

Mississippi Jaeger Sightings: Fall 1985

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At 1100 on 26 August 1985, Toups watched an immature Parasitic Jaeger (Stercorarius parasiticus) for more than 10 minutes from the west tip of Bellefontaine Beach, Jackson County, Mississippi. A tropical depression brewed in the Gulf of Mexico, causing low clouds, intermittent rain, and moderate winds. She saw the jaeger as close as 300 m as it harrassed gulls and terns which followed a shrimp boat in from the south. She used 7 X 35 binoculars.

Toups recognized the bird as a jaeger by its behavior, having seen both Parasitic and Pomarine (S. pomarinus) jaegers off the coasts of Massachusetts and California. The jaeger was roughly the size of a Laughing Gull (Larus atricilla) by direct size comparison. Its plumage was entirely dark, with the exception of pale primary bases, which were more apparent on the underwing than the upperwing. The wedge-shaped tail was slightly rounded, with no elongated central feathers. Toups judged the bird to be a Parasitic Jaeger on the basis of its size, the white of the wing which was less prominent than that of Pomarine Jaeger, and the generally more slender build than the latter.

Hodges saw a Parasitic Jaeger at 1100 on 26 September 1985 about 4 km south of Horn Island, Jackson County. Observations were made at about 40 m with 7 X 35 binoculars for about 15 seconds. Skies were partly cloudy and winds were moderate.

This immature bird was also the same size as the Laughing Gulls which it pursued. Hodges noted its long, pointed wings and slightly wedge-shaped tail (without long central feathers). The bird was almost entirely dark brown, with pale primary bases forming a well-demarcated, contrasting white patch near the wrist on both wings. The bird flew with swift, deep wing-beats, maneuvering very quickly in its pursuit of the gulls.

Hodges has seen this species in the Pacific Ocean, and Pomarine Jaegers there and in the Gulf of Mexico. Pomarine and

Long-tailed (*S. longicaudus*) jaegers were ruled out because they are respectively too large and too small, since the bird was the size of a Laughing Gull.

The Parasitic Jaeger has been documented on the Mississippi coast (Gandy and Turcotte 1970); there are at least six records between the dates of 4 September and 6 May. There are also several records of unidentified jaegers from the Mississippi coast, including one seen by Hodges on 29 October 1985 in association with Hurricane Juan.

Literature Cited

Gandy, B.E. and W.H. Turcotte. 1970. Catalog of Mississippi bird records. State Wildlife Museum, Jackson, Mississippi.