

# ONTARIO BIRDS



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Cover Illustration: Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)  
by *Barry Kent MacKay*

## Letters

### Jaeger Quiz

I enjoyed Bob Curry's photo quiz analysis of the two Pomarine Jaegers (*Ontario Birds* 19: 139-143), and especially liked the football analogy, which was a refreshing departure from the staid treatment of jaegers found in most of the literature.

Photographs of jaegers inevitably provoke differing viewpoints regarding species or age determination, with well known ambiguity of physical characters being a problem, compounded by the difficulty of interpreting them in the one dimensional product of a camera. Thus, I am offering a different opinion on the age of the Pomarine in Figure 2. It would appear to be a dark morph adult (definitive alternate) with no apparent sign of prebasic molt, rather than a juvenile, as stated.

Several features are important in this regard. The smooth, very dark head and underparts, including the underwing coverts, breast, belly and

ventral region, differ from a typical juvenile, which is not so solidly dark, and also has contrasting light and dark barring on the underwing and undertail coverts. There does not appear to be any suggestion of a whitish patch at the base of the greater underprimary coverts. This patch is characteristic of most juveniles but is not found on adults. The broad, projecting central rectrices give the impression of having the tips broken off. This condition is well known in some late summer adults. The literature indicates consistently that there is only a minuscule projection of the central rectrices in juveniles, with even, round tips. The length and irregular look to the tips of the central rectrices of this bird would seem to preclude a juvenile.

Rather than detracting from Bob's instructive work, I hope that my comments will stimulate some useful thought and discussion on the photographs.

Kevin McLaughlin, 30 Bingham Road, Hamilton, Ontario L8H 1N4

### Bob Curry comments:

It is difficult to argue with Kevin McLaughlin's careful comments on Pomarine 2. Nevertheless, let me try! My sense of this photo is that the bird was back lit and consequently the photo is underexposed. This, I felt, accounted for the apparent lack of patterning and barring on the underparts. Many times, I've seen juvenile Pominines in life which appeared, under the conditions, to be all dark until the lighting changed. I do detect

light bases to the underprimary coverts which, again, could be faint on account of the lighting and photograph. That said, the length of the central rectrices gave me trouble at the time of analysis for the Photo Quiz. These feathers are the best argument for aging as an adult. As Kevin states, identification of birds in photographs is fraught with difficulty, but he may well be correct in his analysis.