

**NORTHERNMOST RECORD OF BROWN SKUA *Stercorarius antarcticus*  
(LESSON 1831) AT MARANHÃO STATE, NORTHERN BRAZIL****Registro más septentrional del salteador pardo *Stercorarius antarcticus* (Lesson 1831)  
en el Estado de Maranhão, norte de Brasil**RENATA HURTADO<sup>1,5</sup>, PATRICIA PEREIRA SERAFINI<sup>2</sup>, RALPH ERIC THIJL VANSTREELS<sup>3</sup>,  
KLAUS MALLING OLSEN<sup>4</sup>, EDISON LUIZ DURIGON<sup>5</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Preventive Veterinary Medicine and Animal Health,  
School of Veterinary Medicine, University of São Paulo<sup>2</sup>National Center for Bird Conservation Research (CEMAVE),  
Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMbio)<sup>3</sup>Department of Pathology, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of São Paulo.<sup>4</sup>Freelance ornithologist<sup>5</sup>Department of Microbiology, Institute of Biomedical Sciences, University of São Paulo✉: R. Hurtado. Avenida Prof. Orlando Marques de Paiva, 87, 05508-270,  
São Paulo, SP, Brasil. Email: renata\_fh@yahoo.com.br

**RESUMEN.-** El Salteador Pardo *Stercorarius antarcticus* es considerado un visitante ocasional en Brasil y existen pocos reportes de esta especie en la costa brasileña. En mayo de 2010, se observaron dos ejemplares de *S. antarcticus* en cautiverio en una comunidad de pescadores en la Isla de Guajerutua (01°29'10"S 44°50'42"W), Maranhão, Brasil. El aislamiento de muchas comunidades pesqueras situadas en regiones de migración de aves en el noreste de Brasil hace posible que la presencia de *S. antarcticus* y otras especies haya sido subestimada en esta región.

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Phylogeny of Stercorariidae (Aves: Charadriiformes) is enigmatic, and ten taxa have been disputed as either full species or subspecies of the genera *Catharacta* or *Stercorarius*: *antarcticus*, *chilensis*, *hamiltoni*, *longicaudus*, *lonnbergi*, *maccormicki pallescens*, *parasiticus*, *pomarinus*, and *skua* (Furness 1987, Cohen *et al.* 1997). We herein adopt the classification proposed by Olsen and Larsson (1997) and by the Brazilian Ornithological Records Committee (CBRO 2011), recognizing the Brown Skua *S. antarcticus* (Lesson 1831) as a species of which Falkland Skua (*S. a. antarcticus*),

Tristan Skua (*S. a. hamiltoni*) and Sub-Antarctic Skua (*S. a. lonnbergi*) are subspecies.

*S. antarcticus* has an estimated population of 36.000 to 48.000 mature individuals, and breeds on the Antarctic Peninsula, Sub-Antarctic islands and along the Patagonian Argentinean coast (Furness 1987, Birdlife International 2012). It is highly predatory, feeding mainly on other birds but also scavenging on fishery discards and carcasses (Furness 1987, Graña-Grilli & Montalti 2012). Breeding from October to February, *S. antarcticus* will winter in Sub-

Antarctic waters and along coastal regions the South America, South Africa and Australia (Furness 1987, Phillips *et al.* 2007).

Reports of this species in Brazil are scattered and sometimes disputed (Sick 1997, Olmos 2002), however the species is generally considered a rare austral visitor on the south Atlantic coast with scattered records of banded *S. antarcticus* up to Ceará state (Table 1, Figure 1) (Sick 1997, Olmos 2002, CBRO 2011). Additionally, van Perlo (2009) reports possible sightings of the species in Alagoas, Bahia and São Paulo states.

In 11 May 2010, two skuas were found in different houses at a fishery-based community at Guajerutua Island (Figure 2) (01°29'10"S 44°50'42"W), Maranhão, Brazil. These specimens were identified as *Stercorarius antarcticus* based on their uniform blackish-brown plumage, large and broad body, with a very large bill (Olsen & Larsson 1997). The Chilean skua (*S. chilensis*) is a smaller, neater bird with a strong reddish cast to underbody, not the dark earthy brown

of the examined birds (see Olsen & Larsson 1997); the smaller (and even rarer) South Polar skua (*S. maccormicki*) could have a similar plumage, but looks smaller with finer bill (see Olsen & Larsson 1997); body measurements would have been helpful in completely excluding this species however unfortunately were not available. Skua #1 (Figure 2) had been caught at open sea by a fishing boat at the coast of Maranhão state, and became overweight due to the hypercaloric diet received in captivity (food scraps and grains). The «owners» of Skua #2 (Figure 2) were unable to determine its origin as it had been received as a gift, but inferred that it had certainly come from the Maranhão state; this bird was not overweight and was fed mostly with fish and vegetables. Both birds had been kept in captivity for an undetermined period, at least one year. The primary feathers of both skuas had been cut to prevent flight (Figure 3), and the local communities had kept them as pets, in close contact with humans and other domestic and wild animals.

**Table 1.** Reports of banded Brown skuas *Stercorarius antarcticus* resighted in Brazil.

Record	Resighting location	Resighting date	Banding location	Banding date	Reference
A	Pernambuco state	Oct 1974	Tristan da Cunha	Not reported	Sick 1997, Olmos 2002
B	Macucos Island, Sta. Catarina state	13 Jul 1963	Signy Island, South Orkneys	1960	Sick 1997, Olmos 2002
C	Maceió, Alagoas state*	6 Nov 1988*	King George Island	17 Jan 1988	Teixeira 1988, Olmos 2002
D	Capão da Canoa, Rio Grande do Sul state	May 1992	King George Island	22 Jan 1988	Soto 2000, Olmos 2002
E	Ceará state	Dec 1974	Graham Land	Not reported	Sick 1997
F	Pernambuco state	Dec 1974	Cormorant Island, Palmer Archipelago	Not reported	Sick 1997

\* = Olmos (2002) suggests this record may have been mistaken, as this specimen was elsewhere reported to have been resighted on 26 Jul 1979 at Recife, Pernambuco state. It is thus unclear which of these is the resighting location and date.



**Figure 1.** Records of Brown skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* in Brazil (refer to Table 1 for details; crosses indicate the locations reported by Van Perlo 2009).

The jagged coastline of northwestern Maranhão state, also known as «reentrâncias maranhenses», is recognized as one of the most important resting areas for migratory seabirds along the Atlantic America Flyway (Boere & Stroud 2006, Nunes *et al.* 2006). This area regularly receives several thousand migratory birds from North America and southernmost South America (Nunes *et al.* 2006), although it does not seem to be part of migration movements of Brown skuas (Furness 1987). There are a few records of Brown skuas in northeastern Brazil (see Table 1); however, our observations seem to be the

first records of *S. antarcticus* in the coast of Maranhão state. To our knowledge the previous northernmost record of the species had been from Ceará state (Sick 1997); the precise location of that sighting was not informed, but its presumed latitude must have been South to 2°46'S.

Small fishery-based communities such as Guajerutua Island, which at the time had less than 600 inhabitants and could only be reached by boat, are very isolated from biologists and public authorities and such reports of uncommon birds are likely to go unnoticed.



**Figure 2.** Brown skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* (Skua #1) maintained as a pet by a remote community in coastal Maranhão, Brazil. Photo: R. Hurtado



**Figure 3.** Primary feathers cut to prevent flight of a Brown skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* (Skua #2) maintained as a pet by a remote community in coastal Maranhão, Brazil. Photo: R. Hurtado

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