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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD

UNUSUAL RECORD

CFO-ORC FILE # _____

Species: Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)**Date:** 31 October 1999**Number seen:** one**Sex:** Male? **Plumage:** Juvenile**Locality:** Standley Lake**Elevation:** about 1600m**Nearest town:** Westminster**County:** Jefferson**Time observed:** about 07:30 - 09:30 MST**Duration of observation:** off and on during that time period for a total of about 1.5 hours**Description:** This bird had been found the day before (30 October) by Norm Erthal. We viewed it from the south side of the reservoir and it was usually near the north side.

The bird was obviously a juvenile jaeger (overall coloration brown; long, pointed wings; white flashes at base of primaries underneath; central rectrices not obviously extended beyond rest of tail; and strong, snappy wingbeats in level flight and almost flickering wingbeats while in turbo mode chasing gulls). It was also obviously at the darker end of the color continuum of juvenile jaegers (head as dark as back, belly all brown). We watched this bird, mostly at long distance, chase Ring-billed and California gulls around. We were almost convinced that it was a Parasitic, due to being quite lanky and appearing about the same size as a Ring-billed Gull (it turned out to be slightly larger than RBGU) and apparently not having white bases to the underside primary coverts. We continued to watch it, endeavoring to get firm details on the pattern of the primary coverts, axillars and the rest of the underwing, and the upper and undertail coverts. As we watched it further and got somewhat closer looks at the bird, we saw most of the features of a fairly dark juvenile Pomarine (which was disappointing as most of us really wanted it to be a Parasitic).

The bird's head was very dark. The bill shape and pattern were nearly impossible to determine due to the long viewing distance, but at one point when it was much closer, the bill appeared to be bi-colored (dark distally, pale proximally). The upperside looked mostly featureless medium-dark brown, without the rufous cast that young Parasitics usually show. The upper and undertail coverts were strongly marked with alternating blackish and white bars; this was the palest part of the upperside. The tail was wholly dark. The underparts were entirely about the same coloration as the upperparts, except for the flanks (which were barred) and aforementioned undertail coverts. The wings were strongly patterned underneath, with obvious white flashes at the bases of the primaries (about 2/5 to 1/2 of the primaries) on both wings. Additionally, we could see that the bases of the primary coverts were extensively white, forming a semi-circular white patch proximal to the white primary flash and being separated from that flash by the dark tips to the primary coverts. The undersides of the secondaries were strongly barred blackish and tan. The axillars were even more strongly and broadly barred, but with black and white, creating an obvious contrast with the dark body and a still apparent, but less noticeable contrast with the secondaries.

Similar species eliminated: Juvenile and Basic I gulls are all eliminated by plumage pattern, wing shape, and flight style. The only real confusion candidates are the other two jaeger species. Plumage features of dark juvenile Pomarine and Long-tailed jaegers can be very similar. A

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behavioral feature can help eliminate the latter as a candidate: the bird's exceedingly aggressive chases of Ring-billed and California gulls. Though the bird was on the small, slim end of Pomarines, the wings were too broad-based for Long-tailed, thus not creating the very long-ended look of that species (having a lot of body and tail behind the wings as compared to the projection of the head in front of the wings). This also helps create the powerful and fluid wingbeats typical of Pomarine (and this individual) versus the more tern-like wingbeats of Long-tailed. The pattern present on the underwing, particularly those of the primary coverts and axillars, rule out Parasitic, as Parasitics as dark as this bird have very little if any patterning on the underwing.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): No vocalizations heard.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen 100s of Pomarines, >75 Parasitics, and >45 Long-tails. Importantly, I had recently spent three weeks in Alaska (Aug/Sept 1999) where I saw all three species, including numerous Poms and Long-tails. I have seen uncountable bazillions of dark, immature gulls (e.g. Heermann's, California, and Herring).

Light conditions: sun behind me

Optical equipment used: Kowa 30x and Zeiss 7x42

Distance, and how estimated: most of the time, the bird was 1000-1700m away, but occasionally came as close as about 300m

Other observers who saw the bird with you: John Vanderpoel, Norm Erthal, Joe Roller, Joey Kellner, and Loch Kilpatrick

Other observers who saw the bird independently: someone reported it the next day, but I know not who

If photographed, type of equipment and film: did not photograph

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



Address: Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: Written on 20 August 2000 from notes written on the morning of 31 October 1999 (about 30 minutes after last seeing the bird).