

Trip Report — Gulf of California: Mexico's Rich Desert Coast 2024

December 2-7, 2024 with Micah Riegner



Blue Whales had arrived in the Gulf of California for the winter and we were fortunate enough to cross paths with a few off the southern end of Isla Tiburon. This particular individual with a notch cut out of the dorsal fin had been photographed by the marine mammal researchers at the Prescott College Kino Bay Center a few days before we saw it. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

This was the fourth time we ran this short easy tour based out of the town of Bahia Kino. We started in Hermosillo visiting Parque Metropolitano, a wetland in the middle of the desert. Water levels were quite low due to a prolonged and intense drought, but we saw a decent variety of waterbirds including Least Grebes, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Long-billed Dowitchers and a super cooperative Bendire's Thrasher digging around in some cow manure. We could see it had a relatively short bill—shorter than that of a Curve-billed Thrasher.

Early the next day we took off for Puente el Gavilan, a riparian corridor along the Rio Sonora, with my buddy Carlos, a resident birder from Hermosillo. Despite the drought, there was still a bit of water flowing through the cottonwood corridor and a number of birds came down to drink. We had nice looks at both Sinaloa and Happy Wrens, Black-tailed, Black-capped and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a vagrant Eastern Phoebe, Black-chinned Sparrows in winter plumage and another eastern vagrant, White-throated Sparrow. We heard Elegant Quail, but this time they didn't show. After lunch we packed up and drove west to Kino Bay, making a stop at Estero la Cruz for the afternoon. At first glance the mudflats were empty, but with a scope we could see dozens and dozens of Wilson's and Semipalmated Plovers scuttling around on the mud.



Red-billed Tropicbirds breed on Isla San Pedro Martir, the island smack in the middle of the Gulf of California. We saw this one on our way to Isla Tiburon. Photo by tour participant Doug Clarke.

The next day was our offshore islands boat trip, and we couldn't have asked for better weather. Before getting on the boat with Capitan Cosme we birded the desert around Kino Nuevo where we saw several overwintering Gray Vireos defending patches of Elephant Trees, which they depend on.

We had a great day on the south end of Isla Tiburon, seeing lots of Black-vented Shearwaters, Craveri's Murrelets, a close Red-billed Tropicbird and a pod of Blue

Whales. It's not every day you get to spend time with the largest animal in the world! We had a picnic lunch at Coralitos Bay at the southern end of Isla Tiburon, then we circled Isla Cholludo, the small island covered in Cardons. From there we crossed to Isla Datil where we saw a Rock Wren down by the water's edge. As we neared Isla Alcatraz, the island right in front of Kino Bay, we came across several Pomarine Jaegers in a loose aggregation, which was the first time I've seen this species in Sonora. We made a brief landing on Isla Alcatraz, seeing a trio of Common Goldeneyes, and good numbers of Yellow-footed Gulls getting ready to breed, and huge numbers of Brown Pelicans also in breeding condition.



This was my first Pomarine Jaeger for the Gulf of California. We saw a small flock of these winter visitors near Isla Alcatraz. Photo by tour participant Doug Clarke.

Before our second boat day, we did some more birding around Kino Nuevo and had great looks at a Streak-backed Oriole, a rather scarce species along the coast. Then, after another fine breakfast at the hotel, we drove to Punta Chueca where we were picked up by Cosme on the panga. We were joined by two Comcaac guides, Rey and Ana Maria. On our way up the Infernillo Canal we saw a number of Brant, though nothing like the usual thousands. Redheads too were in alarmingly low numbers. We also saw a smattering of Surf Scoters, Horned Grebes, a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins and several hundred Blue-footed and Cocos Boobies plunge-diving. We had a hot tamale lunch at Punta Perla and scanned the mud flats for shorebirds. There were several Snowy Plovers and some Sanderlings running around. After lunch, Rey and

Ana Maria talked to us about the Comcaac nation, and Ana Maria sang us some songs that pertained to the birds we had seen. On our way back we stopped at Estero Arenas where I called in a male Mangrove Warbler from the band of White Mangroves. Gorgeous bird!



We came across several Black-vented Shearwaters during our boat trip to the southern end of Isla Tiburon. They are called pardelas in this part of Mexico. Photo by tour participant Doug Clarke.

Our final full day, we birded locally around Kino. In the morning, we stopped at Estero la Cruz and I called in a pair of Ridgway's Rails that walked right out in front of us—certainly the best views I've had of the species! We spent the rest of the morning birding along the peninsula that forms the mouth of the estero, finding several shorebirds and an overwintering Northern Waterthrush. On our way back through town, we stopped at the tortilleria and I bought everyone some fresh flour tortillas, perhaps the best in the world! In the afternoon we took off to go to the Cardon forest outside Kino Viejo where we saw Gilded Flickers on the giant 50-foot cacti. Before reaching the hotel for our final dinner, a Western Screech-owl swooped across the road and landed on a palm, another first for the tour!

I'd like to thank Caroline in our office for lining up all the reservations, Lorayne Meltzer, the Prescott College Field Station Director, for giving us a nice introduction, Cosme our captain for the two boat trips, Jaime and Aly for their presentation about waterbirds,

Vickey for her wonderful lunches and Carlos for taking us to the riparian spot on the Rio Sonora. I'd like to thank you all for joining me on this tour and I look forward to seeing you on more Field Guides adventures!

