# MID-CONTINENTAL JAEGERS: A MANITOBA PERSPECTIVE

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Jaegers and skuas are predatory closely related to aulls. birds. Whether they are seen on Arctic breeding grounds, on pelagic migration routes, or somewhere far inland, these birds create excitement among birders. They also have a reputation for turning up in unfamiliar or downright hostile surroundings. South Polar Skuas wander deep into Antarctica, even to the Pole itself.31 Even more remarkable, one was photographed at Lake Oahe, North Dakota, 13 July 1989.4 Long-tailed Jaegers have been seen on the Greenland icecap. 72 Both Long-tailed and Pomarine Jaegers have been

observed migrating over the Brooks Range of mountains in Alaska. 12 Thus, mid-continental records are perhaps not surprising. All three jaeger species (Parasitic, Pomarine and Long-tailed) have occurred in most of the 50 states and every Canadian province (Long-tailed Jaeger is hypothetical in Prince Edward Island). 17,32 This article reviews inland records of the three jaegers in Manitoba, in comparison with neighbouring regions.

A Note of Caution Adult jaegers in breeding plumage with their elongated central tail feathers are



Long-tailed Jaeger, Cape Merry, Churchill, Manitoba.

R.F. Koes



Parasitic Jaeger, Churchill, Manitoba, July 1982.

R.F. Koes

relatively easy to identify, but immature or transitional plumages present identification challenges, even in the hand. In an amusing (perhaps apocryphal) tale, a jaeger reportedly circled a boatload of birders three times, and was identified as a different species on each pass!8 Jaeger identification is often based on impressions of flight characteristics and proportions, which can vary with the bird's activity. A slowly cruising Parasitic Jaeger may seem bulky enough to be a Pomarine, then resemble a Long-tailed Jaeger when it slips into high gear after a passing tern. On the other hand, one might identify a poorly seen jaeger as Parasitic by default, when it is better left unnamed.

Analysis of Records Tables 1 and 2 summarize all records known to me of inland jaegers in Manitoba, including Long-tailed Jaeger records previously compiled by Crawshaw.<sup>11</sup>

In the following discussion, the status of the three species in Manitoba and neighbouring regions is compared. The review of neighbouring regions is admittedly not comprehensive.

Parasitic Jaeger This is the jaeger frequently encountered in most southern Manitoba, with 24 known records between 1918 and 1991 (Table 1A). The increase in frequency of sightings since 1970 (17 of the 24 records) presumably reflects increased observer effort and improved reporting. Similar creases have been noted for several uncommon migrant water birds. 74,75 Most records of Parasitic Jaegers involved single birds; three involved two individuals each, and as many as five may have been seen separately at St. Ambroise, 9 September 1989. Most records (63%) were in September and October, and the remainder were

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### Table 1. ANNOTATED LIST OF JAEGER RECORDS IN MANITOBA

# A. Parasitic Jaeger

- 13 July 1918, Pelican Island, n. LW. Light ad. found dead.<sup>58</sup>
- 25 Sept. 1929, Scanterbury (s.e. LW). Light ad. shot. 10,44
- 14 June 1934, Pine Island, Lake St. Martin. Two birds.<sup>67</sup>
- 17 Oct. 1936, Husavick (s.w. LW). Dark imm. shot. 46
- 20 Oct. 1940, Husavick (s.w. LW). Dark imm. found dead, MMMN # 3.6-335.<sup>49</sup>
- 17 June 1961, Pinawa Channel (WR). One bird. 53,54
- 1 Aug. 1966, Gimli (s.w. LW). Two light ad.<sup>69</sup>
- 9 June 1973, Whitewater Lake, RMNP. One bird. 35
- 27 June 1973, Southern Indian Lake. Light ad. 76
- 18 Sept. 1976, Oak Hammock Marsh. Dark bird.<sup>21</sup>
- 26-27 July 1978, St. Ambroise (s. LM). Light ad. photographed. 34,65
- 30 Sept. 1979, St. Ambroise (s. LM). One: G. Holland, I. Ward.
- 6 Sept. 1980, Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg. One: G. Holland, R. Koes et al.
- Late June to about 10 July 1983, Clandeboye Beach (s. LM). One, unpublished photos: S. Haig.
- 13 Sept. 1986, Allegra. One light imm. flying s. over farmland: R. Knapton, R. Koes, P. Taylor (MORC). Cited as Winnipeg in American Birds.
- 18-19 Sept. 1987, Seven Sisters Falls (WR). One light imm.: R. Parsons, G. Grieef, P. Taylor (MORC).
- 11 Oct. 1987, Seven Sisters Falls (WR). One light imm.: P. Taylor (MORC).
- 15 Sept. 1988, nr. East Meadows Ranch (s.e. LM). One light, ad.?: R. Taylor.
- 26 Sept. 1988, Clandeboye Bay (s. LM). One light imm.: R. Parsons.
- 24 May 1989, Waskada/Deloraine. Two light ad. flying e., pursued 30 km by road: K. De Smet, M. Conrad.
- 9-17 Sept. 1989, St. Ambroise (s. LM). Five sightings in 4 hours on 9th: S. Holohan, J. Steeves. One light ad. on 11th (M. Siepman) and 17th (G. Grieef, R. Koes, R. Tkachuk).
- 13 Oct. 1991. St. Ambroise (s. LM). One bird: G. Holland, R. Koes.
- 19 Oct. 1991. Grand Beach (s.e. LW). One light bird: J. Weir.
- 20 Oct. 1991. Clandeboye Bay (s. I.M). One dark bird: R. Parsons, B. Shettler.

