

## LONG-TAILED JAEGER *Stercorarius longicaudus*

### Conservation Status

**ALASKA:** Not At Risk

**N. AMERICAN:** Low Concern

**GLOBAL:** Least Concern

Breed	Eggs	Incubation	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
June-Aug	1-2	23-25 d	22-28 d	tundra, depression	hover and pounce, piracy	rodents, birds, fish, insects, berries

### Life History and Distribution

The Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) is rarely seen outside of the arctic breeding grounds because it spends over three-fourths of its life at sea. It is the smallest of the three jaegers, the most abundant and widely distributed in the arctic, and it breeds the furthest north.

Identifying the three Jaegers can be quite difficult. Adult Long-tailed Jaegers are similar to the light-phase of the Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) but are smaller, more graceful, and have very long central tail feathers (up to 8"). The tail feathers are narrow and tapered, instead of broad and twisted as in the Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). They also project well beyond the tail, instead of only a little way as in the Parasitic Jaeger. The upperparts of the Long-tailed Jaeger are grayish and paler than in the other jaegers, and their blackish cap is smaller and more sharply defined. Identifying the three jaeger species in immature and nonbreeding plumage is even more challenging.

Like the other jaegers, Long-tailed Jaegers occasionally harry terns and gulls to steal their food, but usually they feed by catching their own fish, taking flying insects in the air, and sometimes preying on the eggs and the young of other birds. On the breeding grounds, lemmings (*Lemmus trimucronatus*) and voles (*Microtus oeconomus*) are their staple food. Lemmings undergo regular cycles of abundance and scarcity. In years of scarcity, jaegers often do not breed at all and in other years, their numbers fluctuate with the abundance of lemmings. Unlike other avian predators in the arctic, this species does not experience high mortality or sudden mass migrations in years with scarce prey.

Long-tailed Jaegers breed in the high arctic of Eurasia and North America, with major populations in Alaska, Canada and Russia, and smaller populations around the rest of the arctic. It nests on dry tundra among moss or shrubs. Eggs are laid in a shallow depression on the ground with no nest materials.

In northern Alaska, they breed in the Brooks Range, western Alaska southward through the Yukon River Delta, the Trinity Island group at the south end of the Kodiak Archipelago, and probably at the south end of Kodiak Island itself. They also breed in small numbers in the mountains of central Alaska and the southwest Yukon.

This species is a transequatorial migrant that takes



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advantage of regions with high productivity and extended day lengths throughout the year. It spends winters over the open ocean and is very rarely found inland. Large numbers of all ages are found off the southeast coast of South America and southwestern Africa. Occasionally this species is reported in coastal waters in the South Atlantic. Smaller numbers are found regularly off the southeast coast of Australia, in Indonesian seas, and off the coast of Chile.

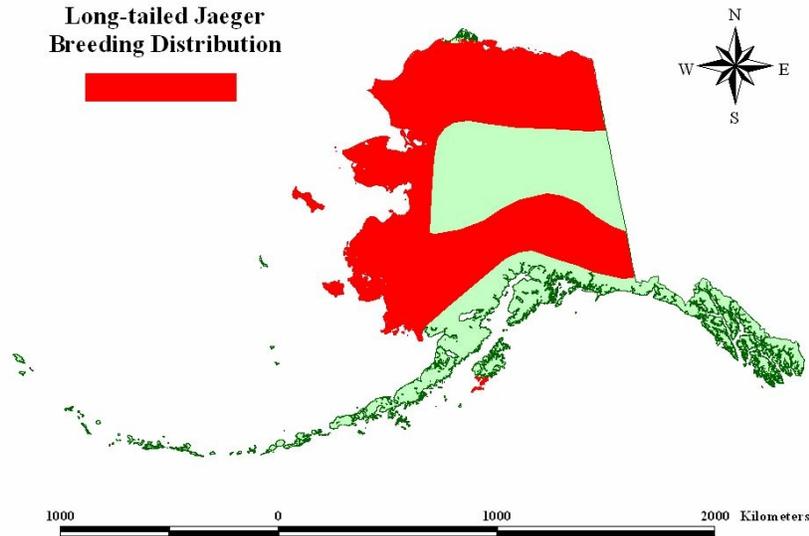
### Alaska Seasonal Distribution

AK Region	Sp	S	F	W
Southeastern	R	R	R	-
Southcoastal *	R	R	R	+
Southwestern *	U	U	U	-
Central *	C	C	C	-
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. © Armstrong 1995.

### Population Estimates and Trends

There are no detailed estimates of total numbers or trends for the Long-tailed Jaeger. The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (2002) tentatively estimates the global population at >150,000 individuals.



Seabird breeding distribution maps created from data in *Birds of North America*, Wiley and Lee 1998.

### Conservation Concerns and Actions

Because Long-tailed Jaegers are primarily pelagic, most of the information about them comes from observations on the breeding grounds. Fluctuations in densities of lemmings have no clear influence on total numbers and survival after fledging depends on conditions at sea. Yet, wintering areas and migration routes remain poorly documented (particularly in the Pacific), nothing is known about possible contamination by oceanic pollution, and molting also takes place primarily at sea so even the progression of immature plumages is speculative.

The majority of the published information about this jaeger focuses on identification and unusual sightings. The species could be used for monitoring the health of arctic ecosystems because it breeds as far north as any bird and is abundant and conspicuous in the arctic, but much more study is needed before we could have any understanding of the long-term regulation of Long-tailed Jaeger populations.

### Recommended Management Actions

- Develop standardized methods for monitoring populations.
- Implement a regional monitoring program.
- Determine Alaskan Long-tailed Jaeger breeding population numbers.
- Complete a nesting inventory.
- Measure productivity.
- Determine wintering areas and migration routes.
- Measure contaminants in Long-tailed 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 1998.

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



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