

Malar Patterns of Light-phase Adult Jaegers

The three species of jaegers (Pomarine *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Parasitic *S. parasiticus*, and Long-tailed *S. longicaudus*) constitute a notoriously difficult problem in field recognition. Immature birds pose the most excruciating aspects of this difficulty; but even typical light-phase adults may confuse inexperienced observers, especially if the distinctive central tail feathers are broken or missing. For this reason, practically any character separating the species may be worth noting.

Although it seems not to be mentioned in any of the standard references, I have always received the impression that light phase adults of each species displayed a different facial expression. Part of this, of course, is due to differences in bill shape. But I believe that another major factor is the pattern of the malar region — the tract of feathers extending back from the base of the lower mandible.

In light phase adult Pomarine Jaegers, this area is almost always entirely deep black, imparting a “heavy-jawed” appearance and emphasizing the bulk of the bill. The adult Long-tailed has the basal, or forward, part of the malar region black, sharply set off from the whitish or yellowish rear portion; the black area usually extends only one-third to one-half as far back as in the Pomarine. Light phase adult Parasitic Jaegers are more variable in this character. Their malar areas may be mainly whitish, with only a gray central smudge, or they may be mostly dark gray, shading to blackish centrally; but it is a good general rule that the *darkest* portion of their malar areas lies at the *center* — and that the color pales somewhat toward the base of the lower mandible. In the figure below I have sketched out typical examples of the malar pattern in each species.

I would like to thank Dr. George E. Watson for allowing me to check my impressions against the collection in the U.S. National Museum, Washington, D.C. —
Kenn Kaufman, Post Office Box 43294, Tucson, AZ 85733.

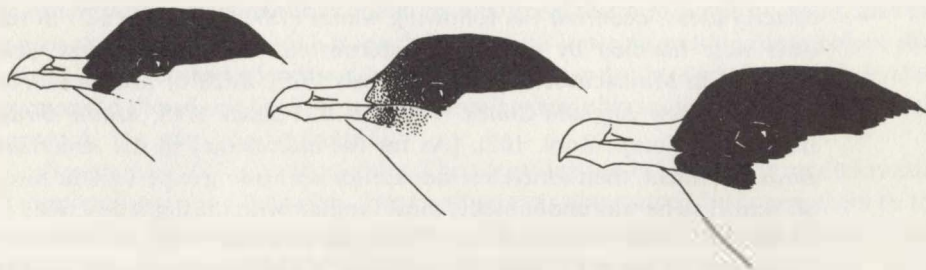


Diagram to show malar patterns of adult light-phased Long-tailed (left), Parasitic (center), and Pomarine (right) jaegers.