

Pelagic Birds in the Gulf of Maine

*A report based on observations from the
ferry M.V. Bluenose with extensive notes
on identification. Part II.*

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PHALAROPES: *Phalaropodidae*

Red and Northern Phalaropes occur in the Gulf of Maine as apparently scarce spring and common fall migrants. Both species are small shorebirds with proportionately long tails and a curious chesty or pot-bellied look when arising from the water. Flocks of phalaropes are commonly found afloat in off-shore patches or streaks of rockweed, are often first detected by voice, and are occasionally seen in distant towering flocks resembling drifting clouds of smoke.

Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*)

Status: June-Sept.: Seen on about 50% of the crossings between July 10 and 31, 100% of the crossings thereafter. The maximum count is 3500 on Aug. 29, 1968 (RWS) but counts near 500 are more typical during the peak period. There are records for June 12 and 19, but these may represent late northbound birds. The earliest presumptive southbound bird occurred on June 25. Oct.-May: Red Phalaropes have the most extended fall migration period of any shorebird, remaining in the Gulf of Maine until December, the latest record from the "Bluenose" being Dec. 11, 1975; numbers up to 50 can be expected through October. Spring migration is more compressed: although no trips have been made in April, there are coastal records of Reds in the last week of the month and northbound birds occur at these latitudes as late as early June.

Field Identification: Red and Northern Phalaropes are often confused. Virtually all mid-summer Red Phalaropes are adults in "winter" plumage, best identified by their uniformly light gray backs devoid of streaking or dark feathers, making them strikingly pale both afloat and in flight. Northerns are darker overall, with more contrasting wing stripes and pronounced light stripes on the back. In addition, Reds are considerably larger and appear chunkier. Northerns in comparison appearing more slender-bodied, with smaller heads and thinner necks and bills. The calls of the two species are different: a sharp metallic "beek" in Red Phalarope, a flatter "bik" in Northern. As a word of caution we note that molting adult Red Phalaropes can retain dark back feathers, giving them a mottled look, though such birds are rarely seen from the "Bluenose" and usually show other vestiges of breeding plumage such as rusty patches on the underparts. Juvenal Reds appearing in early September are notably darker-backed than adults, with a buffy wash on the upper breast and rusty areas on the sides of the rump, and in a context of pale adults these birds can be mistaken for Northerns as they are not particularly pale in appearance. Also, contrary to most descriptions, virtually all fall Reds in the Gulf of Maine have bills appearing entirely black. As a final complication, almost all the other small shorebirds have been recorded in modest numbers on mid- to late summer crossings. Sanderling, the species most closely resembling phalaropes, is apparently

rare, however. The two phalaropes exhibit a fairly marked ecological separation, Northerns usually occurring close to shore, within two hours of Bar Harbor and one hour of Yarmouth, while Reds occur more regularly in the central portion of the crossing.

Northern Phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*)

Status: June-Sept.: Seen on about 50% of the trips between July 14 and 31 and 100% of the crossings thereafter. A maximum count of 598 was recorded on Sept. 1, 1976, but counts of 50–100 are more typical. Northbound birds have been seen on two of three trips in the first week of June and can be expected in small numbers during this period. The earliest record indicating southbound movement was July 10. Oct.-May: As fall migrants, Northerns appear to arrive later and leave earlier than Reds. The latest fall record is of 15 on Oct. 26, 1971 and there are no spring "Bluenose" records before the third week of May.

Curiously, "Bluenose" records fail entirely to reflect the abundance of Northern Phalaropes in nearby waters. About 100 miles east-northeast of Bar Harbor, in lower Passamaquoddy Bay, one of the largest concentrations of these birds in North America occurs annually in late summer and early fall, where up to three million have been estimated in late August. A short distance south of the "Bluenose" route similarly immense numbers gather in areas of upwelling around Mount Desert Rock, where more than two million birds have been estimated in early September.

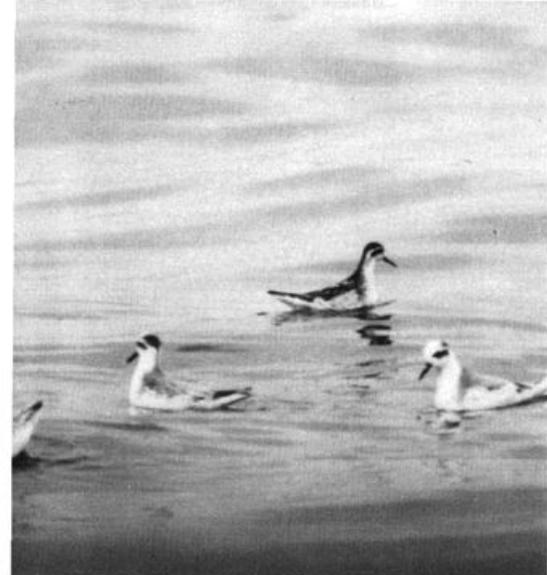
Field Identification: See Red Phalarope.

