

Pomarine Jaeger
16 Nov 1996
Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA
*S.Dinsmore*Fuller*Kent*Edwards*Cummins
up to 3; IBL 67:22, 82; Dinsmore 1997

Record Number: 96-55
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Stephen J. Dinsmore (16, 27 Nov) [4/6/97]
Jim Fuller (17 Nov)
Thomas H. Kent (17 Nov)
Chris Edwards (18 Nov)
Ray Cummins (1 Dec)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:22
Records Committee: IBL 67:82
Dinsmore, S. J. 1997. A late influx of Pomarine Jaegers in
Iowa. IBL 67:94-96.

VOTE: 1 A-P, 6 A-D

A-D, Some of the minor differences described by individuals
could be due to seeing different birds, as three were seen
simultaneously at this location later.

A-D, While always subjective, flight is indicative of
Pomarine. Did we have three or four birds in central Iowa this
fall?

A-D, Size comparisons with RB and Herring gulls useful.

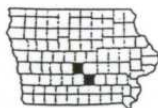
City; *Kayleen A. Niyo (KAN), Ames; Babs K. Padelford (BKP), Bellevue, NE; Loren J Padelford (LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Peter C. Petersen (PCP), Davenport; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; *Curtis L. Rector (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.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

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.

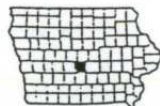
Using differences in plumage, I tried to determine the total number of birds present. At Saylorville, there were at least three birds; the possible dark subadult and two intermediate phase juveniles. There was also the dark phase juvenile present at Red Rock from 16-30 November. That makes a minimum 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).

612 1/2 W. Magnolia, Fort Collins, CO 80521

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.

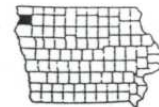
This is the eighth record of this species to be confirmed in Iowa. I suspect that a fair number may pass through our area undetected, since this bird was quite plain, in a mixed flock, and not in a highly birded area--a soybean field.

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 Binoscope 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.

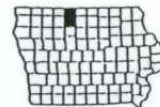
After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me 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: 1-2 juveniles

Location: Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA

Habitat: large lake

Date: 16,27 November 1996

Time: 1:12-1:55 p.m. on the 16th, 3:40-4:30 p.m. on the 27th

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014

Others who saw bird: Jim Sinclair, m.ob.

Description of bird(s): 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 watched the bird for about the next half hour and took a couple of distant photos.

The bird was gull-shaped with a wingspan slightly greater than that of a Ring-billed Gull. On the water, the bird was the same length as that of a Mallard. The wings were long and pointed with a large white patch at the base of the outer primaries. This was formed by white bases to at least the outer four (and possibly five) primary shafts. The underwings showed a lot of white in the outer primaries and a smaller white crescent on the underprimary coverts. The rump was paler than the mantle and barred. The entire bird was otherwise dark chocolate brown, except for a very slightly paler belly with dark barring. The tail was also dark, and the central rectrices were slightly elongated and blunt-tipped. In flight, there were a couple of small, pale patches on the flanks. The head was also dark brown with a darker (appeared black) patch around each eye. The bill was long and thick, similar in size and shape to the bill of a Ring-billed Gull. The distal one third of the bill was dark and the basal two thirds were paler and bluish-gray colored. Based on the very dark coloration and barred underparts, I concluded the bird was a dark phase juvenile.

On the 27th I observed two juveniles together above the dam. Both birds appeared identical in plumage. However, because of the distance and low light, I would hesitate to identify them to age and color phase. On the 30th, Jim Sinclair and I observed three jaegers together above and below the dam. The bird seen below the dam was very dark and lacked barring on the belly. This was probably the dark bird (possible subadult) seen earlier at Saylorville. The other two birds were only seen over the main lake. One was clearly darker than the other, and I suspect they were both juveniles, one dark phase and one intermediate phase. The intermediate phase bird may also have come from Saylorville.

Similar species and how eliminated: The size, shape, and white in the primaries ruled out all gull species. The combination of size, the large bill, large amount of white on the upperwing, white color in the underprimary coverts, and blunt-tipped central rectrices rule out juvenile Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good with overcast skies. Estimated viewing distance was mostly 200-400m, but I was within 100m of the bird a couple of times. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

96-55

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous individuals of all three species of jaegers off North Carolina and elsewhere. I have also seen Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers previously in Iowa, including two Pomarines the week prior to this sighting at Saylorville Reservoir.

