

POMARINE SKUAS *STERCORARIUS POMARINUS* WINTERING OFF BRAZIL

FÁBIO OLMOS

Olmos F. 2002. Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* wintering off Brazil. Atlantic Seabirds 4(2): 73-76. *In the Atlantic, Pomarine Skuas Stercorarius pomarinus have been rarely recorded in southern South America. At-sea observations made from bottom long-line fishing boats operating on the shelf off the Brazilian coast between 23°30'S and 29°S showed Pomarine Skuas to be present in March, May, October and November, but absent in July, and to be the commonest skua in the area. Most records were made in March, when up to 14 individuals were recorded at a time. Most birds seemed to be immatures. Pomarine Skuas are clearly more regular off Brazil than suggested by the current literature.*

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The Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* makes long annual migrations between its breeding areas in the Arctic and wintering grounds in the tropics and further south to southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Off southern South America, sparse available information suggested that Pomarine Skuas were vagrants (Furness 1987, Malling Olsen & Larsson 1997). There are few records of Pomarine Skuas in eastern South America south of the Caribbean. Escalante (1972, 1985) reported sight records for Punta del Este, Uruguay, and Cabo San Antonio, Argentina. The first Brazilian specimen, a female in second winter plumage, was collected at the mouth of the Tapajós River (around 03°30'S, 55°30'W) on 7 May 1960 (Escalante 1972). After that, Belton (1994) reported a sight record of a possible Pomarine Skua at 32°09'S, 50°09'W, and Olmos (1997) listed Pomarine Skuas among the seabirds attending bottom long-line fishing boats operating off Brazil between 25°15' and 27°49'S, but gave no details on skua records. Here further information is presented on records mentioned by Olmos (1997, 2000) and on new observations of Pomarine Skuas made off the southern Brazilian coast.

Data were collected during five cruises on board bottom long-line fishing vessels operating on the Brazilian shelf, mostly in waters less than 200 m deep. Shelf waters are strongly influenced by the warm, southward-flowing Brazil Current, but also by seasonal upwellings and the penetration of cold waters from the south in winter (Olmos 1997). Surface water temperature never dropped below 18°C during the observations, and was commonly around 22-26°C. Cruise dates were 23 - 27 Novembre 1994, 24 - 30 March 1995, 29 July - 7 August 1995, 3 - 9 Octobre 1996, and 26 May - 1 June 1997. The vessels

fished mainly near the shelf break and most skua observations were made on the shelf in waters less than 100 m deep. Bottom long-line fishing in Brazil has been described by Olmos (1997), Tutui *et al.* (2000) and Silva (2000). Seabird records were gathered by keeping a constant watch with the aid of binoculars during each day-time setting and hauling, recording the maximum number of birds of each species attending the boat (see Olmos 1997). So, the results provide the minimum number of individual birds present, as this method tends to underestimate the actual number of individuals due to turn-over of satiated birds and recruitment of new ones as the boat progress. Malling Olsen & Larsson's (1997) guide was used for the aging and identification of photographed specimens and assign them to age classes.

Pomarine Skuas were recorded during the November 1994, March 1995, October 1996 and May 1997 cruises, but were absent in July-August 1995 (Table 1). Pomarine Skuas were most frequent around the boats in March, when they were recorded almost every day. In fact, Pomarine Skuas made 15% of all bird records, only Spectacled Petrels *Procellaria conspicillata* being more abundant (58%). In March the skuas tended to stay in the same general area, with repeated sightings of the same recognizable individuals in consecutive days. Records made in May, October and November seem to refer to migrant birds only passing by and taking the opportunity for a snack. Skuas came quite close the fishing boat to feed, both by keeping on the wing and dipping for food and by sitting on the water waiting for discards to be thrown. Spectacled Petrels commonly supplanted skuas trying to get favored items like shark liver or whole bait (Argentine Squid *Ilex argentinus* and Chub Mackerel *Scomber japonicus*) discarded during hauling. The skuas fed mostly on floating scraps ignored by the petrels, like shark intestines and tilefish *Lopholatilus villarii* (Malacanthidae) viscera. Although skuas are considered surface feeders, some individuals sitting on the water would dive completely to at least 1 m deep to reach drifting discards passing below them; the clear water made it possible to see the skuas used their wings to dive, performing an underwater "somersault" before coming back to the surface. They would also probe kitchen discards thrown by the crew. No instance of predation on other birds was recorded but skuas would fight among themselves and try to kleptoparasitise each other. Unsuccessful attempts to steal food from Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* (three) and Spectacled Petrels (four) were also observed in May. Great Shearwaters are aggressive enough to fight Yellow-nosed Albatrosses *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* trying to steal their food, and Pomarine Skuas were twice displaced from floating discards by Great Shearwaters. Spectacled Petrels did the same four times.

