



**SOUTH POLAR SKUA**  
*Stercorarius maccormicki*





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Order : Charadriiformes — Family : Stercorariidae

## GEOGRAPHIC RANGE :

The species breeds throughout the Antarctic continent and Peninsula. It is one of the only Antarctic species that undergoes a transequatorial migration, wintering as far north as Alaska and Greenland.

## HABITAT :

During the winter the species is pelagic and is found in warm and cold waters offshore. During the breeding season, South Polar Skuas settle on relatively snow-free areas in Antarctica, sometimes near penguin and petrel colonies.

## DIET :

South Polar Skuas primarily feed at sea on fish and krill. In winter, they probably add carrion to their diet.

## BEHAVIOR :

South Polar Skuas forage several kilometers away from their colonies in flocks of about 100 birds. They gather around carcasses, and are known to kill sick or weak birds of their own species. Outside the breeding season, they surface plunge and attack petrels and shags to steal their prey in flight, grabbing them by the wings, tail or abdomen. South Polar Skuas are very territorial during the breeding season. They are monogamous, pair for life, and usually show strong site fidelity. They perform threat displays with their wings spread out wide, exposing whitish outer-wing patches while giving harsh calls. Physical attacks and fighting may occur, sometimes resulting in serious injuries. In established breeding pairs, the bond is renewed on the territory used year after year, but courtship displays are limited. They have a powerful flight with fast wing-beats.

## REPRODUCTION :

The breeding season starts in November and continues until February. South Polar Skuas form loose colonies on bare, open grounds along the coast. Rocky outcrops allow a good view over the territory. The ground is often covered with lichens and mosses in sheltered ice- and snow-free depressions. Nests are bare scrapes on the ground, in soil or moss. Females lay two eggs and incubation takes 28 to 31 days. Nidifugous chicks leave the nest 24 to 48 hours after hatching and fledge after 36-45 days. Usually, only one chick survives.

- Size : 50-55 cm
- Wingspan : 130-140 cm
- Weight : 0.9-1.6 kg



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## THREATS :

The species is categorized as "Least concern" (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, August 2018). It has a wide range, and despite a mixed breeding success and harsh weather conditions affecting adults and juveniles, no factors are thought to pose a genuine threat to this species at present.