

## SOUTH POLAR SKUA

*Stercorarius maccormicki*

**nonbreeding visitor, occasional**

monotypic

South Polar Skuas breed in the Shetland Is and Antarctica and disperse widely throughout the world's oceans during non-breeding seasons (May-Nov), N to Greenland and the Gulf of Alaska (Higgins and Davies 1996, AOU 1998). It is one of 4-5 similar taxa, included in the genus *Catharacta* until 2000 (AOU 2000), which can be difficult to distinguish in the field. Most or all large skuas that reach the N Pacific appear to be South Polar Skuas; however, there is some indication that Brown Skuas (*S. lonnbergi*) of Antarctica and subantarctic islands may also occur in the North Pacific (Howell 2005). Several records of large skuas from Hawaii have shown characters diagnostic of South Polar Skua, although in some cases other species of skuas were not eliminated. Prior to 1988, skuas in Hawaiian waters were considered either South Polar or Great (*S. skua*) skuas (Pyle 1977-1983).

All records of skuas in Hawaiian waters have been observed during *at-sea* surveys or one-day boat trips offshore. H.C. Palmer reported a probable skua between Midway and O'ahu in Jul-Aug 1891 (Rothschild 1900). Of eight skuas recorded by King (1970) during monthly surveys S and E of the Southeastern Hawaiian Islands Mar 1964-Jun 1965, two were within Hawaiian waters: 17 May 1964 (about 110 km E of Hawai'i I) and 8 Sep 1964 (about 335 km NE of Maui). Other skuas were observed about 275 km NW of Kaua'i 29 Aug 1966 (W.B. King, pers. comm.), and about 335 km N of O'ahu in early Nov 1976 (Gould 1983). None of these were identified to species (*cf. E* 37:121) although chances are good they were South Polar Skuas (Spear et al. 1999). The first confirmed records of South Polar Skuas were of one photographed about 92 km S of Hawai'i I (18° 5' N 155° 1' W) 7 Oct 1987 (*E* 48:21; [HRBP](#) 0624-0626) and another observed 13 Nov 1989 (Spear et al. 1999). Rowlett (2002) recorded 12 individuals 12 Sep-10 Nov 2002, from NE of O'ahu to SSW of Kure. The high count was of two birds observed 175 SW of Lisianski 7 Nov. Other skuas have been observed near Lehua Islet NW of *Ni'ihau* (17 Jun 2003); off *Kaua'i* 28 Jul 1993, 19 Aug 1993, 29 Jun 2000, 24 Aug 2001, and 24 Jun 2003; off *O'ahu* 2 and 13 Aug 1992; and off *Hawai'i I* 29 Aug 1991, 3 Oct 2004, 12 Aug 2007 (2), 11 Nov 2007, 9 Jul 2008 ([HRBP](#) 5498-5499 published *NAB* 62:632), 20 Aug 2009 ([HRBP](#) 5746-5747), and 19 Oct 2009 ([HRBP](#) 5796-5798). There are several other records of probable skuas in Hawaiian waters (e.g., *E* 31:98).

### [Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

### [Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2009. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 1 (31 December 2009) <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>