Table 1. Skua records off the Brazilian coast from bottom long-line fishing boats (individuals).
 Tabel 1. Waargenomen jagers vanaf vissersschepen voor de kust van Brazilië (aantal individuen).

Date	Coordinates	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>
23 Nov 1994	25°13'S, 44°52'W	-	3	-
25 Nov 1994	25°15'S, 44°55'W	2	-	-
26 Nov 1994	25°10'S, 45°03'W	1	-	-
24 Mar 1995	25°58'S, 45°34'W	1	-	-
25 Mar 1995	25°54'S, 45°34'W	5	2	-
25 Mar 1995	27°05'S, 46°47'W	5	5	1
26 Mar 1995	27°06'S, 46°50'W	4	1	-
26 Mar 1995	27°03'S, 46°46'W	2	-	-
27 Mar 1995	27°03'S, 46°46'W	8	2	-
27 Mar 1995	27°49'S, 46°17'W	-	1	-
28 Mar 1995	27°49'S, 46°17'W	4	1	-
28 Mar 1995	27°47'S, 47°12'W	5	3	-
29 Mar 1995	27°58'S, 47°09'W	6	-	-
29 Mar 1995	27°04'S, 46°49'W	5	2	-
30 Mar 1995	27°07'S, 46°52'W	14	2	-
30 Mar 1995	25°54'S, 45°35'W	4	-	-
30 Mar 1995	25°12'S, 45°07'W	2	3	-
30 Mar 1995	25°06'S, 45°15'W	6	-	-
3 Oct 1996	26°49'S, 46°46'W	1	-	-
8 Oct 1996	25°39'S, 45°08'W	1	-	-
27 May 1997	24°41'S, 44°37'W	1	-	-
28 May 1997	24°07'S, 43°43'W	7	-	-
28 May 1997	24°14'S, 43°44'W	2	-	-

Most recorded skuas were immatures (first-third summer plumage) and very few probably adult birds with all dark underwings were seen, suggesting that Brazilian waters are mainly visited by young birds. The records suggest that Pomarine Skuas are more common off Brazil than expected from previous accounts. The rich waters of the Falklands/Malvinas Current and the coasts of Uruguay and Argentina are some of the main areas used by Long-tailed *Stercorarius longicaudus* and Arctic *S. parasiticus* skuas during the austral summer (Veit 1995, Malling Olsen & Larsson 1997), both being regularly recorded in southern Brazil (Vooren & Chiaradia 1989). Olrog (1967) and Escalante (1970, 1972, 1985) suggested the regular presence of Pomarine Skuas in Uruguay and Argentina, and my data agree with their view that Pomarine Skuas are regular migrants to the southern West Atlantic.

In Brazil, several seabirds have been documented only from a few beached corpses, suggesting they are quite rare. However, very few ornithologists have attempted to study seabirds in their open-sea habitat at and beyond the Brazilian shelf. Recent offshore studies showed that several species,

such as the Pomarine Skua, were in fact quite common, for example around fishing vessels (Olmos 1997, Olmos *et al.* 2001).

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MIDDELSTE JAGERS *STERCORARIUS POMARINUS* OVERWINTEREND VOOR BRAZILIË

Tot dusverre werden Middelste Jagers Stercorarius pomarinus vrijwel niet in zuidelijk Zuid-Amerika gemeld. Waarnemingen vanaf vissersschepen op zee toonden aan dat Middelste Jagers op het Continentale Plat van Brazilië (23°30'ZB en 29°ZB) voorkomen in maart, mei, oktober en november. In juli werden tot dusverre geen Middelste Jagers gezien, maar in de andere maanden was het zelfs de talrijkste soort. De hoogste aantallen werden in maart gezien, met maximaal 14 exemplaren in een groep. Vrijwel alle vogels waren onvolwassen. Het voorkomen van Middelste Jager is veel regelmatigere dan de literatuur suggereert.

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