

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Arctic skua: pp 184-186.



ARCTIC SKUA

Family Stercorariidae

Species *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Common names Arctic Skua, Arctic Jaeger

Status Migrant

Abundance Uncommon

Size 430 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Pomarine Skua 480 mm)

Habitat A coastal species which ranges into deeper waters.

Worldwide range Breeds in countries of the Arctic Circle.

New Zealand range Waters around New Zealand over summer.

Discussion Easily identified by its habit of chasing White-fronted Terns to rob them of recently caught prey.

Morphs Comes in both a dark and light morph. They are known for a great

variation of colour so the descriptions below are approximate only.

Description – non-breeding – dark morph

Upperparts and underparts Brown with crown darker. **Wings** Brown usually with conspicuous white flashes at the base of the primary wing feathers on the underwings and with traces of white on the upperwings. The wing-flashes are sometimes missing.

Description – non-breeding – light morph

Crown neck and upperparts Dark brown. **Chin and throat** White. **Breast** Brown band. **Underparts** White. **Tail** Brown, with a protruding central tail feather.

Conspicuous features

- Prominent tail feather but not on non-breeding plumage birds.
- White underwing flashes.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Flies steadily and level when searching for feeding terns.
- Sits on the water like a gull.
- Extremely manoeuvrable when in flight chasing terns.
- Has the habit of approaching fishing boats and sitting on the water nearby.
- Will roost on beaches in the vicinity of other birds such as Caspian Terns.

Breeding localities of the Arctic Skua Birds breed north of the 58th parallel in loose colonies on offshore islands, open tundra and on open sandspits.

Migration Birds head southwards in July to the 46th parallel. They return north in March. Some immatures are known to stay on.

Where to find – North Island

Northland – Any coastal water where White-fronted Terns feed.

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island waters. P. 292.

South Auckland – Miranda near nesting terns on the shellbanks. P. 302.

Where to find – South Island

Cook and Foveaux Strait – From the ferries.