JAEGERS AND SKUAS: *Stercorariidae*

Four species are known as late spring to fall visitors to the Gulf of Maine. All are dark, gull-like seabirds which in flight show a variably intense white flash at the base of the primaries. Two species, Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, occur in a range of color phases. All pursue gulls and terns piratically and often spectacularly, but are more typically seen in leisurely flight, frequently well above the horizon, where their slender, angled and pointed wings give them a silhouette quite different from that of the large gulls. Floating birds look small-headed compared with shearwaters, and appear straight-necked, chesty and high-sterned, carrying their bills about horizontally. Readily identifiable adult jaegers with rectrices intact constitute an unfortunately small percentage of "Bluenose" sightings. By far the largest number of jaegers are immatures and subadults, and these are best identified by shape and manner of flight. It is a common misconception that jaegers, in particular Pomarines and Parasitics, are separable on the basis of relative intensity of wing-flash. While it is true that the number of ivory quills diminishes more or less with species size, wing-flash results from white-based primaries rather than quills, and this is angle-dependent, individually variable, and often simply hard to judge.

Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

Status: June-Sept.: The earliest record is of a single bird on June 26, 1968, and after that date Pomarines have been seen on about 25% of the summer crossings. They appear to have increased in recent years, perhaps reflecting our improved ability to identify the species. The maximum count is seven on Sept. 7, 1971. Oct.-May: Pomarines continue to be rare but regular through October with the latest record being of three birds on Nov. 21, 1971. There are no spring records.



A single Northern (rear) with three Red Phalaropes on Moore Ledge, N.S. Note the more slender neck, smaller head and thinner bill of the Northern. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



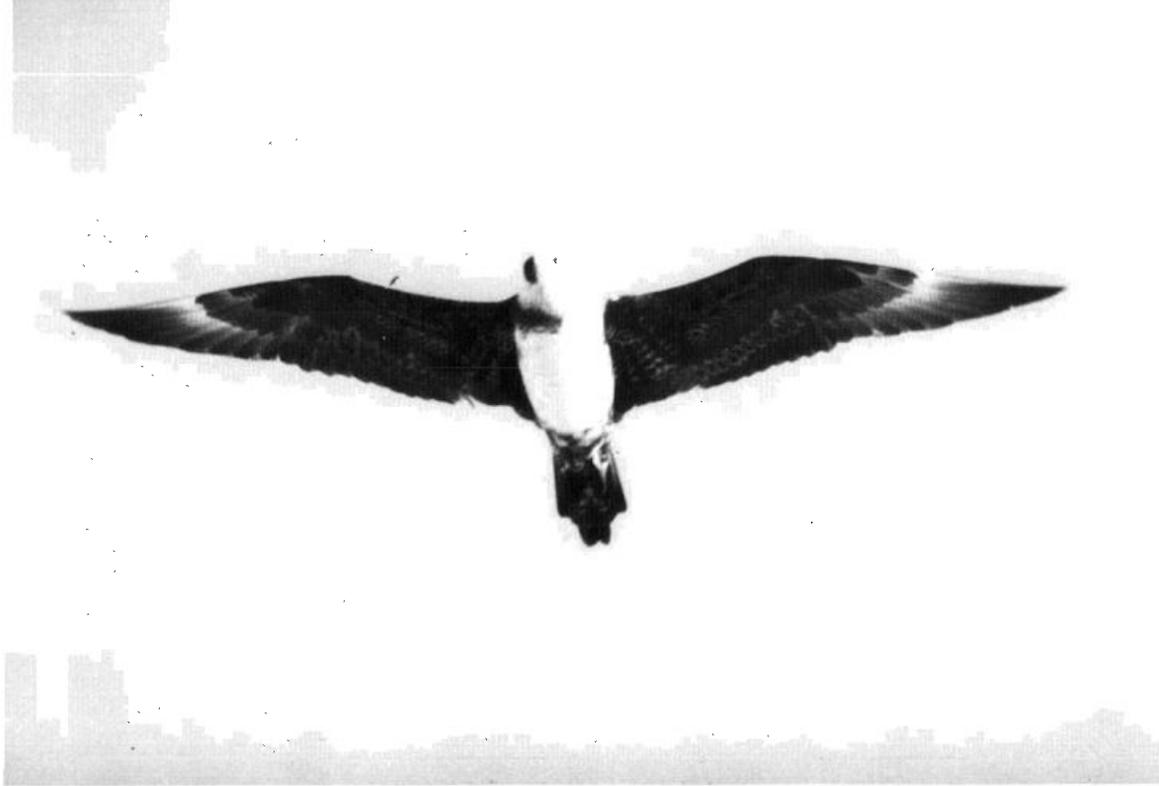
Red Phalaropes in basic, non-breeding, very pale plumage afloat on Moore Ledge, N.S. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



Sanderlings in flight show a distinctively black 'wrist' and lack the black eyeline characteristic of winter-plumaged phalaropes. The extremely light gray overall appearance of Sanderlings is much lighter than that of phalaropes. Photo/Ken Gardiner.



Northern Phalaropes in flight lack the chunky appearance of Sanderlings and show long slender bills and proportionately longer tails. Photo/Jeff Foott, from Bruce Coleman Inc.



