

golf courses and fields.” He continues that these aspects of the species’ migration and lifestyle are indeed, relevant to their identification, and that a “personality” starts to form, quite different from Arctic Skua (i.e. Parasitic Jaeger), with implications for identification on at least behavioral grounds.” McGeehan also specifically mentions the species “kittiwake-like” appearance in flight. He describes the species’ “combination of stall, swoop and drop to the surface ... with the bird no sooner having landed, then it is off again.” This is the exact behavior noted by the author on the 1999 Carlyle Lake bird as it followed our boat. I find no mention of such behavioral traits specifically attributable to either Parasitic or Pomarine Jaeger, and such behaviors likely rarely if ever occur in these species. In fact, Olsen and Larsson (1997) state that “juveniles (Long-tailed) are often recorded feeding on worms and smaller animals on newly ploughed [sic] fields in autumn, a habit unknown for Arctic Skua (Parasitic).” They also mention Long-taileds regularly hover, catching insects or fish by direct hunting, characteristics exhibited by both of Illinois’ accepted Long-tailed Jaegers. Most studies on jaegers have been conducted on the breeding grounds, or

involve jaegers in constant, direct flight in coastal or oceanic areas. However, a few behavioral traits noted in such areas show the species’ more diverse behavioral traits as compared to the other two species of jaeger.

Plumage Characteristics

A few points should be made as to why the Chautauqua bird is indeed a Long-tailed Jaeger. The chart below, along with accompanying photos, should be helpful for birders trying to separate Parasitic from Long-tailed. A variety of excellent sources on juvenile jaeger identification were used to prepare the chart, including Mather (1981), Cramp and Simmons (1983), Olsen and Christensen (1984), Olsen and Jonsson (1989), Kaufman (1990), Jonsson (1992), McGeehan (1995), Olsen and Larsson (1997), Sherony and Brock (1997), Wiley and Lee (1998, 1999), and Sibley (2000).

These plumage traits disregard the darkest forms of each species (10 percent or less of all birds). Many of these traits may only be visible on birds seen at close range — and/or perched birds.

The 1999 and 2000 Long-tailed Jaegers in Illinois provided not only a unique opportunity to observe a

Characteristic	Parasitic	Long-Tailed
General coloration	Warm brown, usually tinged with rust or orangish; may appear darker especially depending on lighting conditions	Always a cold tinge, never rusty tinge; may vary from ashy gray to blackish-brown depending on lighting conditions.
Head color	Brown to reddish-brown; always shows some distinct streaking even on palest individuals	Grayish to whitish; streaking usually confined to crown and forehead
Head appearance	More “flattened” appearance; often pointed toward back of head	Rounded
Nape	Often paler than the rest of the head (but streaked), contrasting with overall dark head (except palest individuals).	Pale with little or no streaking often contrasting, especially with top of head and mantle.
Bill	Black nail on tip of bill, ~25 to 30 percent of the bill; proportionally longer, slimmer bill	Black nail on tip of bill, ~ 40 to 50 percent of the bill; proportionally shorter, thicker bill
Belly/breast band	No contrast or breast band between upper breast and belly	Pale, un-streaked upper belly with darker breast band in between breast and lower belly
Outer primary shafts, dorsal surface	3 to 8 (very rarely 2); all-white	2 (very rarely 3 to 4); all-white
Primary tips	Pale fringes (usually noticed only on perched birds); sometimes forming distinct crescents	Mainly all dark (usually noticed only on perched birds)
Secondary and upperwing covert contrast	In flight, little contrast between secondaries and upperwing coverts	In flight, dark secondaries contrast sharply with remainder of wing, especially upperwing coverts
Base of wings	Wider than Long-tailed with more rounded wing tip	More narrow than Parasitic, with a more pointed wing tip
Uppertail coverts	Usually with little or no contrast with rest of dorsal surface; barring more indistinct, often forming a jumbled or wavy pattern of black and dirty white	Usually in sharp contrast to darker back and tail; barring usually very bold, with neat (i.e., forming) straight black and white lines
Central tail feathers	Sharp or pointed; short extension	Blunt or rounded; usually extending farther than Parasitic