A small group of widespread and highly mobile coastal or marine birds, medium to large. Plumages are highly variable but mostly brown and white, with white flashes in the wing. The small skuas are difficult to separate mostly from juvenile to immature, or immature to adult winter, or between breeding and non-breeding plumage. Sexual skew. Flight is fast and direct, or twisting and turning in pursuit while releasing chases and pursuits to attract prey or lure it into deeper water and forcing it to bring prey. 

LONG-TAILED SKUA Stercorarius longicaudus

35 cm — projecting tail feathers. 350 g. Smallest skua. Like small slender Arctic Skua but more buoyant and fly higher. Grey upperparts with darker primaries, which have only 2 pale edges, short and shirt. Similar variety of plumages and changes with age as in Arctic Skua. Pale phase found in NZ, dark phase rare. Intermediary variable very common. Breeding adult has grey-brown underparts contrasting with dark black back and wing. Juvenile has grey underparts contrasting with white back and wings (less than 60 cm). Non-breeding adult lacks or has short pointed tail projection, and undertail is banded brown and white. Juvenile and immature have short tail projection, heavily barred underwing and undertail, and often a barred rump. Habitat: Breviolaris, Arctic and sub-Arctic. Winters in tropical and southern temperate coasts. Mostly struggles to North Zealand in late summer and autumn.

SKUAS

Species 2 breed in the New Zealand region, 2 are regular transients in spring and autumn as they pass between their Arctic breeding grounds and Southern Ocean seas, and 1 is a straggler from non-breeding areas in the central Pacific.

Skua are strong-flying pelagic birds allied to the gulls. They have hooked beaks with a distinctive sheath covering the base of the upper. Most species have light and dark plumage phases, with some intermediate forms all have conspicuous white flashes in the outer wing. The three small species have highly developed central tail feathers that extend well beyond the remainder of the tail, but these are rarely seen in New Zealand breeding skua.

Skua are piratic, pursuing gulls, shearwaters and albatross, dropping them to drop or disperse their food. These spectacular aerial promotions are most often seen in autumn when large flocks of White-fronted terns usually have Arctic and Pomarine skua in attendance. During breeding, the large native skua feed mostly on shoaling fish, petals and their eggs and chicks, or pernivorous eggs and chicks. They also take crabs from beaches or coastal fasteants. They are also prone to their three terrestrial territories, defending noisily at people or other large invertebrates invading their breeding area. They strike at people with their legs as they pass close overhead.


STERCORARIIDAE

Stiff 35 cm, excluding central tail feathers; 300 g.

Long-tailed Skua — Stercorarius longicaudus

With a distinctive sheath covering the base of the upper beak, most species have light and dark plumage phases, with some intermediate forms all have conspicuous white flashes in the outer wing. The three small species have highly developed central tail feathers that extend well beyond the remainder of the tail, but these are rarely seen in New Zealand breeding skua.

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232. LONG-TAILED SKUA

Stercorarius longicaudus

Stercorariidae

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233. LONG-TAILED SKUA

Stercorarius longicaudus

Plate 52

Stercorarius longicaudus

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