

## LBRC Report Form

1. English and Scientific names: South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):  
1 individual. This individual was well into primary molt and how far along it was indicates it is at least 1 year old.
3. Parish:  
Plaquemines
4. Specific Locality:  
~30 mi. SE of South Pass unsure if anyone got an exact point
5. Date(s) when observed: 17 August 2024
6. Time(s) of day when observed: 1256
7. Reporting observer: David Vander Pluym
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):  
All but one on board saw it. My understanding is that K L Vinay was the first to spot the bird flying up the wake but thought it was a Pom Jaeger. See list of people here  
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S191988163>
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):  
Van Remsen, David Muth, Esme Rosen
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Sun was high overhead which washed out the photos
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): 10x20 Swarovski's
12. Distance to bird(s): 50-100m bird was about 30 meters off the boat and maybe 20 meters high
13. Duration of observation: >1 second of good views
14. Habitat: Open ocean, bluish water

15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): As we were heading ~NW the boat suddenly slowed to a stop. I was at the front of the boat and quickly noticed as a large bird came flying high with powerful wing strokes up the left side of the boat from the wake and quickly overtook the boat, disappearing into the distance.

16. Description (include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

Pretty quickly shouts of skua came out from the front of the boat as this was a heavy broad winged, bull chested bird. Bird was worn and in molt with fresh fresh inner primaries contrasting with the worn outer primaries. Head (nape may have been slightly paler or it may have been the harsh light), neck, and underparts were a pretty uniform cold blonde-gray with a few darker flecks in the underparts (makes this a light morph). This contrasted strongly with the darker underwing coverts. Back and upperwing darker chocolate brown with a few paler speckles. Broad white bases to the primary feathers visible both below and above. Large thick bill. As the sighting was brief and I concentrated on trying to get a few photos details were missed. Notes written immediately after the sighting.

17. Voice: none

18. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Structure, bulky size and broad wings eliminates jaegers as does the broad white base to the primaries visible from both above and below (jaegers show less white above). Though looks were brief this was a pretty obvious skua. While this was a large and bulky bird it was not bulky enough for the Brown Skua complex (or Great). Uniform pale underparts and head (lacking cap) and limited pale brown on the back (lacking golden spangling) helps rule out Great and the Brown Skua complex. Lack of warm tones helps rule out Great and Chilean Skua.

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):

Yes by me and others. Mine are attached

20. Previous experience with this species: I have seen hundreds on the West Coast when I was a leader for Shearwater Journeys for 10 years. I have also seen a handful of South Polar in Antarctica and 1 in Maine while I was doing seabird surveys. I have seen thousands of jaegers, mainly on the West Coast but also a handful inland and in the gulf of Maine. I saw a couple Great Skuas in the Gulf of Maine and 50+ Chilean Skuas in

Chile and Argentina. Within the Brown Skua complex I have seen 50+ Falkland (in the Falkland Island), ~40 Subantarctic in the subantarctic and Antarctica regions; also a likely one off California (see Western Birds 36(1)).

21. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

I checked the Oceanic Birds of the World (Howell and Zufelt) to remind myself about the various Brown Skua taxa as well as skua molt.

22. Identification aids used when?

After observation

23. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:

Yes

24. Date report completed:

22 August 2024

25. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

Yes

26. If yes, may we include your name with the report?

Yes