## B. Long-tailed Jaeger

- Sept. 1896, LW. Dark imm. shot.<sup>66</sup>
- 8 Oct. 1902, Clandeboye (s.w. LW). Imm. 11,58
- 17 May 1903, Aweme. One shot.<sup>2,11,50</sup>
- 10 May 1940, Pine Falls (WR). One bird. 11,48
- 13-27 June 1969, nr. Thompson. Up to 29 birds. 11,39
- 3 June 1973, between Roblin and Lake of the Prairies. One ad. flying n.e.: W. Neily (MBRC).
- 14 June 1982, Leaside Beach (w. LW). One light ad. caught; photos.<sup>11</sup>
- 14-18 June 1985, Seven Sisters Falls (WR). One light ad.: P. Taylor, P. Ingham et al. (MORC, MBRC).
- 4 June 1987, Dauphin Bay, Lake Winnipegosis. One light ad.: R. Knapton, unpublished report, Manitoba Wildlife Branch.
- 14 April 1989, Niverville. One light ad.: R. Dueck.

### C. Pomarine Jaeger

- 19 Sept. 1932, Netley Marsh (s. LW). Imm. female found shot. 45 MMMN # 1.2-2066.
- 30 Oct. 1975, Marshy Point (LM). Light ad. found dead. Emaciated (347 g). MMMN # 1.2-3399.

Note: Observers' names are given only for unpublished records. A more detailed listing has been deposited with the Manitoba Ornithological Records Committee, and is also available from the author. This listing includes seven additional records of unidentified jaegers (see Table 2). 11,47,55

Abbreviations: ad. = adult, imm. = immature, LM = Lake Manitoba, LW = Lake Winnipeg, MB = Manitoba, MBRC = Manitoba Bird Record Card at MMMN, MMMN = Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature (190 Rupert Ave., Winnipeg MB R3B 0N2), MORC = Manitoba Ornithological Récord Committee card at MMMN, RMNP = Riding Mountain National Park, WR = Winnipeg River. "Light" and "dark" refer to colour morphs ("phases"). Please send any information on missing specimens or additional records to the author.

	Parasitic	Long-tailed	Pomarine	Unidentified*
April	0	1	0	0
May	1	2	0	2
June	5	5	0	0
July	2	0	0	0
August	1	0	0	0
September	9	1	1	0
October	6	1	1	3
1892-1911	0	3	0	0
1912-1931	2	0	0	0
1932-1951	3	1	1	1
1952-1971	2	1	0	1
1972-1991	17	5	1 1	5
Lake Winnipeg	6	3	1	2
Lake Manitoba	8	0	1	2
Other lakes	3	1	0	1
Winnipeg River	3	2	0	0
Other rivers	1	2	0	0
Elsewhere	3	2	0	2
Totals	24	10	2	7

scattered between May and August. Most sightings occurred at or near major lakes and rivers, especially Lakes Manitoba and Winnipeg. Noteworthy exceptions were birds apparently migrating overland near Deloraine in May 1989 and near Allegra in September 1986.

The Parasitic Jaeger is also the most frequent of the three species in Minnesota, where it is a rare but regular fall migrant on Lake Superior, most often seen in the Duluth area.37,43 The Duluth records appear to represent the western limit of a migration route through the Great Lakes region. 24,29,71 Other Minnesota records include one sighting (and an unidentified jaeger) on Lake of the the Manitoba Woods near border.37,40,41 Duluth area records extend from early August to late

October, with a peak in early to mid-September, resembling the southern Manitoban pattern (Table 2). In contrast, Janssen lists just five spring records in Minnesota.<sup>37</sup> The Parasitic Jaeger is an accidental fall migrant in North Dakota, with about six records to 1990, and is unreported in South Dakota.<sup>5,17,19,70</sup>

Four Saskatchewan records of Parasitic Jaegers were reviewed by Bird. Fifteen fall reports in *American Birds*, 1976-1990, indicate a status similar to that in southern Manitoba, and there are also single observations in May, June and July. Farther west, there appears to be a sparse but regular movement of Parasitic Jaegers through Alberta, notably at Beaverhill Lake, and again with a peak in September. 13,14,15,64

