

AN UNUSUAL CONCENTRATION AND FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE POMARINE
JAEGER (*STERCORARIUS POMARINUS*) ON THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF GUATEMALA

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On 26 March 1992, I left Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, on the regularly scheduled boat trip north to Livingston (15°49'N, 88°45'W) at the mouth of the Río Dulce. The passage roughly paralleled 22 km of the west coast of the Bay of Amatique, Gulf of Honduras, about 1 km from shore. Half-way into the journey, I began to encounter dark seabirds with white patches in the primaries. These birds were substantially larger than the Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) which were also in the area. I also noted considerable barring on the body and a somewhat lighter base of the tail as the birds flew by the boat, then rested on the sea. The boat passed more individuals until we reached Livingston, where at least four or five more birds were seen harassing Royal Terns (*Sterna maxima*) and Sandwich Terns (*S. sandvicensis*) in the harbor.

During the afternoon of 27 March 1992, I used a 200-mm lens to take 4 color transparencies of the different jaegers as they flew past my hotel dock, about 1 km upstream (west) from the mouth of the Río Dulce. On 28 March, I again encountered the jaegers during the first half of my return boat trip to Puerto Barrios. One of these individuals exhibited a hint of a dark cap typical of jaegers (*Stercorarius* spp.), but none of the birds had elongated tail feathers. I left Guatemala uncertain of the species I had seen and photographed.

At the Carnegie Museum of Natural History (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), I asked D. Scott Wood and Kristin M. Williams to view the transparencies. Both tentatively identified the birds as immature Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). I also forwarded the transparencies to David Lee, North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, who also identified the birds as immature Pomarine Jaegers. In all cases, the identification was based on the depth of the body and the large wing area, and my comparison of size with that of the Laughing Gull.

The American Ornithologists' Union Checklist (1983) includes the West Indies and the northern coast of South America within the winter range of the Pomarine Jaeger, but states that this species has not been "recorded on the Caribbean coast of Middle America between southern Mexico and Costa Rica." In the western Atlantic, the winter range of the Pomarine Jaeger extends from both coasts of Peninsular Florida, the southeastern Gulf of Mexico, and all of the Caribbean Sea from the northern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula to Tobago, thence north and westward to the Bahama Islands (Furness 1987). Land (1970) did not report records of jaegers of any species from Guatemala, although 50 Pomarine Jaegers were seen 50-100 km off the Pacific coast of Guatemala on 15 April 1973 (Jehl 1974). One record of a Parasitic Jaeger (*S. parasiticus*) exists for Belize (Wood et al. 1986). No

jaegers are listed among the avifauna of Honduras (Monroe 1968). In Costa Rica, the Pomarine Jaeger is regarded as rare and sporadic on both coasts, and immatures have been found in two gulfs along the Pacific coast (Stiles and Skutch 1989). Pomarine Jaegers have been regularly seen in the Colon Harbor on the Caribbean coast of Panama (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989).

In the past 5 years, I have sailed the 28 km from Belize City (200 km north of Livingston, Guatemala) to Caye Caulker, Belize, 3 times during the months when jaegers might be expected, including a trip 1 week after seeing jaegers at Livingston. I saw no jaegers either from the boats or during my stays on Caye Caulker.

Considering the scarcity of records for the Caribbean coast of Central America, the numbers of Pomarine Jaegers in the Bay of Amatique is surprising. I observed at least 12 jaegers in the 3 days.

The proximity of immature jaegers to the mainland coast and in the Río Dulce, 22 km west of the open ocean, and consistent concentration within the Bay of Amatique suggests that these birds are not restricted to open ocean. The question remains: Were the jaegers at Livingston an isolated occurrence, or is the area a part of their normal winter range?

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