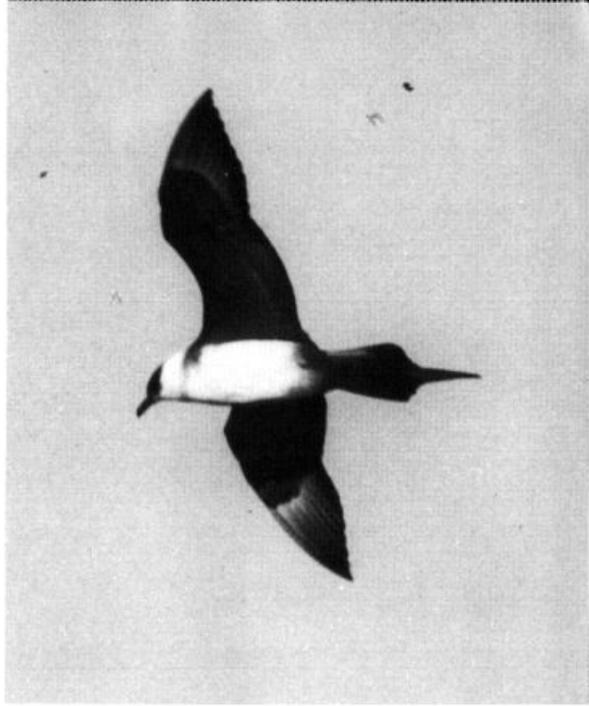
Light phase, subadult Pomarine Jaeger. Note the rather blunt, decidedly unpointed central rectrices of this second-year bird. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



Light-phase adult Pomarine Jaeger showing 'chocolate' breast band and venter and light belly. Photo/Hans and Judy Beste, from Ardea Photographics.

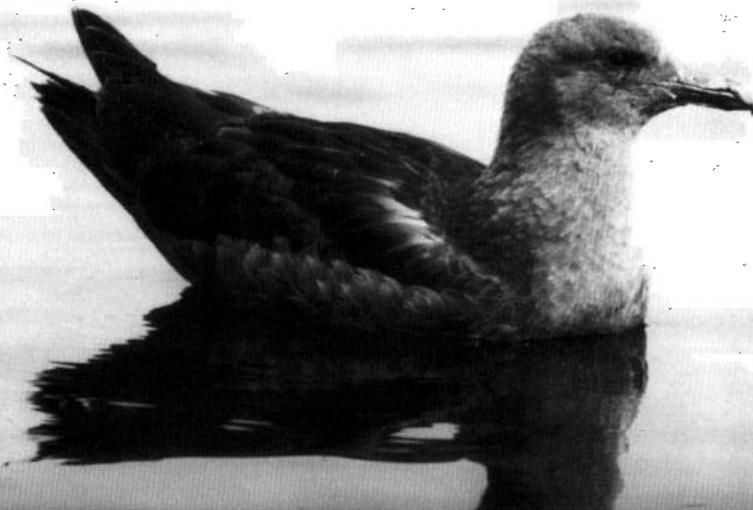


Dark-phase adult Pomarine Jaeger showing wing-flash, relatively larger head and somewhat longer bill than other jaeger species. Photo/Davis W. Finch, Cox's Ledge, R.I., Sept. 16, 1973.

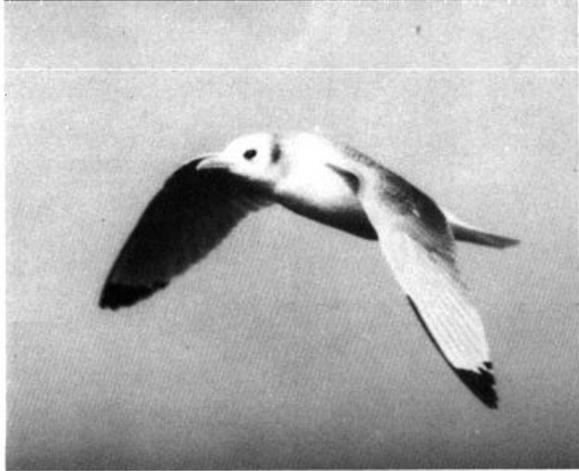


Long-tailed Jaeger adults are easily distinguishable by their characteristic tail 'streamers', very white breasts, and small caps and bills. Photo/Karl H. Maslowski, from Photo Researchers, Inc.

Parasitic Jaeger (light phase, adult) from below. Note the elongated, pointed central rectrices. Photo/C. R. Jones, from Ardea Photographics.

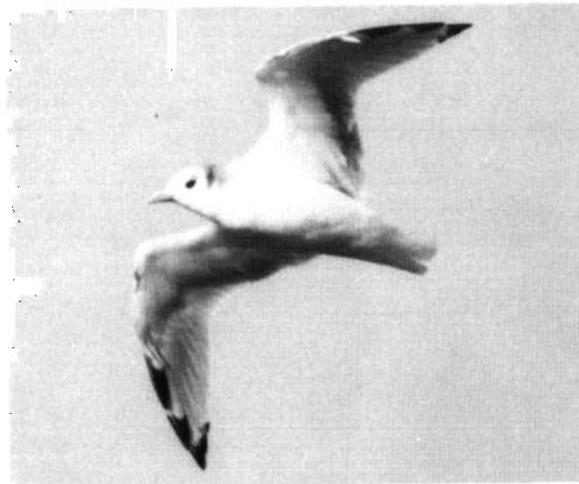


Skua, showing white flash at bend of wing and heavy bill. Immature Pomarine Jaegers are often mistaken for skuas but in the presence of a bona fide skua the converse is virtually impossible. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



Black-legged Kittiwake adult in winter plumage showing dark nuchal collar, dark outer primaries and upper wing inverted "V". Photo/Davis W. Finch, Jeffreys Ledge, N.H.