Long-tailed Jaeger This jaeger is the second most frequently reported inland in Manitoba (Table 1B). Only four of the ten records occurred prior to 1969. Except for the flock of up to 29 birds near Thompson in June 1969, all records involve lone birds. Half the records occurred in June, and only two in fall. Saskatchewan's first documented Long-tailed Jaeger occurred at Last Mountain Lake, 8-17 July 1982. 26,27 Previous sightings occurred in June, July (twice) and September. 3,30,56,57,61 An exceptionally early report at Regina, 22 April 1989, occurred just eight days after an equally surprising Manitoba sighting.<sup>28</sup> One Minnesota record also occurred in April, one in July, and five in fall migration.37

Of 16 Alberta reports up to 1980, only three were in June and the majority of recent sightings were in August or early September. 14,16,30,60,63,64 Excellent photographs document a September 1977 record at Beaverhill Lake. The Long-tailed Jaeger is a relatively recent addition to the state lists for both North and South Dakota. 9,22,70 More southerly inland records in the U.S. have almost all been in the fall, but isolated June records extend south at least to Kansas. 52

Pomarine Jaeger This is the rarest jaeger in southern Manitoba, with only two fall specimen records (Table 1C). By coincidence, the 1932 bird was found just three weeks before South Dakota's sole record; the species is unknown in North Dakota. In Minnesota, however, Pomarine Jaeger records outnumber those of Long-tailed Jaeger, as they do in Ontario, where "fall" records extend from late August to early January. Speirs cites only one spring record for Ontario, and Janssen only one for Minnesota.

Saskatchewan's two Pomarine Jaeger specimens were obtained on 9 November 1922 and (amazingly) 30 December 1976. 51,73 There are also about nine sight reports of Pomarine Jaegers in Saskatchewan (R. Kreba, pers. comm.), but published details are sparse. 1,61 The Pomarine Jaeger is reported to leave the Arctic a few weeks later than the other two species, although this is not apparent in the Minnesota records. 37,68 The Pomarine Jaeger was listed as hypothetical in Alberta by Salt and Salt.64 The most fully described of four sight records was at Lake Athabasca, 6 June 1969. 15,33,60,63

**Discussion** The three jaegers show three different patterns of rare occurrence in southern Manitoba, as outlined above. Do these records represent random wanderings inland, or are they evidence of "shortcut" migration routes between the Arctic and warm oceans? Such routes have been postulated for Arctic Tern and Sabine's Gull, as well as jaegers. <sup>23,38,62</sup> Overland migration of Parasitic Jaegers in Africa and the former Soviet Union appears to be well documented. <sup>20</sup>

The relative frequency of occurrence of the three jaeger species in southern Manitoba parallels the southward extent of their breeding ranges. The Parasitic Jaeger nests as far south as coastal Manitoba and Ontario. <sup>24,38,59</sup> The southern limit of the Long-tailed Jaeger's breeding range is near the Manitoba-Keewatin border, and this species is a regular migrant at Churchill (arriving overland?). <sup>24,38</sup>

The Pomarine Jaeger nests mainly north of the Arctic Circle, and is a rarity even at Churchill.<sup>24,38</sup> Note, however, that the frequency of occurrence of vagrants or rare

migrants is a function of total population and other factors as well as geographic proximity.

Parasitic Jaegers nesting around southern Hudson Bay could benefit from a migration route to the Atlantic via the Great Lakes, if the risks of overland migration are not too great. Migrant seabirds in southern Manitoba, however, do not necessarily originate in or near northern Manitoba. Extremely rare visits to southern Manitoba by Common Eiders, for example, originate from Alaska or the Beaufort Sea, not Hudson Bay. 42 The similar frequencies of Parasitic Jaeger records in Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba point to a sparse, broad-front movement from the Arctic, rather than the fringe of a migration from Hudson Bay.

This suggested movement jaegers could lead southeastward to the Great Lakes and the Atlantic, southward to the Gulf of Mexico, or southwestward to the Pacific. The similar timing of Parasitic Jaeger records in southern Manitoba and Minnesota, and the absence of South Dakota records, tend to support the first of these three routes. Jaeger records in the Gulf of Mexico between November and April, however, indicate that some birds complete an overland migration, possibly follow-River. 18,77 Mississippi ing the Jaegers seen in Alberta in fall are likely Pacific-bound. The concentration of southern Manitoban Longtailed Jaeger records in June coincides with migration at Churchill, but not with broader patterns in neighbouring regions, where fall records predominate.

The scarcity of Pomarine Jaeger records in southern Manitoba is consistent with this species' general scarcity in mid-continent, although a

few overwinter in the Gulf of Mexico. 18,77 Details of inland movements of all the jaegers are likely to remain a mystery, however, unless sophisticated tracking methods such as satellite telemetry can be applied to the problem.

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