

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Long-tailed Jaeger at Derby Hill, Oswego County: At about 5:15 p.m. EDT on 10 September 1977, the writer and Eric M. Freeman of Syracuse, were standing on a bluff overlooking Lake Ontario at Derby Hill, Oswego County, observing the movement of a large number of water birds. At the time, there were sustained winds at 20 to 30 mph from the west-northwest, a mostly cloudy sky, no precipitation, and a slowly rising barometer, conditions in large part generated by an intense low pressure area located over southwestern Quebec, and a high over central Canada, which were both moving slowly eastward. The cold front, extending south from the low, had passed over Derby Hill at about 10:30 a.m. The frontal passage and its accompanying strong, westerly winds had contributed to a substantial gull and tern flight, with small numbers of waterfowl and a few Parasitic Jaegers (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Prior to 4:00 p.m., only three Parasitic Jaegers had been seen, but thereafter several flocks of from two to nine each were noted.

At about 5:15 p.m., a flock of nine jaegers was observed moving southward along the east shore of Lake Ontario, into the southeast corner of the lake. Then the flock turned west and proceeded toward the observers. As the birds approached slowly, into the teeth of the gale, I watched them through a Bushnell 20X telescope; it soon became obvious that one of the birds was strikingly different from the rest. The following characters were noted as this bird flew in close association with three adult, light-phase Parasitic Jaegers: the bird was slighter-bodied, and had a much more buoyant tern-like flight, than the Parasitics; whereas the Parasitics were generally a dark brown on the back, this bird was much lighter, with the back and upper surface of the wings gray rather than brown. As the bird turned parallel to the observers, its greatly elongated tail feathers could clearly be seen. During these observations the jaegers were visible for about five minutes, and were within 75 yards of the observers at the closest point. It was obvious that the smaller, grayer bird was an adult, light-phase Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). The conditions of observation were about as close to perfect as one could ask.

During the period of observation the flock moved steadily southward, and then westward past the lookout, without interacting with nearby gulls. There was some interaction within the flock, as the Long-tail was pursued briefly on two occasions by nearby Parasitics.

I have been observing the fall waterfowl and water bird flights at Derby Hill since 1968, and have had experience with Parasitic Jaegers, which are regular fall migrants usually associated with weather conditions like those described here. Bull (1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 267) lists three confirmed records of the Long-tailed Jaeger from upstate New York, all of which are specimens; these include an immature found dead by Chris Spies on 31 October 1971 at Sandy Pond, about seven miles due northeast of Derby Hill, and now preserved

as a skeleton in the American Museum of Natural History. It thus appears that our sighting is the first record of a live individual for upstate New York.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for this being the first occurrence of the species at Derby Hill, in view of the regular occurrence of the other two species of jaeger. Paul DeBenedictis (pers. comm.) indicates that Long-tails leave the breeding grounds much earlier than the other two species. The strong frontal systems that probably play a part in the appearance of jaegers in our area do not usually occur early in the season, and thus Long-tails are less likely to be drifted into our area. The rarity of the species in eastern North America suggests that the birds breeding on the west coasts of Hudson Bay and James Bay migrate westward along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Since it appears that a portion of the Parasitic Jaegers nesting in the same area move south regularly through Lake Ontario, and then overland to the coast, it may be that the Long-tail seen on 10 September 1977 had simply migrated with Parasitic Jaegers. It may also be that the strong low pressure area was instrumental in displacing the Long-tailed Jaeger eastward. Whatever the reasons, the occurrence of this striking bird was ample reward for the large number of days spent in early July, August and September by the writer at Derby Hill, during which nothing more exciting than Herring and Ring-billed Gulls was seen. In closing it must be emphasized that the day's total of 29 Parasitic Jaegers and one Long-tailed Jaeger is extraordinary for so early in the season. Such a count of Parasitics would be excellent even during the peak of the season between 5 and 25 October. If this trend continues, 1977 may prove to be a banner year for jaegers on eastern Lake Ontario.

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"Kumlien's" Gull in Essex County: On 3 July 1977 the author, Esther Ann MacCready, Gerald Rosenband, and Carole Slatkin, traveled by boat to the Four Brothers Islands in Lake Champlain, located in the Town of Willsboro, Essex County. Acquired in January, 1977, by the University of Vermont, the Four Brothers are "Resource Management" land within the boundaries of the Adirondack Park. Approximately six acres in area, the four islands lie about two miles east of Willsboro Point, at lat. 44°25' W., long. 73°20' N. Surrounded by rocky and shingle beaches, the islands are low plateaus with open areas of stinging nettle, wild mustard, grasses, raspberries, stands of conifers and hardwoods, and tangles of dead cedars. The individual islands have been unofficially designated "A," "B," "C," and "D" by the Vermont Fish and Game Department.

Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) have nested on the islands at least since late in the last century, Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*) since 1949, and Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*) since 1975. During 1977 the islands supported