

The History and Status of Jaeger Migration in Illinois

by Steven D. Bailey

Early ornithologists present a rather confusing account of jaeger status in Illinois. Ridgway (1881, 1895), Woodruff (1907), and Gault (1922) list few records for any jaegers, with the few noted apparently being based mainly upon a few sightings by Nelson from 1876. From these sightings, all three jaegers were considered winter visitants only, with Ridgway (1895) stating for Pomarine Jaeger "doubtless visits Lake Michigan in winter."

Pre-1950 records for any jaeger species in Illinois are few and far between. Ford (1956) summarizes all apparent records from the Chicago region before 1950. These include two records (2 birds) for Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) and five plus records of a minimum of 13 Parasitic Jaegers (*S. parasiticus*), including 3 specimens. There apparently was a good "flight at Chicago where seven were seen in one day...from Oct. 19, 1949 to the end of Nov."

By the mid 1950s, jaegers were apparently known as "casual visitors" at best (Ford 1956), but beginning about 1955, some bellwethers in jaeger observation appeared. Raymond Grow and Jim Landing were two of these observers, although most sightings initially came from nearby places in Indiana at the southern tip of Lake Michigan near Gary (at Miller Beach) where an ornithologist named Herbert Stoddard had done some earlier collecting of jaegers. Following some exceptional flight years, Landing (1966) summarized his sightings, but also see Mlodinow (1984).

Unfortunately, it would be more than a decade before jaeger observations became a regular part of the state's ornithological records. In fact, between 1950 and 1969, there were only three years when any reports of jaegers in Illinois were published, even though in the fall of 1951 "many observers" in the Chicago area saw jaegers, all thought to be Parasitic, migrating along the Lake Michigan shore (Nolan 1952). Other than that record and Ford's, the only published accounts of jaegers for the state prior to 1969 were 1 juvenile Parasitic, 22 September 1960 (Eiseman and Shank 1962), 1 Pomarine and 10 unidentified jaeger species at Chicago in the fall of 1966 (Petersen 1967), and "several jaegers, including one Pomarine and one Parasitic" at Chicago in the fall of 1967 (Petersen 1968). Apparently, the large flights occurring just across the Indiana border did not extend around the south end of the lakefront into Chicago in 1956, 1957, and 1965.

Jaegers have been seen and reported in Illinois every single year from 1970 through 2001 (see Table 1). Between 1970 and 1973, 18 jaegers (9 Parasitic, 9 unknown) were tallied, including some of the first downstate records in years (see Bohlen 1989), at Lake Chautauqua. Beginning in 1974, with Kleen's mimeographed Illinois Department of Conserva-

tion Seasonal Reports, records (for all bird species) were solicited in a more regular and orderly fashion than in previous years. Although most of these birds were reported to the national publication "American Birds," more detail and sometimes additional records can be found in the seasonal reports by Kleen from 1974 through 1984 and later in "Illinois Birds & Birding" from 1985 through 1991.

Much of my summary of jaeger records begins with the last 27 years of recordings, beginning in 1974 with Kleen's seasonal reports. These reports initiated the first real attempt at soliciting documentation of some of the rare or difficult-to-identify species in the state, including all the jaegers. Unfortunately, most jaeger sightings, including all Parasitic sightings, especially along the Chicago lakefront, continued to be accepted at face value until 1996.

Beginning with the first report of the newly formed Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC), a review list of bird species was compiled, which included a request for all three jaeger species to be documented, everywhere within the state (see Goetz and Robinson 1988). However many records continued to be accepted from "experienced" observers until 1996 when only documented records of immature jaegers were accepted (see Chapel 1997, 1998). All data within this paper reflect the most recent decisions, both published and unpublished, by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee. A few older records still await review; the observers' identifications are used in these instances. This decision makes sense, since virtually all jaeger records before at least 1974 were accepted at face value by earlier authors (see Ford 1956, Mlodinow 1984, Bohlen 1989).

Misidentifications

Very few jaeger records before the early 1970s came with any real evidence to support an accurate identification to



Immature Long-tailed Jaeger. 13 September 2000. Lake Chautauqua, Havana, Illinois. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.