

## A SUMMARY OF RECENT PELAGIC TRIPS OFF THE NEW JERSEY COAST

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ALAN BRADY

Until 1973, all of my pelagic birding off the New Jersey coast had been done at a maximum distance of twenty miles off shore, ranging from ports at Cape May to Sandy Hook. All the D.V.O.C. trips were in this area and my knowledge of the bird life beyond twenty miles was quite minimal.

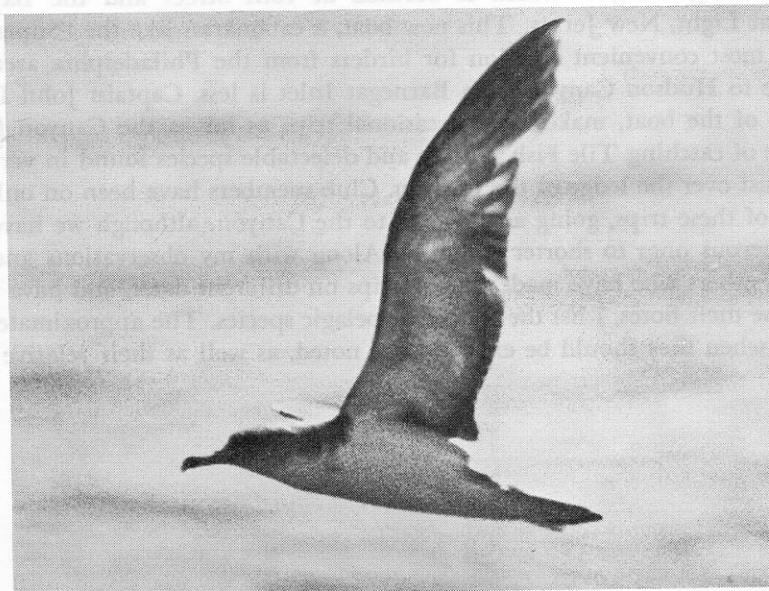
The wealth of birds at the Hudson Canyon, the edge of which lies some eighty miles east of Brigantine, New Jersey, came to us when several D.V.O.C. members went on a scheduled Tile fishing trip aboard the boat, "Super Cat", berthed near Sandy Hook, New Jersey. We had been on shorter trips aboard the same boat and had some birding luck; but this time, we went all the way to Hudson Canyon. While the boat drifted along the edge of the canyon, we were able to study the abundant bird life. It was immediately apparent that this area attracts many more birds than areas nearer to shore. The water temperature here varies from 45°F in winter to 72°F in summer. Marine life is plentiful. It has been a favorite fishing ground for Russian and Japanese fishing boats, several of which are occasionally sighted. Birds flock around the fishing fleets, feeding on the waste of fish cleaning operations.

Our most recent and successful pelagic trips, however, have been aboard the "Miss Barnegat Light" which is berthed at 18th Street and the Bay near Barnegat Light, New Jersey. This new boat, a catamaran like the "Super Cat", is in a most convenient location for birders from the Philadelphia area. The distance to Hudson Canyon from Barnegat Inlet is less. Captain John Larson, skipper of the boat, makes only occasional trips as far as the Canyon for the purpose of catching Tile Fish, a large and delectable species found in very deep water just over the ledge of the Canyon. Club members have been on only four or five of these trips, going all the way to the Canyon, although we have been on numerous ones to shorter distances. Along with my observations and with those of others who have made similar trips on different dates, and have kindly given me their notes, I list the following pelagic species. The approximate times of year when they should be expected are noted, as well as their relative abundance.



**NORTHERN FULMAR, *Fulmarus glacialis*.**

Until 1976, we had very few records. Early November had been the most promising time to see them. This spring, however, a major flight was recorded in Baltimore Canyon, an area seventy miles east of Ocean City, Maryland. In Hudson Canyon on 29 May, about a month later than the large flight farther south, fourteen birds were sighted.



**CORY'S SHEARWATER, *Puffinus diomedea*.**

This large shearwater arrives in our waters in May, becoming more plentiful during the summer months and leaving in November. It's never a very numerous shearwater, but is regular in its occurrence.



**GREATER SHEARWATER, *Puffinus gravis*.**

The records show this species to be the commonest shearwater, absent only in the coldest months. This boat follower is seen from May through late fall, and can be observed in the hundreds at Hudson Canyon as late as early November.



**SOOTY SHEARWATER, *Puffinus griseus*.**

This is a warm water shearwater. It arrives in numbers at the end of May and leaves even sooner than the Cory's. Single birds have been sighted as late as early November.

**AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER, *Puffinus lherminieri*.**

One bird was sighted on 1 September 1974, about five miles offshore.

