



Birds Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images (email to tonyp@bigpond.net.au or a.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

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Species Name: South Polar Skua (intermediate phase)	Scientific Name: <i>Stercorarius (Catharacta) maccormicki</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	Total of 2.0 to 3 hours (not continuous)
First and last date of occurrence:	23/09/2012
Distance to bird:	Down to 5 m

Site Location (e.g 3km SE of Lavers Hill, Victoria) SOSSA Pelagic outing from Wollongong. First sighting only about one hour out of port. See second image with Wollongong still visible in the background. First sighted 10 – 15 minutes before this picture was taken.

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats): First sighted on the way to the continental shelf. About one hour out on a four-hour trip. Travelled North Easterly direction not straight out to the shelf because of North Easterly winds. So SPS first sighted less than a third of the way out to the shelf.
Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Clear Sunny day with good visibility. Light to moderate winds.
Optical aids used: Bushnell Legend Ultra HD 10*42 binoculars. Canon 7D, Canon 100-400 mm lens

To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? Only four South Polar Skuas have been accepted by BARC off NSW (#144, #688, #689, #690). A fifth (off Sydney, 14/04/2012) was submitted to BARC by Nikolas K. Haass; the verdict is pending.
Did you use a field guide? (or any other references for help with identification). Bird immediately identified by Lindsay Smith as soon as sighted. I immediately saw it was quite different from the Two Brown Skua which were also present for part of the time, but needed a field guide to confirm that it was a South Polar Skua (intermediate phase). The following references cited; JOHN DOUGLAS PRINGLE (1987): The Shorebirds of Australia. North Ryde • GRAHAM PIZZEY and FRANK KNIGHT (2007): The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Sydney (Distinguishing South Polar Skua and Pomarine Jaeger << Sibley Guides posted July 9 th , 2007, last edited April 9 th , 2010 ---David Sibley).
Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)? Lindsay Smith and other Pelagic trip observers.
How confident are you of your identification? , e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not? 100%

Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically
YES or NO
YES

Other details: e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?
See above

Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw: (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

(1) Number: one SPS observed, but two Brown Skua,(see fig 6.) present simultaneously for some of the time, allowed for direct comparison

(2) Age, sex: bill indicates an juvenal or sub adult bird having blue with a blackish tip (see fig. 3). Café-au-lait-coloured plumage rules out juvenile, hence likely a 2nd year bird?
(GRAHAM PIZZEY and FRANK KNIGHT (2007): The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Sydney).

(3) Size and Shape: Slightly smaller than the present Brown Skua *Catharacta antarcticus* with finer bill and smaller head and less streaked than the Brown Skua which was also a more uniform darker brown colour with pronounced streaking over the mantle(fig 6.). SPS upper wings were a darker colour than the head, neck and body which were a uniform pale grey-brown colour. Compared to the Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus* SPS has broader wings relative to the body of the bird and relative to the wing length. Skuas have broader bodies that taper very little from the chest to the belly. Jaegers tend to have the body deep-chested and clearly tapered to the rear. Skuas have shorter broader tails than jaegers. The tail of the Pomarine jaeger is relatively long and narrow. (Distinguishing South Polar Skua and Pomarine Jaeger << Sibley Guides posted July 9th, 2007, last edited April 9th, 2010 ---David Sibley).

(4) Colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; bill blue-grey with black tip.(see fig. 3), eyes, legs and feet black

(5) Plumage colour and pattern Colour intermediate between pale and dark morph. Head, neck and body blue- grey in colour with head slightly darker than the rest. Top of wings darker grey-black with prominent white patches on upper and lower surfaces. Underwings black at the front with dark grey section either side of the white patch.

(6)No calls heard

(7) Behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species? Both SPS and Brown Skua sat next to each other in the water at the stern of the boat and could be directly compared.

Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

Main source of confusion in southern oceans are the Brown Skua *Catharacta antarcticus* and Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*, which were discussed above.

Was the description written from memory? Both from memory and examining my photos taken on the trip.

Were photographs taken? (please include where possible)

See below for photographs taken on the day. Other photos also taken are available but not used as file too large to transmit. Happy to send more photos if required.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3 Bill blue-grey with black tip



Figure 4.

What experience have you had with the species in question? (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

Have never seen SPS before but have seen the Brown Skua on two previous SOSSA pelagic trips off Wollongong including birds being tagged. Also had good views of Pomarine Jaegers of different ages on earlier trips this year.

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Please email all material