

rare species at an unusually close range, but they also gave downstate birders (as well as those Chicagoland birders who came to see the jaegers) a chance to acquaint themselves with some of the more subtle and often confusing plumage characteristics of this difficult group of birds. Such fine details of plumage and other field marks are often not possible on the mostly “fly-by” jaeger observations to be had on Lake Michigan. With some of the fine photos and video taken of these birds, especially of the 2000 Lake Chautauqua Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaegers, it is now easy to understand how it was possible for various observers to think there were two separate jaegers involved in the 1999 Carlyle sighting. In fact, in discussions on IBET (Illinois’ birding list serve) some disputes arose not only concerning the Lake Chautauqua “Pomasitic” jaeger that was later identified as a Parasitic, but also over the actual colors of the Long-tailed there. Eric Walters’ statements concerning the phenomenon of how light and other variables may affect a bird’s description (and thus an observer’s documentation and identification), are especially pertinent. In dispute of one observer’s description of the 2000 Lake Chautauqua Long-tailed Jaeger as having a “cold, gray plumage,” Walters stated, “I would like to dispute this. When I was there under a clear blue sky at about 2:30 p.m. on Friday, I saw no gray at all anywhere on the bird. I knew it was supposed to have it, and I looked hard from very close range, but there was none at all. This, no doubt, was a function of the overhead bright sun making the gray color a much more bleached-out whitish color. Later, closer to 5 p.m., when the sun was starting to set, the colors of this bird changed, and it seemed like the element of gray coloration was coming in. This just shows how different optics under different lighting conditions, on different days, from different viewing angles and different distances, can cause bird descriptions and documentation to be very different.” This phenomenon was the likely reason why the Lake Carlyle bird was being described as two separate jaegers, one gray and one dark bird, depending on what time

of day observers were viewing it and under what lighting conditions (see Kassebaum 2001). Dennis Oehmke’s photos in Figures 3 and 4 illustrate Walters’ points very well.

With this said, the various plumage characteristics, which were noted by observers and which can be seen in the various photographs in this paper, provided for a fairly straightforward identification of the 2000 Lake Chautauqua Long-tailed. With all I have seen and read, I would judge the 2000 Lake Chautauqua Long-tailed Jaeger to have been an intermediate morph juvenile, grading toward the light end of that color morph. Although most field guides give a rendition of a light or pale morph, intermediate morph, and dark morph for this and the other two jaeger species, individuals will range in a gradation or “sliding-scale” between all of these color forms (Olsen and Larsson 1997). The Lake Chautauqua bird seemed much paler about the head, nape, and belly than most photos and renditions of intermediate morph, but was not nearly as pale as the renditions of birds noted as pale morph in various field guides. For comparative photographs, see Mactavish (1995), a slightly darker bird on page 15, and Olsen and Larsson (1997), a slightly lighter bird in Figure 121 on page 157.

The most succinct reason this bird was a Long-tailed Jaeger can be found in a statement by D. Sibley (see Sherony and Brock 1997). Sibley stated “Parasitics rarely show extremely pale heads or underparts; consequently, any juvenile with a pale head or belly is a prime Long-tailed candidate. Juvenile Long-taileds with smooth, gray breasts and contrasting white bellies are distinctive,” i.e., diagnostic. The only caveat to that statement is “any juvenile.” See Figure 5 for comments



Figures 3 and 4. On these two photos, taken one week apart, notice how the bird in Figure 3 appears to have an overall cold, grayish tint to the plumage, while the bird in Figure 4 appears to be very dark, almost blackish brown, except for the nape and sides of head. Figure 3 was taken under overcast conditions on 20 September 2000, while Figure 4 was taken in direct, afternoon sun. Dennis Oehmke took both of these photos of the 2000 Long-tailed Jaeger at Lake Chautauqua.