References consulted: Kaufman Advanced Birding

How long before field notes made: written during observation

How long before this form completed: written 18 November 1996, updated 28 November

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Pomarine Jaeger (Juvenile)

LOCATION: Red Rock Reservoir (Marion County)

DATE & TIME: 17 November, 1996 (1:45-2:50 PM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: This bird was reportedly found by Steve Dinsmore on 16, November, and was reported by Jim Sinclair on 17 November. With me was Tom Kent. Seen later by M. Ob.

DESCRIPTION: When we arrived at the Red Rock dam, as we drove on top of the dam we observed a dark brown bird flying out over the lake from the face of the dam. It had white wing flashes. We pulled off and watched until it settled down on the water straight out from the dam outlet. We then watched it for nearly an hour, sitting and flying, from the platform at the visitor's center. This was a dark brown bird, and comparisons with Herring Gull and Ring-billed Gull were made as the jaeger harassed these birds. The bird was generally smaller and had narrower wings than the Herring Gull, and was slightly larger than any of the several Ring-billed Gulls it harassed. The bird's body was dark brown, but with an even darker tail, and mottling or barring on the underside and the rump. The head was a little lighter, but did have an almost black area in front of the eye. The bill was a blue-gray color and relatively small. A black tip could not be seen. No tail streamer extensions could be seen. In flight, the wings were quite long and pointed. The underwing was generally lighter, and showed quite prominent white mirrors at the base of the primaries. There was less white in the same location on the upperwing, but it was still quite noticeable. The bird was quite heavy-bodied, and when flying straightaway, the wingbeats seemed rather heavy and slow. It was seen to harass one Herring Gull and several Ring-billed Gulls, and pick up and eat a fish one of the Ring-billeds had dropped.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Parasitic Jaeger is smaller, does not show as much white flash either in the upperwing or undererwing, is slimmer bodied, and flies with quicker wingbeats. Long-tailed Jaeger has very little, if any, white flash in upperwing, has a slimmer body and a more graceful flight, and normally exhibits some tail streamers.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: The bird was observed through a KOWA TSN-4 telescope and sometimes in flight with Swift Aububon (8.5 X 44) binoculars. Distances ranged from 300-600 yards. Most of the viewing was looking toward the north in mid afternoon of a partly cloudy day.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were made in the car on the trip home. The National Geographic guide and Harrison's Seabirds guide were looked at during and after the viewing.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Pomarine Jaeger; **Number:** 1 juvenile

Location: Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA

Date: 17 November 1996; **Time:** 1:45 to 2:45 p.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: with Jim Fuller; reported in morning by Jim Sincliar.

Habitat and circumstances: above dam at large open reservoir.

Description of bird: I spotted the bird flying low over the water as I was driving across the north side of the dam, and Jim, using his binocular, said, "That's it." We could see that it was an all dark jaeger rather than a cormorant or first-year Herring Gull. It had long, pointed wings. On the upperwing there was a thin but prominent white line at the base of the primaries, and on the underwing the outer part "flashed" silver or white. The bird turned and flew south to the other side of the reservoir. We lost it about at the spillway and continued on to the observation deck at the Visitor's Center. From there we watched it swimming and flying for about an hour. From time to time it would take off and chase gulls. Once it was seen next to a Herring Gull - its wingspan and body bulk were less than that of the Herring Gull. Earlier, Jim had observed that it was slightly larger than a Ring-billed Gull. Its wing beat was heavy and slow compared to my previous experience with smaller jaegers. The base of the bill was blue-gray. I did not see the tip of the bill clearly. There was an irregular black area behind the bill and in front of the eye, much like the bird I photographed at Saylorville Reservoir in 1988. The rest of the head and body were dark brown and the wings were black (on resting bird). The white on the distal part of the underwing was extensive but there was brown anteriorly. The tail had a square tip, and I could not make out any extension centrally.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: Parasitic Jaeger is the only similar species. It is smaller, slimmer, and with more rapid wing beat.

Parasitic also has less white in the wing. I am unsure about the significance of the black in the face.

