

FALL JAEGER RECORDS FROM LAKE ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT—Fall migration records are given for Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*), Pomarine Jaeger (*S. pomarinus*), and Parasitic Jaeger (*S. parasiticus*) from five locations south of Lake Ontario: Derby Hill, Cayuga Lake, Hamlin Beach, and Buffalo, NY, and Hamilton, Ontario. Years covered range from 1966 - 1996. The total number of jaegers seen on Lake Ontario varies from year to year as well as with location. Observations of jaegers leaving Lake Ontario suggest that the main points of departure are at the east and west ends of the lake.

INTRODUCTION

Regular overland migration of seabirds is an unusual occurrence, even for jaegers. Nevertheless, there is an annual overland jaeger migration in North America and Asia. Furness (1987) mentions the Asian jaeger migration to the Persian Gulf. Jaegers have been recorded on Lake Ontario since the later part of the nineteenth century (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). Scheider and Evans (1956) noted their occurrence as occasional at the east end of the lake and Bull (1974) reported that Parasitic Jaegers have been reported regularly since 1960. When more extensive lake watch data were collected, Crumb and Smith (1980) estimated the peak dates of their fall migration.

The primary intent of this paper is to summarize the available records of fall jaeger occurrences on Lake Ontario since this represents a significant part of the North American inland jaeger migration. The data were taken over a long period by many observers from selected locations on Lake Ontario, where viewing is optimum. Site records from the north side of Lake Ontario are not included in this summary since jaeger occurrences there are much less frequent. This information has been used to study the effects of weather on jaeger migration (Sherony 1997, Sherony and Brock 1997). The migration records collectively suggest that jaegers seen over the eastern Great Lakes originate from James Bay (Sherony 1997) and the highest numbers of jaegers seen annually on the Great Lakes occur on Lake Ontario. A second purpose of this paper is to begin to understand how jaegers leave Lake Ontario as they continue south.

Derby Hill, Mexico, NY - (Region 5)

The total number of jaegers of each species seen in one season are summarized in Tables 1 to 3. Sight records for Region 5, shown in Table 1, come mostly from the work of F. Scheider (1994) and G. Smith (personal

communication). W. Purcell and M. Rusk continue to maintain records for Region 5 and provided summaries for 1987 to 1995. Almost all sightings (97%) are from Derby Hill but a few records are from Sandy Pond, and there are three records for Oneida Lake. There was total observer coverage by G. Smith on days when weather conditions were promising from 1972 to 1986. F. Scheider would frequent Derby Hill from the late 1950's until 1988. Jean Propst and Dorothy Crumb provided substantial coverage as well.

The highest single year (391 jaegers in 1973) and highest single day (202 jaegers on 7 Oct 1979) counts within the Great Lakes have occurred at Derby Hill. High jaeger counts (more than 30 seen in one season) occurred in 1968, 1973, 1976 to 1982, and 1996. There has been only one Long-tailed Jaeger sighting (Smith 1977). Only 3.9% of all jaegers seen were identified as Pomarines. Adult Parasitics are occasionally noted and there are six sightings of dark morph adults.

Occasionally observers note that jaegers leave Lake Ontario at Derby Hill and fly south overland. Two accounts are given by Scheider and Rusk (1967) of jaegers leaving the cove at Derby Hill and flying inland. On 4 October 1966, a total of four Parasitic Jaegers was seen to leave the lake and fly south towards Mexico, NY. Purcell (personal communication) provides an account of a jaeger circling over the Derby Hill cove, gain altitude, and leave the lake in a southerly direction. G. Smith, the resident observer, estimates that 10% to 20% of jaegers he has seen leave the lake by spiraling up to a high altitude, almost out of binocular sight, and glide to the southwest.

There are three sight records of jaegers seen from Sylvan Beach on the east side of Oneida Lake which is 33 miles southeast of Derby Hill. Finally, there is one sighting of a Parasitic Jaeger seen over the town of Mexico, NY (25 November 1985, J. Hank), which is four miles south of the Lake Ontario shore, just west of Derby Hill. It is clear that some jaegers leave the lake at Derby Hill and go south to southeast. The majority exit the cove at Derby Hill and move off to the west along the Lake Ontario shoreline.

Cayuga Lake - (Region 4)

There are six fall sight records of jaegers on Cayuga Lake (W. Evans, personal communication). Two of these are from W. Evans of a Parasitic Jaeger on 28 October 1992 and a jaeger species on 18 September 1996. In recent years, a Common Loon watch on Cayuga Lake has not turned up any more than the last two accounts. If jaegers are using this as a migratory route, they are not being visually recorded during daylight hours.