Black-legged Kittiwake adult in winter plumage showing pure white wing linings. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



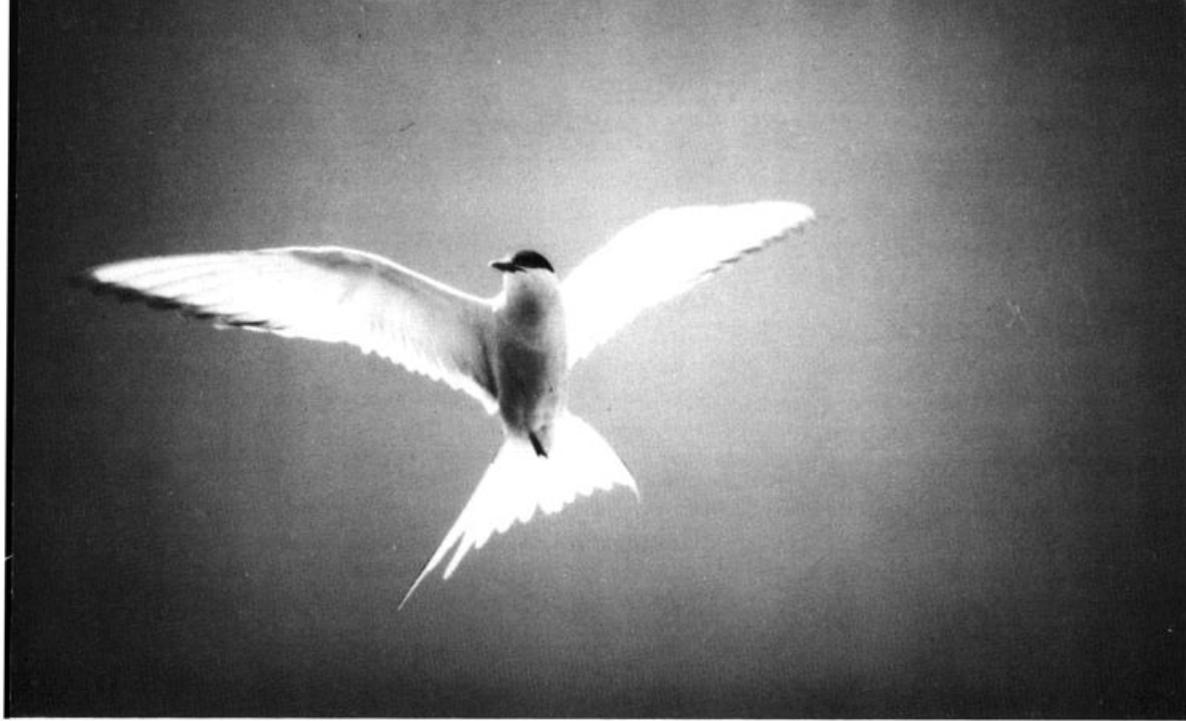
Second-summer Black-legged Kittiwake off Bylot Island, N.W.T. Note the incomplete black in the wingtips and the missing tail feathers. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



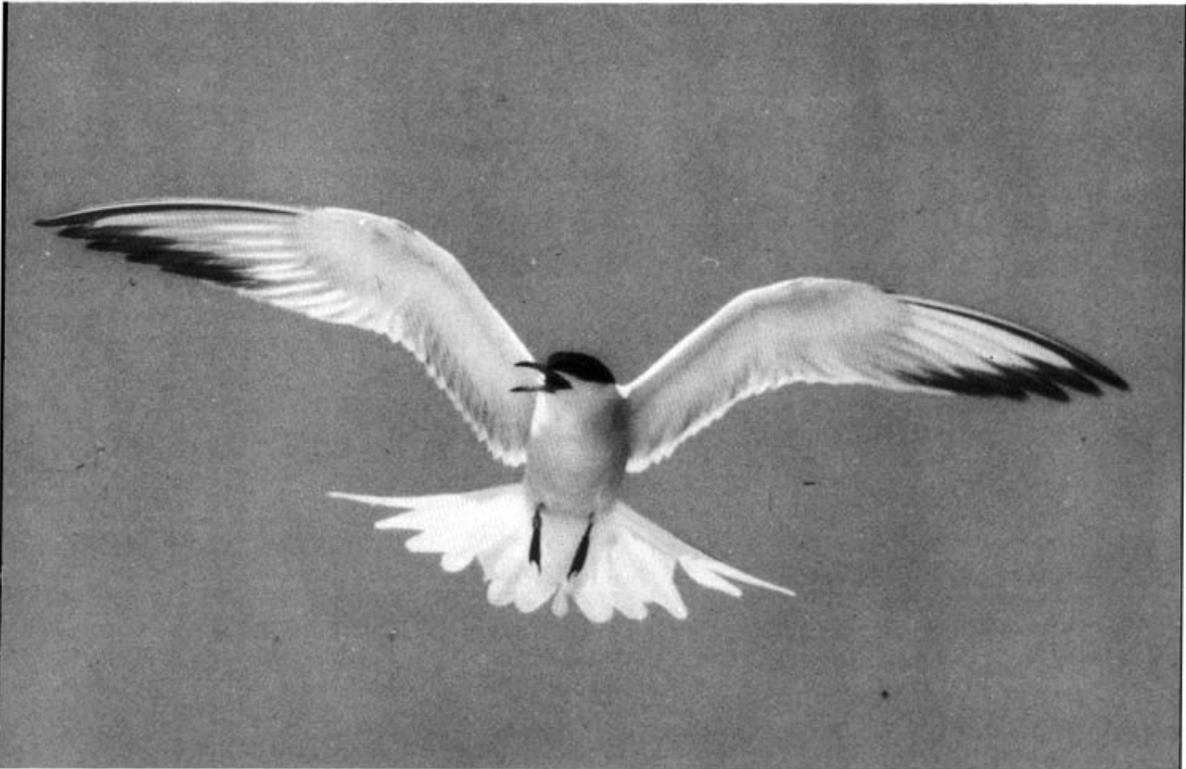
First-winter plumage of Black-legged Kittiwake showing terminal tail band, dark outer primaries, and postocular spot. Photo/Davis W. Finch.