Any one have reservations?: no.

Light: Partly cloudy, sun mostly behind us; **Distance:** several hundred yards to one-half mile; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20-60 zoom scope.

Previous experience: I have seen each of the jaegers once before in Iowa and have seen all at sea and on nesting grounds.

References before/after viewing: With looked at National Geographic Guide and Harrison while viewing.

Time of notes: 3 hours; **Final typing:** 22 hours.

96-55

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What Species? Pomarine Jaeger

How many? 1

Location? Lake Red Rock, Marion Co.

Type of Habitat? Open water

When? November 18, 1996, 11:45 a.m., 12:15 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Who? Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: Dennis Henrickson (approximately 1:30 - 1:45 p.m.)

Others before or after you: Jim Fuller (before)

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.

I observed the bird briefly below the dam as it circled within 20 yards of me and then flew over the dam. I relocated it above the dam sitting on the water several hundred yards offshore, where I observed it at length. It flew several more times, once flying within 40 yards of my position.

It appeared to be a juvenile dark-phase individual. In general size and shape, similar to nearby Ring-billed Gulls, but much heavier-bodied and with a squarish head. Bill relatively thick, in length approximately 3/5 of the width of the head, dark gray with a lighter base, with a prominent hooked tip. Eye dark. Head, nape, neck, upper breast, back, coverts, and sides uniformly dark sooty brown, with no discernible streaking or barring. Folded primaries slightly darker brown than body. Upperside of the wing dark brown, with a prominent white patch at the base of the primaries. Underside of the wing dark brown, with a prominent white patch at the base of the primaries and a smaller white crescent at the base of the primary coverts. Belly grayish-brown, slightly lighter than upperparts. Uppertail and undertail coverts barred horizontally with grayish-white and dark brown. Tail feathers dark brown. Central tail feathers projected very slightly beyond remainder of tail, and appeared square-tipped.

In flight, wing beats were strong and deep, and flight was swift and direct compared to the numerous Ring-billed Gulls in the area. I believe it was vocalizing during flight, a sharp, short "keer", different from the calls of the gulls.

Similar species; how eliminated: The shape of the central tail feathers is diagnostic. The relative size and bulkiness of the bird, the overall dark brown head and body with no streaking or light areas, the extensive white areas on the wings, the bill length, shape and color, and the barring on the tail coverts are all suggestive of this species compared to Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No.

Viewing conditions: Mostly cloudy; viewed 20-300 yards away with 8 x 40 binoculars and 15x-45x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No previous experience with jaegers.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Advanced Birding, National Geographic Field Guide.

How long before field notes made? During observation.

How long before this form completed? Five hours.

Species: Pomarine Jaeger

Number: 2+

Location: Redrock dam, Marion Co.

Observer: Ray Cummins

Others before/with/after: with Tom Johnson

Date: 12/1/96 Time bird seen: 8:00am to 12:40am

Habitant: Openwater

Circumstances: Sighted flying above the dam. We relocated 2 possibly 3 birds many times both above and below the dam. They were flying or setting anywhere from 150 to 600yds. They harassed Ring-billed gulls several times. Their jizz was quite direct and continuous.

Description: They appeared all black from a distance and when they were setting. However, it was easy to see the white in the wings when the birds flared. The white on the upper wing was limited to the base of the primaries, but on the under wing it continued into the base of the secondaries. Also there was white at base of the greater primary coverts. These two white areas were separated by a short black bar formed by the rest of the greater primary covert. The birds were the same size as Ring-billed gulls. The head was small compared to gulls. The bill was dark, thin, and smaller than Ring-billed's. The body was quite heavy for this size of bird. I could not see the tail streamers.

Description of voice: n/heard

Similarly appearing species: Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers would not have as heavy a body or the extensive white with the greater primary covert bar.

Distance: 150 to 600yds

Optical equipment: 8x40 binoculars & a Kowa 20x to 60x spotting scope.

Light: Excellent at times.

Previous experience with species: none.

Anyone have any reservations: no.

Books and references: Seabirds by Harrison & NG

Time of field notes: none.

Final typing: 12/1/96.

Signature: Ray Cummins Address: 609 S. Main Street, Centerville, IA 52544.

Date: 12/1/96