Hamlin Beach (Region 2)

Table 2 gives data available from Hamlin Beach, New York since 1976. In the decade of the 1980's, Hamlin Beach had approximately 60% observer coverage (daily coverage from sunrise to early afternoon). This increased in the 1990s, and in 1993, Braddock Bay Raptor Research organized a full coverage

watch from 15 August to 15 December. Brett Ewald has been responsible for this watch and publishes an annual report of all birds seen. Jaeger records for Region 2 come from the publications of the Rochester Birding Association (*Little Gull*) and the Genesee Ornithological Society (*Goshawk*). W. Symonds and J. Skelly have provided additional data (personal communication).

High jaeger counts were recorded from 1980 to 1985 and have been very sparse since then until 1996. There is only one record of a Long-tailed (Symonds in Griffith 1984). Of those jaegers identified, 20% were Pomarines. This is the highest percentage of Pomarines reported on Lake Ontario.

At Hamlin Beach, jaegers are seen flying east or west. Early season migrant Parasitic Jaegers are usually seen flying east and those later in the season are usually flying west (W. Symonds, personal communication). Occasionally, one to several jaegers will linger and be present on the water the following day. There are only two records of jaegers seen over land just south of the lake. One was found by the author and Tom Tetlow flying along the land a few hundred yards inland at Hamlin Beach. The other is a juvenile female Parasitic Jaeger that was collected over Lake Road in Webster, NY (Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1950). There has been an extensive lake watch from Hamlin Beach for fifteen years and the observers have never reported a jaeger leaving the lake and flying south over land from that location.

Buffalo, New York - (Region 1)

Computerized records from the Buffalo Ornithological Society were provided by W. D'Anna. Jaeger sight records for Region 1 are from the Lake Erie shore from the Pennsylvania state line to the mouth of the Niagara River, and from the Niagara River exit into Lake Ontario west to Olcott, NY. There is no single location over this region where jaegers are regularly observed and recorded. The records show that there are two sightings of Long-tailed (both from 1996), nine sightings of Pomarines, and about 100 sightings of Parasitic Jaegers over a 33 year period. The data for Parasitic Jaegers are shown in Table 4. Fifty-one percent of the Region 1 records come from Lake Erie, primarily from Buffalo. Twenty-eight percent of these sightings are from the Niagara River, primarily from its source on Lake Erie. The remaining 21% are from Lake Ontario, most from east of the river's exit but some from the Canadian shore.

Jaegers are recorded with a much lower frequency in Region 1 than the other major observation sites on Lake Ontario. In the fall, the Niagara River is heavily birded; however, jaegers are rarely recorded on the river but are found occasionally at the mouth of the river. This implies that the Niagara River region is not a major point of departure for southbound migration.

Hamilton, Ontario

The sight records for the Hamilton, Ontario area are compiled by the Hamilton Naturalist's Club and published in the *Wood Duck*. They were pulled

together for this work by R. Dobos and R. Ridout. Most records are from the Burlington-Hamilton area. There are also data for several pelagic trips into Lake Ontario from Hamilton. Coverage is not known. Records have been kept since the 1960's but only data after 1980 are shown in Table 3.

High jaeger counts have occurred from 1991 to 1996. There are 26 sight records of Long-tailed Jaeger. Pomarines accounts for 11% of all jaegers identified. Pittaway and Burke (1995) reported that juvenile Parasitic Jaegers outnumbered adults in Hamilton, and that most adults were light morph but a few dark morph individuals have been seen.

Able (1962) gives a detailed description of four jaegers leaving Lake Ontario on 2 September 1962 at Grimsby Beach, Ontario. All these birds circled, gaining altitude, until they appeared to be about 75 yards above the water, then headed south. At Hamilton, jaegers are seen flying west when they leave Lake Ontario and cross a barrier beach into Hamilton Harbor (R. Dubos, personal communication). From here, the birds continue overland and leave the lake region. It's presumed that they turn south but they are not recorded in any numbers on Lake Erie, which is south of this area.

SUMMARY

The fall jaeger migration in 1996 was an exceptional year for a number of reasons. Record numbers of jaegers were seen at Hamlin Beach and Hamilton. A new high count of Long-tailed Jaegers was tallied at Hamilton. This was the first year ever when high counts of jaegers occurred at all more than one viewing location. Past records have shown high count years in one location but not in another (as shown in Tables 1 to 3). The data shown in Tables 1 to 3 represent total annual counts. In 1996, we believe that at least some birds were lingering and were counted on consecutive days. In addition, it is likely that some of the same jaegers seen at Hamlin Beach were also seen at Hamilton. In general, neither of these causes of multiple counts were believed to be important factors in counts from past years.

