

First record of Long-tailed Jaeger for South Georgia

THIS NOTE REPORTS THE FIRST Long-tailed Jaeger (Skua), *Stercorarius longicaudus*, for the island of South Georgia in the south Atlantic Ocean.

In light of the recent documentation of Long-tailed Jaeger sightings in the Falkland Current (Veit, 1985), the South Georgia sighting represents a significant, albeit not totally unexpected, southeastward range extension for this species. Details of the Long-tailed sighting and supporting photographs were submitted to the British Antarctic Survey (B.A.S.) in Cambridge, and the identification was confirmed by Peter Prince of the B.A.S. staff. As a result, the Long-tailed Jaeger has been added, officially, to the South Georgia bird list. A summary of the details follows.

On January 15, 1984, I was searching for nesting Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) in an area called Horsehead, southeast of Grytviken, South Georgia, and on the perimeter of Cumberland Bay. Grytviken is the site of one of the most famous, but now abandoned, southern ocean whaling stations; Horsehead is located about two to three miles from this station, on the northwestern edge of Moraine Fjord, adjacent to Cumberland Bay. Horsehead is an area of tussock hillside and cliffs, rising to a few hundred meters, with numerous outcrops on which, according to members of the resident British military contingent, the albatrosses were rumored to be courting and, perhaps, nesting. However, the outcrops were only accessible by hiking upwards from the shingle beach outlining the rim of the fjord, and good views of albatross activity on the outcrops could not be assured.

After proceeding a few kilometers south of Horsehead, toward the head of the fjord, a Light-mantled Sooty was encountered, gliding and soaring overhead, and regularly swooping down past a particular cliffside ledge. After climbing 100 meters up the tussock slope to get a better view, another Light-mantled Sooty was found sitting

on this particular ledge, but it was impossible to see whether or not it was guarding eggs or chicks; in any event, it was paying close attention to the swooping albatross overhead.

In the course of nudging upward, and closer, to the sitting albatross, and trying to photograph both it and its swooping suitor, a much smaller seabird, which was clearly a small jaeger (skua), appeared from behind the cliff-face. It rose quickly, almost directly over the site where I was perched, shaking its extremely long and obvious tail streamers, then, within 30 seconds, dropping back behind the ridge, never to reappear. It was unquestionably a Long-tailed Jaeger (Skua), and a few "grab-shots" were obtained. (VIREO/n04/1/001&002.)

The jaeger's central rectrices were substantially long and unbroken, and there was no juvenile or basic-plumage-streaking visible on the seabird's underparts, upperparts, or axillaries. It possessed a small, black cap, with a white upper breast and a gray quarter-collar around the neck; dark lower belly and vent; dark underwings; the white color on the upperwings was confined to the two outer primaries; and, the seabird showed no signs of molt on the body, the remiges, or the rectrices. It appeared to be an adult bird in rather fresh plumage.

Veit (1985) encountered few adult Long-taileds on his winter cruises, and these resembled alternate-plumaged adults, except that they lacked elongated central rectrices and had pale edges to the mantle feathers and more

extensively dark bellies. Cramp and Simmons (1983) indicate that Long-tailed Jaeger adults that were successful breeders generally complete their post-breeding molt (complete, primaries descendant, head and most of the the body) October to December, with larger scapulars, back, rump, tail, and wing November to February or March, and with a pre-breeding partial molt of head, body, and central rectrices, mainly March to April, with the central rectrices needing 30-40 days to become full-grown.

Lacking the benefit of a long observation and a seabird-in-the-hand, the apparently fresh, adult plumage of the South Georgia Long-tailed Jaeger suggests an early molter, perhaps a failed breeder. Conclusions must be guarded, however, pending future observations of this species in and around South Georgia.

Special thanks to Peter Prince, British Antarctic Survey, for his comments and analysis of notes and photographs regarding this sighting.

LITERATURE CITED

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