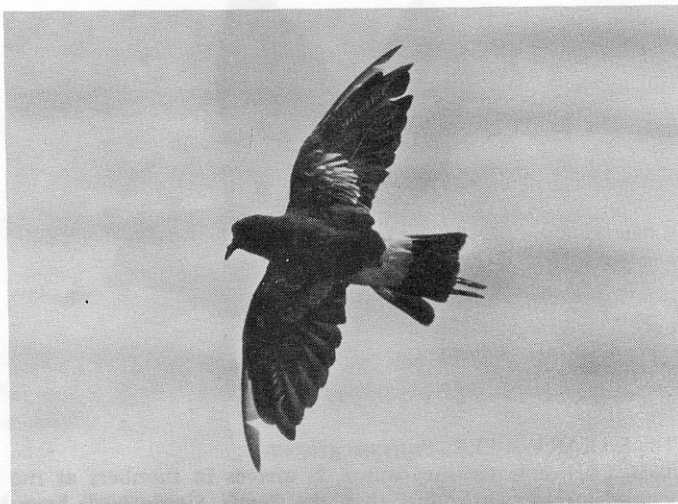


MANX SHEARWATER, *Puffinus puffinus*.

In our experience, it has been a lone shearwater. Single birds have been recorded on 31 May 1975, 2 November 1975 and 16 November 1975. On 29 May 1976, two individuals were seen briefly.

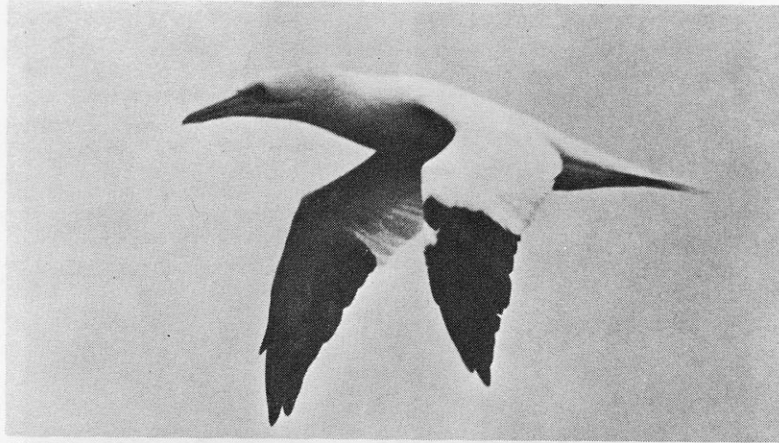
LEACH'S STORM PETREL, *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*.

Fleeting glimpses of this bird have been the best we have recorded thus far. Each spring trip has sighted several birds, including our most recent trip, 29 May 1976, when we recorded six individuals.



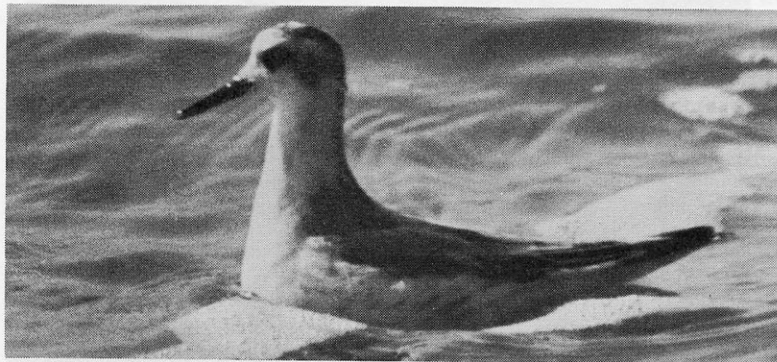
WILSON'S STORM PETREL, *Oceanites oceanicus*.

A widely scattered bird often seen feeding over oil slicks from early May until mid-November. On occasion, good sized flocks can be seen several miles off shore. In summer, near the fishing fleet in the Canyon, they can be seen in all directions and in seemingly endless numbers.



NORTHERN GANNET, *Morus bassanus*.

Although occasionally seen from shore, this bird is most numerous near the fishing grounds. As many as sixty have followed our boat at one time. They begin arriving in late August, are present all winter and leave by the middle of May.



RED PHALAROPE, *Phalaropus fulicarius*.

This bird, an early spring migrant, is seldom seen until fall. Thus, in November, many flocks of from ten to thirty birds each are present. In early November, 1975, a total of over five hundred birds were observed.



NORTHERN PHALAROPE, *Lobipes lobatus*.

This species is seen most commonly in small groups during early May, and on occasion is quite abundant. Our records show them migrating much closer to shore than the Red Phalarope.