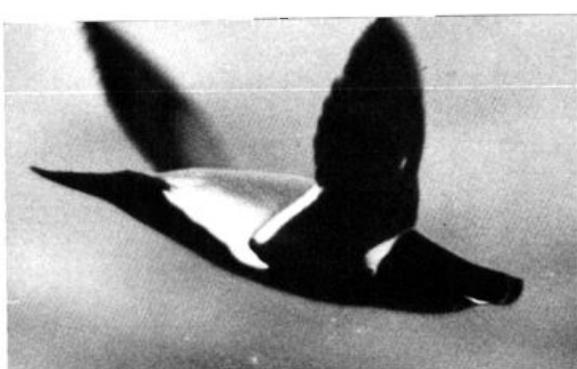
Sabine's Gull showing the more extensive black on the outer primaries than that of kittiwakes. Photo/Philippa Scott, from Photo Researchers, Inc.



Arctic Tern. Note the apparently translucent and narrowly black-tipped outer primaries and relatively long tail. Photo/William C. Russell.



Common Tern. Note the almost opaque broadly black-tipped outer primaries and relatively short tail. Photo/Harry N. Darrow.



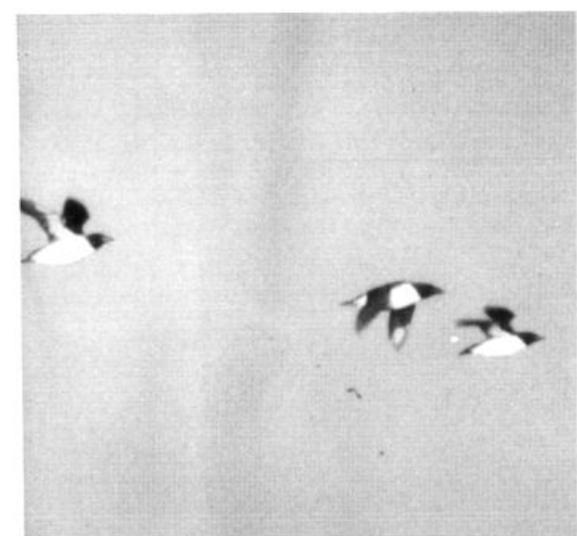
Razorbill in flight showing thick neck, heavy head and blunt bill. Photo/Arne Schmitz, from Photo Researchers, Inc.



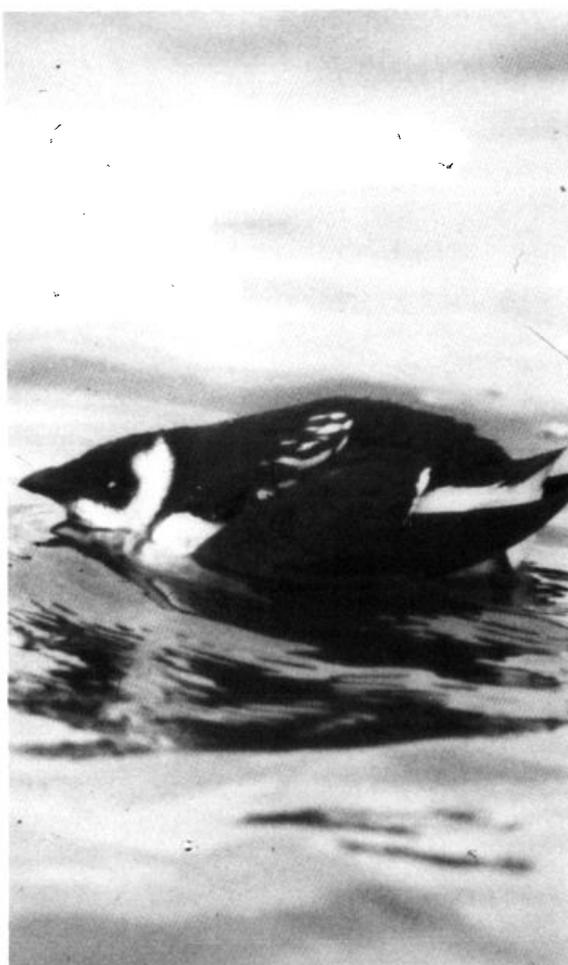
Common Puffin in flight showing characteristic rounded wings and stubby look. Photo/Bill Wilson, from Photo Researchers, Inc.



Common Murre in flight showing a markedly long and pointed bill. Photo/William Curtsinger, from Photo Researchers, Inc.



Thick-billed Murres in flight show blacker backs and wings than Commons with noticeably shorter thicker bills. Photo/F. Erize, from Bruce Coleman Inc.



Floating Dovekie at Star Is., N.H. in winter plumage, showing a very short bill and appearing neckless. Photo/Davis W. Finch.

Field Identification: Field experience and examination of specimens lead us to feel that there are no unambiguous plumage characters useful in separating solitary first, second and third-year Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers. When Pomarines are seen in a context of gulls, size is a good clue, as is wing width at the body and wing beat. Observers with a great deal of comparative experience will be able to identify individual birds on the basis of flight alone, the greatest problem being the separation of Parasitics from Long-taileds. Pomarine Jaegers are about the size of Ring-billed Gulls, appearing large and heavy. Their normal flight is leisurely, steady, unswerving and purposeful, with slow and shallow flaps. They don't look as small-headed as the other jaegers, and the bill looks somewhat longer. Compared with Parasitic Jaegers, the wings seem broad at the base. Typical light-phase adults have heavy chocolate breast bands and venters, the light belly appearing as an oval patch. The fully-developed spoon-tipped central rectrices are much longer than depicted in the field guides, reaching fully seven to eight inches. At close range most subadults can be identified by their blunt or square-tipped central rectrices, these being pointed in Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers.

Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

Status: June-Sept.: a single bird was seen on June 4, 1975, with no subsequent records until June 19, after which date Parasitic Jaegers have been seen on about 75% of all trips with maximum counts of 12 on July 23, 1976 (KPA) and six on June 19, 1971. Two or three is a more representative count. The latest record is of one on Sept. 25, 1971. Oct.-May: There are no late fall records of Parasitics although the species occurs at least occasionally at this season. The earliest spring report is of one on May 26, 1969. There have been only four trips during the last week of May and one or two Parasitic Jaegers have been recorded on each of them.

Field Identification: Parasitic Jaegers appear more buoyant in the air than Pomarines, their bodies seeming to rise with each downstroke, and the wings appear narrower, being more pointed and angled. However, there do not appear to be any simple ways of identifying non-adults except by manner of flight (see Pomarine Jaeger). The separation of non-adult Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers is more difficult. First-autumn Parasitics have rufous edges to most feathers and appear quite rusty while first-autumn Long-taileds are decidedly gray. Second and third-year birds are more similar and our experience is inadequate to advise on their separation.

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Status: One record of a single bird on Aug. 20, 1966.

Field Identification: Adults, rare indeed from the "Bluenose", are easily identified by their long bouncing streamers, these being shorter and not appreciably flexible in Parasitic Jaegers. In addition, though dark-ventered, Long-taileds lack breast bands, and so are strikingly white-chested, and have small dark caps and short bills. The very pale gray back and upper wing, the latter with a narrow dark trailing edge, present a contrast not occurring in the other jaegers. The flight is airy and buoyant, the wings appearing very flexible. For a discussion of subadults, see Parasitic Jaeger.

Skua (*Catharacta skua*)

Status: Unrecorded prior to 1965 but increasingly frequent since then during the summer

period. In the last five years, skuas have been recorded on 80% of the trips between July 1 and Sept. 30, with a maximum count of 11 on Aug. 2, 1974. Counts of one to three are more typical. The latest records are of single birds on Sept. 23, 1975 and again on the same date in 1976, but the species probably occurs into October. The earliest record is of one on June 24, 1970.

Field Identification: Skuas are unmistakable. Although they vary in tone from cinnamon to blackish, their big bodies, broad wings and short tails put them in a class by themselves among northern seabirds. The long, curving white patch across the primary bases is of such contrast as to be visible, above and below even in contrary light, as far as the bird can be seen. When seen at close range most birds show a decidedly light nape. We might note that the species occurring in the Gulf of Maine is not known with absolute certainty. Great Skua (*Catharacta skua*) has been collected in nearby waters and our birds have long been presumed to be this species, but *Catharacta maccormicki* from the South Atlantic has been collected in the North Atlantic, and may conceivably occur in the Gulf of Maine. However, among more than 70 individuals that we have observed over the past ten years, none was a smooth buffy-hooded bird typical of light-phase *C. maccormicki* (see Devillers).

GULLS: *Laridae*

Of ten species known from the "Bluenose" only the two essentially pelagic ones are considered here. Small numbers of Glaucous Gulls and somewhat larger numbers of Iceland Gulls occur during the colder months, and the latter species is regularly encountered far at sea. At all seasons Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls occur along the entire route, Great Black-backed often being impressively numerous. Dark young Herring Gulls may suggest jaegers but differ in silhouette and manner of flight. The few Ring-billed Gull reports are largely from late summer and fall, and Black-headed Gulls occur very rarely on the crossing but are often seen from mid-fall to spring in Yarmouth harbor. Laughing Gulls are typically present in small numbers in summer and early fall close to Bar Harbor in Frenchman Bay, and Bonaparte's Gulls occur in varying numbers from late summer to early winter, mostly near shore but not infrequently in small numbers far at sea.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Status: June-Sept.: Only five records before Sept. 1, with a maximum of four birds on July 10, 1968. Seen on about 50% of trips during the month of September but small numbers are regular along the route by the fourth week. The maximum count is eight on Sept. 25, 1971. Oct.-May: Kittiwakes increase steadily until late October, remaining common until at least mid-January, the maximum count being 319 on Dec. 18, 1971. Numbers appear to decline in mid-winter with a possible build-up in late March, but there is insufficient data to be certain of this.

