

FIRST MISSISSIPPI RECORD OF LONG-TAILED JAEGER

Gene and Shannon Knight
79 Hwy 9 W
Oxford, MS 38655

On 9 September 2000, we were birding on Enid Lake at Long Branch Landing when we spotted a *Stercorarius* sp. sitting out on the lake. There weren't any prior records of jaegers away from the Gulf Coast, so we had little experience with this genus. It was a dark juvenal plumaged bird. While preening, it gave us glimpses of a small amount of white in the outer wing, small completely dark head, and dark barred breast. It began flying around and out into the lake out of sight. During this flight we could see the white crescent at the base of the primaries on the underwing. Size was somewhat comparable to Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). We ruled out Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) due to the size. We needed help so we made a phone call to Jeff Wilson in Bartlett, TN and invited him down for much needed assistance. He assured us that the probability of a Long-tailed Jaeger was excellent, given the time of the year and our description of the bird.

By the time Jeff arrived, we had watched the jaeger flying around out in the middle of the lake for an hour or so and now there were two in sight. The second individual was lighter than the original bird. For the next few hours we watched the two birds through scopes at various distances, noting that their flight characteristics were identical and they were definitely the same size. We noticed that they had very narrow wings compared to the amount of body and tail extending beyond the wings. The darker flight feathers contrasted with the paler-edged upper wing-coverts. Since neither bird was an adult, the short central tail streamers present were rounded, not long and pointed as on mature birds.

Another diagnostic feature on the birds was the amount of white on the shaft of the outer primaries was limited to only the outer two (Figure 1). These features clearly eliminated Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), the remaining species in this hard to differentiate group. We were looking at the first sighting of Long-tailed Jaeger in Mississippi and needed photos to validate our suspicions.

The next day we came prepared with help from Marvin Davis and Judy and Dick Burkepile. Judy's sister's husband had a fishing boat nearby and he carried us out for closer views and photographic documentation. Marvin and Jeff took several photos as the two jaegers allowed close-up viewing of features not seen the day before (Figure 2). The straight black and white barring of the undertail coverts (Figure 3) and clear pale area on the belly are diagnostic for Long-tailed. Parasitic coverts are usually curvy and brown and buff in color. The heads were unstreaked and there was no pale mark seen around the bill or on the forehead usually seen on Parasitic.

This is the first sighting of Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) in Mississippi. The jaegers were seen only on 9 and 10 September 2000. Other mid-south states with records of this jaeger species prior to 2001 include the following: Arkansas has four records (all single juveniles seen, and all at Millwood Lake in southwest Arkansas from 5 September to 20 October), Tennessee has three records (one adult and two juveniles) from the western part of the state seen from 27 August to 5 September, Alabama has two coastal records (one adult and one juvenile both seen in early September), and Louisiana has two coastal records (both seen in Spring).



Figure 1. Juvenile dark morph Long-tailed Jaeger at Enid Lake, Yalobusha Co., MS. Photographed on 10 September 2000 by Jeff Wilson.



Figure 2. Juvenile light (left) and dark (right) morph Long-tailed Jaegers at Enid Lake, Yalobusha Co., MS. Photographed on 10 September 2000 by Jeff Wilson.



Figure 3. Juvenile light morph Long-tailed Jaeger at Enid Lake, Yalobusha Co., MS. Photographed 10 September 2000 by Jeff Wilson.

Acknowledgments

We thank Jeff Wilson for helping us confirm the identification of the jaegers and permitting use of the photographs for publication. We thank Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee Records Committees for supplying records of Long-tailed Jaeger in their respective states.