POMARINE JAEGER, *Stercorarius pomarinus*. (Light Phase)

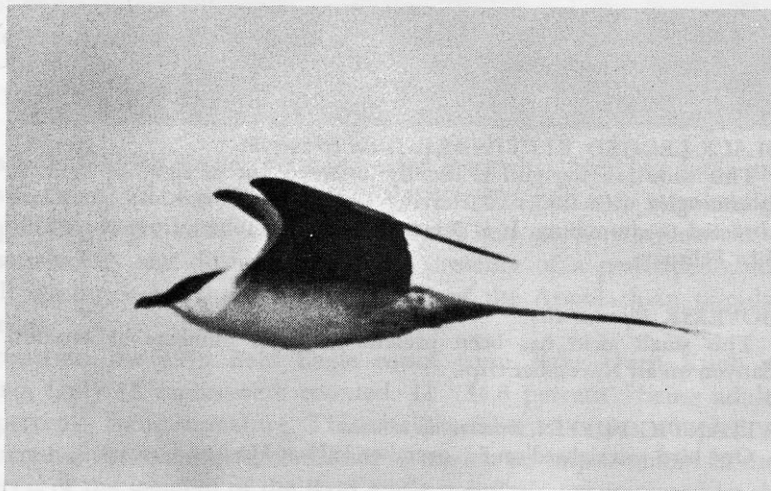


POMARINE JAEGER, *Stercorarius pomarinus*. (Dark Phase)



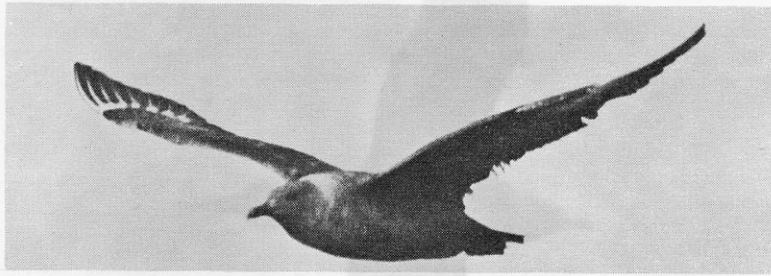
PARASITIC JAEGER, *Stercorarius parasiticus*.

Both Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers arrive in our waters late in April with many more appearing in May. During the summer months, a few stragglers are present, but September, October and November are the peak months for jaegers at Hudson Canyon. The immature birds of the species are most difficult to separate and numbers of immatures are present in fall. Then there are usually a number of birds on the periphery of the gull flocks that follow the fishing boats. Over fifty jaegers have been observed on single trips in the fall.



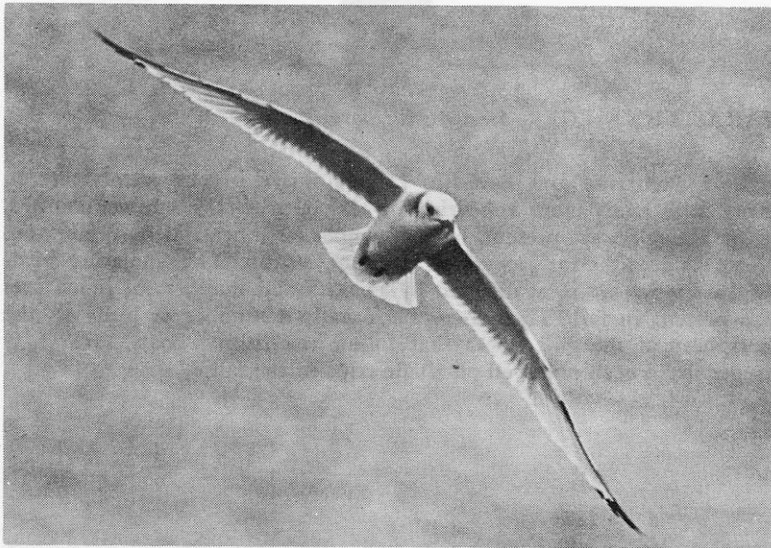
LONG-TAILED JAEGER, *Stercorarius longicaudus*.

On 29 May 1976 in Hudson Canyon, we were extremely fortunate to have three of these graceful birds appear and sail around our boat. Everyone was afforded excellent views as they were attracted to our chumming.



**NORTHERN SKUA, *Catharacta skua*.**

On both spring trips to Hudson Canyon, 31 May 1975 and 29 May 1976, we recorded single birds. A possibility exists that the 1976 bird was of the Antarctic species, *C. maccormicki*.



**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE, *Rissa tridactyla*.**

This wide ranging gull is usually observed out of sight of land. It intermingles with flocks of Herring Gulls, *Larus argentatus*, that are attracted to chumming. It is present in small numbers from November thru February.

**DOVEKIE, *Plautus alle*.**

This small alcid has been present in small numbers at Hudson Canyon on all November trips.

**ATLANTIC PUFFIN, *Fratercula arctica*.**

One bird was sighted on 8 November 1975 at Hudson Canyon.

We hope that other D.V.O.C. pelagic trips to this productive area will give us many more sightings on which to base further information. I am most indebted to Richard Rowlett for use of his records in both Hudson and Baltimore Canyons.