Field Identification: Black-legged Kittiwakes can best be told by their manner in flight, undulant and light on calm days, and in wind, scaling rather stiffly in almost shearwater-like fashion. Sometimes distant birds can be identified by their habit of hooking sharply to the water's surface to pick up bits of food. Their wings are long and narrow for gulls and at a distance adults look flashingly white, the result of pure white underwings and twinkling silvery areas in the primaries. The "dipped-in-ink" wingtips are readily apparent only at close range. The upper wing gives a two-toned effect resulting from the contrast between silvery flight feathers and darker gray coverts. First winter birds are marked with a dark nuchal collar or "yoke", dark outer primaries and dark primary and secondary coverts, these forming an

inverted "V" on the upper wing surface, especially striking in contrast to the white inner primaries and secondaries. For distinctions from Sabine's Gull, see that species. Although they are infrequently observed from the "Bluenose", second-summer kittiwakes can be perplexing; they have post-ocular spots, gray nuchal shading, and usually one or two incompletely grown primaries, or the outermost unshed. Such birds average considerably less black in the wingtips than adults, sometimes appearing to lack any black whatever, and they lack the silvery flash in the primaries. Most are in tail molt, retaining a few dark-tipped rectrices forming in some cases an interrupted terminal tailband, and the shedding of central rectrices sometimes producing strongly forked tails. Very few retain traces of a carpal bar. By early summer most have acquired the pale yellowish bill typical of adults, and this together with the decided bluntness of the bill probably furnishes the best means of identifying birds of this age class. Bonaparte's Gulls, which are regularly found far at sea, can, at a distance, be confused with adult Black-legged Kittiwakes, the two species being more or less alike in shape and manner of flight and the size difference not always readily apparent. In Bonaparte's Gull the outer-wing contrast is furnished by a wedge of white up the leading edge, and the inner wing lacks the two-tone effect of kittiwake. The long wings of Black-legged Kittiwake make floating birds decidedly attenuated or long-pointed behind, and the carpal bars of first-winter birds are readily apparent.

Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*)

Status: One record of three adults on Sept. 10, 1969 about 15 miles from Yarmouth, following Hurricane Gerda.

Field Identification: In all plumages the upper wing surface of Sabine's Gull is extraordinarily flashy. Hooded adults are unmistakable, but winter adults and young birds should be identified with caution because of their superficial resemblance to first-winter Black-legged Kittiwakes. Both species show broad white triangles on the rear edge of the wing. The inner triangular wing panel of Sabine's Gull is uniform, gray in adults, brown in fall immatures, whereas in first-winter kittiwakes the light gray inner triangle and the white rear triangle are separated by the broad dark carpal bar. Sabine's Gulls are more extensively black on the outer primaries (both webs of outermost five as opposed to outer webs of outermost four in first-winter kittiwakes). Adult Sabine's Gulls are known to leave the Arctic with unmolted dark hoods and September adults at our latitudes are likely to retain them. Winter adults have heavy blackish patches on the back of the head, differing markedly in position and intensity from the nuchal collar of young kittiwakes. The rectrices of young Sabine's Gulls are all dark-tipped, the outermost pair in young kittiwakes being white, the dark-tipped (and more strongly forked) tail of young Sabine's Gulls thus being more pronounced. Sabine's Gulls are smaller than kittiwakes, their wings appearing longer and narrower, and they tend to fly with deeper strokes. Young birds are washed with brown on the sides of the upper breast, and being extensively brown on the nape, crown and cheeks look astonishingly dark when afloat. At moderate range the bill of Sabine's Gulls looks dark, slender and short.

TERNs: *Sterninae*

Two species of terns, Common and Arctic, have been recorded, although Common Tern is only rarely seen very far from land and is not here considered as a pelagic species. Roseate Terns have not been seen but can be expected since they breed, at least occasionally, on the Maine coast just north of the "Bluenose" route.

Field Identification: Terns at sea are usually distant, seldom audible, and consequently hard to identify. The most useful marks in separating adult Arctic and Common Terns appear

to be the following. **1.** Seen from above the outer five primaries are markedly paler in Arctic than in Common, and this causes them to appear translucent when seen from below, the same areas appearing more nearly opaque in Common Tern. Early in the breeding season the primaries of both species are coated with a pale powdery "bloom" tending to mask the underlying tonal differences without, however, altering relative opacity. As the season progresses this bloom wears away to expose the underlying darkness of Common Tern primaries, this wear first appearing as a narrow triangular intrusion or wedge of darker gray extending back from the tips of the middle primaries. We feel that this darker gray triangle in the trailing edge of the outer wing of Commons, absent from the uniformly pale upper wing of Arctics, provides a constant distinction among birds seen flying at eye level or below. **2.** From below, the outer eight primaries of Arctic Tern are finely tipped with black, giving the impression of a very narrow and even black trailing edge. In Common Tern this edge is broader, smudgier, and limited to the outer five or six primaries. **3.** Compared to Common Terns, Arctics have shorter bills, rounder heads, narrower wings and longer tails, thus the two species, at least individuals having fully developed tails, differ in flight silhouette. In Arctics the projection of rump and tail behind the wings appears about twice the projection of neck, head and bill before the wings, while in Common Terns these projections appear about equal. The entirely dark red bill of breeding Arctic Terns can be a good mark but is hard to see. Moreover some fall Arctics have dark-tipped bills and some fall Commons have all-red bills. Subtle differences of body color are difficult to assess at sea and are of little use. Unlike Commons, Arctics swoop to the surface more often than they dive. Immatures of the two species have essentially the same primary pattern as the adults. The leading edge of the inner wing in juvenal Common Terns is darker than in juvenal Arctic Terns, a mark useful at close range.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Status: June-Sept.: Seen on 90% of the crossings between June and the end of August with a maximum count of 200+ on Aug. 9, 1967. Ten-to-twenty is a more typical count for a crossing in this period. The latest record from the "Bluenose" is Aug. 31, 1968. Oct.-May: There are no fall records. Northbound birds appear in the third week of May with the earliest date being May 19, 1972. The maximum count is 150+ on May 29, 1975.

