

Stercorarius parasiticus (Parasitic Jaeger)

Family: Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

Order: Charadriiformes (Shorebirds and Waders)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Parasitic jaeger, *Stercorarius parasiticus*.

[<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/parasitic-jaeger> downloaded 7 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Stercorarius parasiticus* is an ocean predator with an average mass of 450g (Potter, 2015). The plumage of the parasitic jaeger exists in two morphs, light and dark (Dakota, 2009). The light morph has ashy-brown upper parts with white under parts, and yellowish on the side of the neck and head (Fig. 1). The dark morph is uniformly sooty brown (Fig. 2) and there is also an intermediate morph (Fig. 3). Both the light and dark morphs have pale or white panels under the wings (Dakota 2009). Adults have dark caps with white flight feathers that are seen both dorsally and ventrally when the wings are stretched out. The two central tail feathers are elongated, pointed and straight (Farrand, 1983). Immature birds do not have elongated long tail feathers; they are dark with bars in their plumage and they pale with age. Length is 41-46cm, with an

average wing span of 118cm. The parasitic jaeger has a slightly hooked beak which is greyish-black, as well as the legs. Males and females are similar in physical appearance; females tend to be larger than males (Dakota, 2009).

DISTRIBUTION. *Stercorarius parasiticus* breeds in the Arctic in the Northern Hemisphere and migrates to areas of the Southern Hemisphere where they are mostly seen in southern oceans (Wiley and Lee, 1999). It has a wide distribution (Fig. 2) and is indigenous to many countries in almost every continent, except Antarctica. It is a rare visitor to Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Parasitic jaegers are mainly coastal but can also be found on grassland and tundra (Farrand, 1983). They can survive in windy and wet climates and withstand extreme cold. They can fly very rapidly in high winds in order to gain food from other birds or from the surface of the water. They breed during May or June in northern breeding areas, and attract mates by various flying techniques. They breed on islands and on mainland coasts; after the breeding season they can be found mainly at sea.

FOOD AND FEEDING. Most of its food is obtained by attacking other birds and stealing from them, which is known as kleptoparasitism (what bird.com, 2013). It attacks birds until they drop their food trying to escape. This technique of stealing food from other birds such as terns enables them to save energy seeking for food. Parasitic jaegers can also capture their own food, including insects, rodents, birds' eggs and nestlings, and berries. They prey on nests of water fowl such as snow geese, and eat their eggs and young.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The parasitic jaeger is solitary or seen in pairs, it also appears with flocks of small terns and other shorebirds such as gulls. The density of nesting population varies, with lower density colonies observed at high latitudes. Nests are built by pairs on the ground, on coastal gravel, and do not contain any plant material. Pairs arrive at the same territory each year but males return first to reclaim it.

REPRODUCTION. This species is monogamous (Dakota, 2009), they breed in the Arctic during the period of May to September when they return after moving from the southern hemisphere (Potter, 2015). Females choose dark males over pale morphs. Dark males are seen to get mates earlier and breed earlier than pale males. Pale males mate less due to them being overly aggressive (Dakota, 2009). When parasitic jaegers are a year old they start seeking territories for breeding, and once a stable territory is found that spot is used for the rest of their breeding lives. They normally breed once a year, laying 1 or 2 eggs per season, which take approximately 25-28 days to hatch.

BEHAVIOUR. The parasitic jaeger is a very aggressive bird when it comes to protecting its nesting area from intruders. It is a mostly silent bird that can fly long distances and is able to move quickly and easily during flight. When defending its territory it makes long high-pitched calls, and short repeated calls when attacking and before landing (Potter, 2015). They usually breed in loose colonies.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The parasitic jaeger is stated as Least Concern by the IUCN because of its very wide range and large as well as stable population. It is not an endangered species since there are no potential threats towards it. No conservation methods are put in place for this species because its population is fairly stable (IUCN, 2017).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Parasitic jaeger, dark morph.

[<http://www.arkive.org/parasitic-jaeger/stercorarius-parasiticus/image-G50042.html>, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Parasitic jaeger, intermediate morph.

[<http://www.arkive.org/parasitic-jaeger/stercorarius-parasiticus/image-G50042.html>, downloaded 7 March 2017]

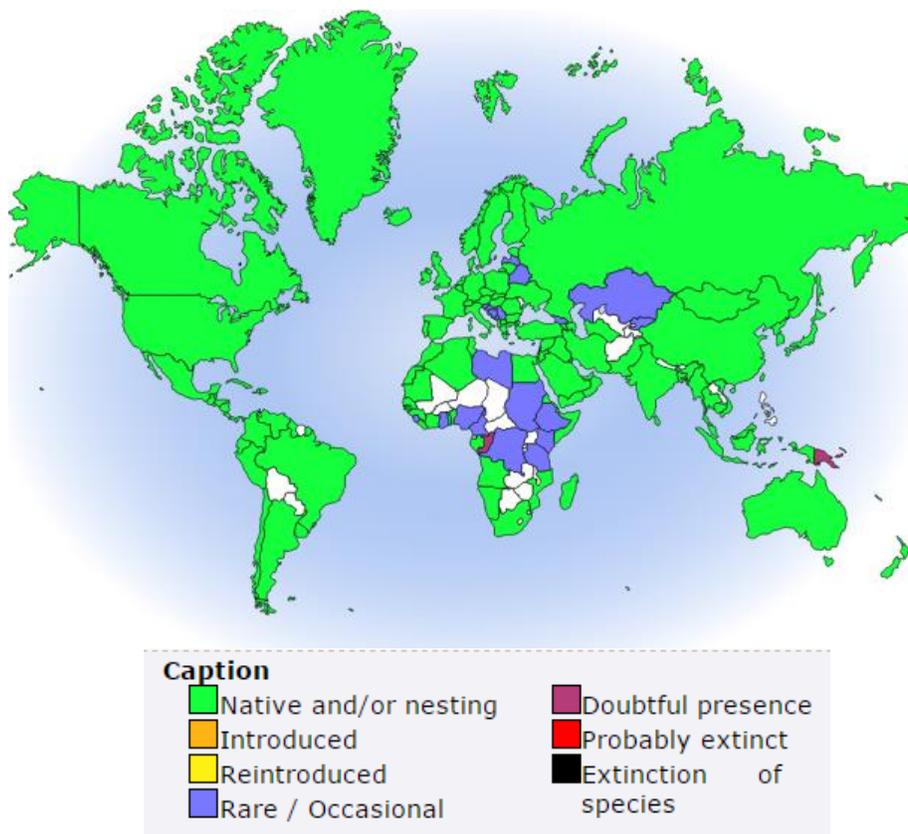


Fig. 4. Geographical distribution of the parasitic jaeger, by country.

[<http://www.oiseaux.net/maps/parasitic.jaeger.html>, downloaded 7 March 2017]

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