime, upon several turns it appeared to me to be almost identical in size to the ring-bill.

7. Description of voice, if heard:

8. Description of behavior: chasing ring bill gull9. Habitat - general:  
specific:

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 &amp; 8, Explain:

11. Distance (how measured)? 1 mile +12. Optical equipment: 7x50

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

15. Other observers:

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: many

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

Signature Bery Engstrom Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State: \_\_\_\_\_