ALCIDS: *Alcidae*

All six Atlantic alcids occur regularly in the Gulf of Maine during the colder months, Thick-billed Murre and Dovekie being essentially limited to this season. Razorbill, Black Guillemot and Common Puffin breed locally and Common Murre summers regularly in very small numbers, these four species thus being present in varying numbers throughout the year. Excluding the essentially non-pelagic Black Guillemot, encountered principally in the Bar Harbor area in Frenchman Bay, the alcids are small to medium-sized seabirds, blackish above and white below. Their flight is normally swift, direct and low over the water on rapidly beating, relatively short and narrow wings, often tilting from side to side and so showing alternately black and white surfaces. Floating alcids appear mostly black. Closely approached by the ship they normally dive in a characteristic fashion, seeming simply to tip vertically and vanish downward, often remaining submerged for long periods. Arising from the water they typically patter, then briefly splay the feet when airborne. Although usually encountered singly or in small groups, alcids have been recorded in groups of up to 50 individuals in winter.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*)

Status: June-Sept.: Seen on about 25% of the crossings with a maximum count of three on Sept. 1, 1967. Oct.-May: Rare to common during the period with a maximum count of ten on Dec. 12, 1970. A count of 152 occurring on Dec. 28, 1967 appears to be a unique record.

Field Identification: The best marks of adults are the thick neck, heavy head and deep, blunt bill, giving floating and flying birds a distinctive bulky-headed shape. They have a longer and more pointed tail than the other large alcids, and this is often cocked. Adults and immatures appear very black dorsally. Small-billed young birds are easily confused with Thick-billed Murre, but like winter adults have a crescent of white above and behind the eye, this area being dark in Thick-billed Murre. There have been some reports of sizable numbers of Razorbills from "Bluenose" in winter, but these are suspect owing to possible confusion with the much commoner Thick-billed Murre. However, they are locally common, at least in early winter, in the Bay of Fundy between Eastport, Me., and Grand Manan, N.B., and can be expected in small numbers at this season from the "Bluenose".

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)

Status: June-Sept.: Unreported before 1971. Since then seen on four June crossings, the maximum being four on June 19, 1972. Since 1967, from five to 35 Common Murres have remained at Machias Seal I., N.B., about 60 miles north of the "Bluenose" route, until late June and in some years throughout the summer. Oct.-May: Rare to uncommon between early November and late March with a few birds lingering to late May. The maximum count during this period is six on Dec. 28, 1967.

Field Identification: Common Murres have a long and pointed bill giving them an attenuated look different from Thick-billed Murres and markedly different from adult Razorbills. In addition their distinctly grayish-black upper back and wings will permit medium-range separation from the blacker Thick-billed Murre, especially in flight. Both of these marks are excellent but require some comparative experience. Birds in winter plumage show a strikingly white face at medium range but the black post-ocular line is normally hard to see. See Thick-billed Murre.

Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*)

Status: June-Sept.: Two records of single birds, on June 5 and Aug. 25, 1975. Oct.-May Thick-billeds arrive in late October. They are regularly seen on winter crossings in numbers of up to 50, the maximum count being 129 on Jan. 29, 1975. There is little spring data but at least some stragglers linger into the late spring.

Field Identification: Thick-billed Murres are large black alcids. The best mark of birds in winter plumage is the facial blackness coming down to just below the eye and then bleeding into the white cheek. The general impression is of a dark-faced and dark-necked bird, quite unlike winter Common Murres and Razorbills. The white gape mark so conspicuous in breeding adults is rarely apparent, even at close range, in birds wintering in the Gulf of Maine, these being perhaps largely young birds. Adult murres start molting into breeding plumage in early January and it is possible to see fully black-necked individuals by the end of the month. Conversely, most of the few Thick-billed Murres summering in nearby waters seem to be in winter plumage.

Dovekie (*Alle alle*)

Status: June-Sept.: One record, a bird in breeding plumage on June 24, 1970 (WCT). Oct.-May: Dovekies arrive in late October and can be seen in numbers into late December. The maximum count is 328 on Dec. 28, 1967. Numbers decline in mid-winter and counts of 10–20 birds are more typical. Numbers apparently decline sharply in March but we have insufficient data to say more. The latest record is of one on Mar. 28, 1973.

Field Identification: A very small, neckless, short-billed alcid, unlike any other seabird in the Gulf of Maine.

Common Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

Status: June-Sept.: Common Puffins are seen on approximately 60% of crossings with the frequency increasing slightly in August and September. The maximum count is 13 on Aug. 25, 1973. More typically one to three are seen. Common Puffins breed in two places in the Gulf of Maine: Machias Seal I., N.B., and Matinicus Rock, Me. The increased “Bluenose” sightings during August probably reflect dispersal of birds from these colonies, especially the former. Oct.-May: Uncommon at all times, being seen on about 70% of winter crossings, usually one or two birds. The maximum count is 22 on Dec. 28, 1967. Sparse spring data suggest that Common Puffins occur in the Gulf of Maine in small numbers throughout the period.

Field Identification: Common Puffins are stubby, medium-sized, big-fronted alcids, an appearance resulting from the large bill and short tail. In breeding season the broadly white face of adults is apparent even at a great distance. Bills of young puffins are small and dark enough that confusion with Razorbill is possible, though the dusky face and stubby appearance are characteristic. An excellent field mark of flying birds is the rounded wing, other alcids having noticeably pointed wings. Arising from the water, puffins show red feet and lack white on the dorsal surface, specifically the white trailing edge of the wing and the white sides of the rump characteristic of the other alcids considered here. Floating birds show much less extensively white sides than commonly depicted.

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