PARASITIC JAEGER *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Conservation Status

ALASKA: Low-Moderate **N. AMERICAN: Low Concern** **GLOBAL: Least Concern**

Breed	Eggs	Incubation	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
June-Aug	2	25-28 d	25-30 d	ground depression	piracy, kleptoparasitism, hover and strike	mammals, birds, eggs, fish

Life History and Distribution

The Parasitic Jaeger is appropriately named for the two main strategies it uses to acquire food. The first half of the name refers to the species' habit of stealing food from other birds (kleptoparasitism). The second word comes from the German word for hunter and alludes to the predatory nature of this aggressive, aerial champion.

In the northeastern Atlantic and possibly in the Aleutian Islands, kleptoparasitism is the feeding strategy of choice. These birds specialize in harassing colonial seabirds, relentlessly chasing them until they drop their food. Once dropped, this swift and efficient jaeger swoops down to catch the food before it strikes the water or the ground.

Throughout the tundra regions of the arctic, Parasitic Jaegers prefer to hunt and capture their own prey during the breeding season. They defend large territories within which they hunt mainly small birds and eggs, but also small mammals, insects, and fish. After the breeding season, they return to stealing food from other birds. Unlike other jaegers, this species plays a small role as a predator on brown lemmings (*Lemmus trimucronatus).* In some areas of the arctic, however, it plays a major role as a predator on passerines, small shorebirds, and their eggs. Pairs often cooperate in hunting.

Parasitic Jaegers are the mid-size member of the jaeger family. Adult breeding birds have pointed central tail feathers that extend up to four inches beyond the rest of the tail. These long tail feathers are lost after the breeding season. They have different color varieties, or "morphs." There is a light morph and a dark morph, as well as intermediate types. Light morphs have white underparts from throat to belly, often with a partial or complete brown band across the breast. They are brown across the back and tail with a blackish cap, white collar, and yellowish sides of the neck. Dark morphs are similar except the white areas on the head and underparts are replaced with brown. This color variation has been the subject of extensive research. Much of this work has focused on figuring out why the color variations exist, persist in such stable proportions, and why the percentage of dark to light morphs varies according to latitude. The percentage of dark morphs increases from north to south throughout the breeding range. To date, the reason for the color variation remains unsolved.

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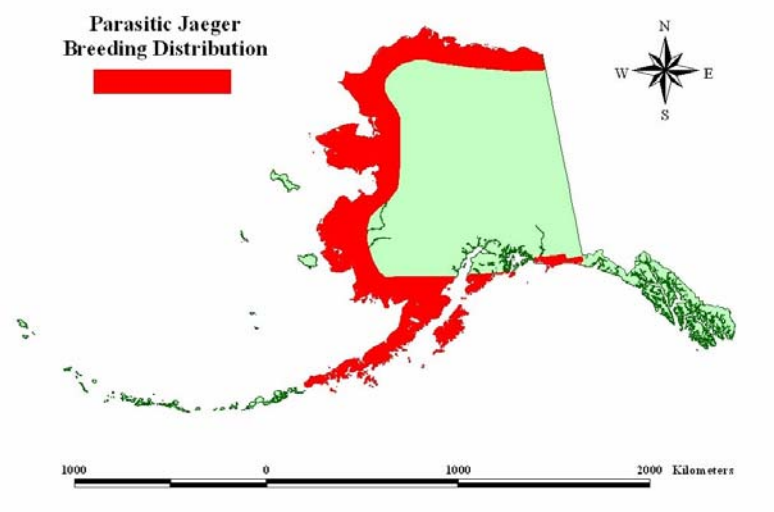
Jaegers spend the majority of their lives at sea, coming to land only to breed. Young birds will spend the entire first two years of their life over the open ocean, before returning to the arctic to nest. While at sea, the birds lead a mostly solitary life.

Alaska Seasonal Distribution

AK Region	Sp	S	F	W
Southeastern *	U	U	U	-
Southcoastal *	U	C	C	-
Southwestern *	C	C	C	-
Central *	-	R	-	-
Western *	C	C	C	-
Northern *	C	C	C	-

C= Common, U= Uncommon, R= Rare, + = Casual or accidental, - = Not known to occur, * = Known or probable breeder, Sp= Mar-May, S= June and July, F= Aug-Nov, W= Dec-Feb.

During the summer months in the Northern Hemisphere, Parasitic Jaegers breed across the arctic Polar Regions; they are found further south than either the Pomarine *(Stercorarius pomarinus)* or Long-tailed Jaegers *(Stercorarius longicaudus)*. Usually, they are the least numerous jaeger in the arctic. In the Americas, they nest in Alaska and across the tundra of northern Canada. In Alaska, they breed along the entire arctic and west coasts, the Alaska Peninsula, and throughout the Aleutians.



Seabird breeding distribution maps created from data *in* Birds of North America, Wiley and Lee 1997.

Breeding records are scarce on the south coast, but they have nested on Kodiak Island and possibly as far east as Glacier Bay. Parasitic Jaegers breed inland throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and along the arctic coastal plain as far south as the foothills of the Brooks Range. They also nest in northern Europe and Asia.

Wintering areas are not well defined because of the difficulty in distinguishing the three species of jaegers in nonbreeding plumage. It is thought that Parasitic Jaegers most commonly winter off both coasts of South America. They have also been observed repeatedly in the Sargasso Sea (northeast of the W. Indies) and there are occasional reports from the Gulf of Mexico, eastern Florida, and throughout the Caribbean.

Population Estimates and Trends

No estimates of total numbers are available for any area in the neararctic. Trends are available only for Scotland where the total number of Parasitic Jaegers increased between 1969 and 1986.

Conservation Concerns and Actions

Color polymorphism and its relationship to effective kleptoparasitism have been extensively studied in the northeast Atlantic. However, in the arctic, despite its role as a primary predator on small birds and eggs, relatively nothing is known about the biology of the species. It is the scarcest and least studied of the three jaegers there.

Additionally, almost nothing is known of its life during the winter in the southern hemisphere.

Recommended Management Actions

- Develop standardized methods for censusing Alaskan breeding populations of Parasitic Jaegers.
- Establish a monitoring program.
- Initiate biological studies of Parasitic Jaegers on the breeding grounds.
- Measure productivity.
- Determine wintering areas and migration routes.
- Investigate predator/prey relationships on the breeding grounds.
- Measure contaminants in Parasitic Jaeger eggs.

Regional Contact

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References

Armstrong 1995; IUCN Internet Website (2005); Kushlan *et al.* 2002; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002; Wiley and Lee 1999.

Full credit for the information in this document is given to the above references.