It appears that when the weather is dominated by strong northwest or west winds, high counts occur in the eastern side of the Lake Ontario and those years when northeast winds dominate, the higher jaeger counts occur on the west side of the lake. Since lake observations are limited to a maximum of about one-half mile viewing distance, it has been the belief of most observers that there are more jaegers on Lake Ontario than are being seen. Indeed, many of the birds are seen at long distance and cannot be separated by species.

There are almost no sight records of jaegers over land south of Lake Ontario except those leaving the lake at Derby Hill. This fact coupled with the fact that jaegers are not seen leaving the south shore of Lake Ontario (from Hamlin Beach area), indicates that south shore departure is not a main migration route. Observations from Derby Hill and Hamilton indicate that most jaegers must leave the lake at the east and west ends. Observations also indicate that more

leave the west end of the lake. Their route after leaving Hamilton, Ontario is not known but they are seen on Lake Erie with a much lower frequency as compared to Lake Ontario. A small fraction of the Lake Ontario migrants might follow the Niagara River. It is possible but unknown if jaegers are leaving Lake Ontario at night.

Table 1. Number of Jaegers Recorded at Derby Hill, NY (Region 5).

Year	Long - tailed	Pomarine	Parasitic	Species	Total
1996	-	9	23	5	37
1995	-	-	-	-	0
1994	-	1	7	-	8
1993	-	-	-	-	0
1992	-	-	3	-	3
1991	-	-	4	-	4
1990	-	2	9	-	11
1989	-	2	14	-	16
1988	-	2	17	-	19
1987	-	2	17	-	19
1986	-	2	10	1	13
1985	-	-	29	-	29
1984	-	1	14	-	15
1983	-	-	16	-	16
1982	-	2	38	-	40
1981	-	2	83	-	85
1980	-	2	103	-	105
1979		3	216	-	219
1978		-	17	-	17
1977	1	-	61	-	62
1976	-	1	56	-	57
1975	-	1	26	-	27
1974	-	-	1	-	1
1973	-	8	331	52	391
1972	-	-	5	5	10
1971	-	2	15	-	17
1970	-	1	4	1	6
1969	-	2	8	-	10
1968	-	3	34	15	52
1967	-	-	-	-	0
1966	-	-	11	1	11
Total	1	48	1172	79	1300

Table 2. Number of Jaegers Recorded at Hamlin Beach, NY (Region 2).

Year	Long - tailed	Pomarine	Parasitic	Species	Total
1996	-	34	119	77	230
1995	-	-	5	-	5
1994	-	-	8	1	9
1993	-	2	8	-	10
1992	-	1	6	-	7
1991	-	2	3	-	5
1990	-	-	-	1	1
1989	-	-	9	-	9
1988	-	2	4	-	6
1987	-	-	7	4	11
1986	-	-	17	1	18
1985	-	6	42	5	53
1984	1	2	45	1	49
1983	-	5	27	2	34
1982	-	22	42	7	71
1981	-	10	11	28	49
1980	-	6	24	9	39
1979	-	6	8	1	15
1978	-	-	1	-	1
1977	-	-	2	-	2
1976	-	4	10	-	14
Total	1	102	398	136	637

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Table 3. Number of jaegers recorded at Hamilton, Ontario.

Year	Long - tailed	Pomarine	Parasitic	Species	Total
1996	15	12	129	11	167
1995	-	3	19	11	33
1994	1	-	34	6	41
1993	7	11	73	18	109
1992	1	1	25	11	38
1991	1	24	64	14	103
1990			3		3
1989		3	13	5	21
1988		4	18		22
1987		1	18		19
1986			12		12
1985			13		13
1984		2	13		15
1983		1	20		21
1982	1		22		23
1981		1	8		9
1980			1		1
Total	26	63	485	76	650

Table 4. Number of Parasitic Jaegers recorded at Buffalo, NY (Region 1).

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1996	3	1987	1	1978	2	1969	2
1995	0	1986	1	1977	21	1968	5
1994	0	1985	0	1976	1	1967	2
1993	2	1984	1	1975	6	1966	1
1992	1	1983	0	1974	9	1965	3
1991	13	1982	0	1973	1	1964	3
1990	1	1981	1	1972	3	1963	0
1989	0	1980	0	1971	1	1962	6
1988	1	1979	2	1970	2	1961	2

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