Mammals

Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) Seen a couple times in the desert around Kino Nuevo.

Harris's Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus harrisi*) These miniature squirrels were along the road to Punta Chueca.

Common Rock Squirrel (*Otospermophilus variegatus*)

Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) We saw a small pod of these coastal dolphins along the Infernillo Canal.

Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) Wow! It's not every day you get to spend time with the largest animal ever! We saw these in the waters at the southern end of Isla Tiburon.

Coyote (*Canis latrans*) We spotted one at Puente el Gavilan along the Rio Sonora.

California Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*) We had our best looks at Isla Alcatraz. Big males were hauled out on the rocks at the south end of the island.

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) We spooked a few along the Rio Sonora outside Hermosillo.

Reptiles

Zebra-tailed Lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*) I was amazed to see these speedy desert lizards out and about in December! Just crazy.

Odonates

Variegated Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum corruptum*)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

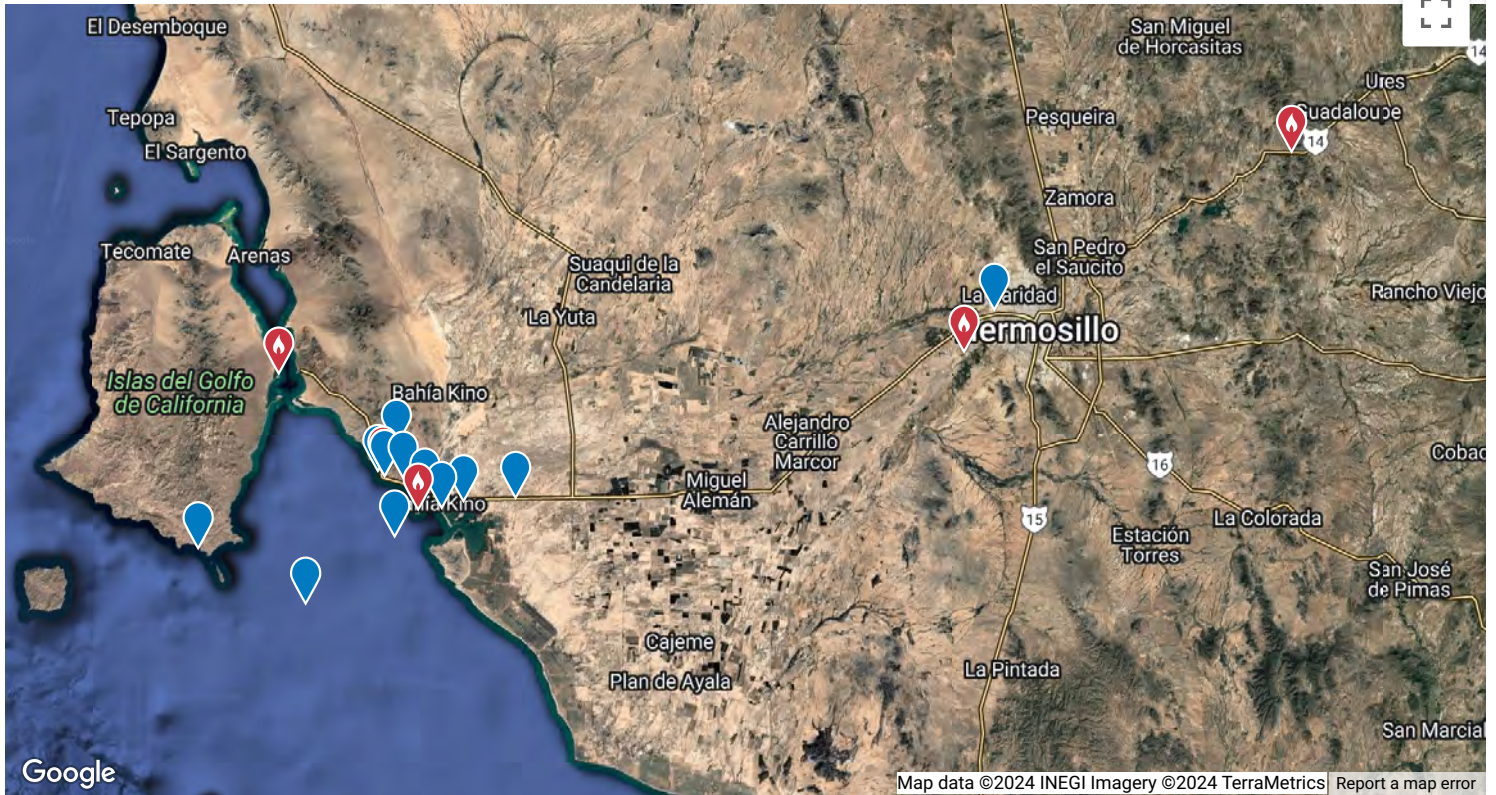
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/306125>

Micah

Field Guides Birding Tours--GULF OF CALIFORNIA: MEXICO'S RICH DESERT COAST, 2024 (with Micah Riegner)



2 – 7 Dec 2024 (6 days) Link-only



📍 Sonora, Mexico
Hermosillo | Ures

👤 Micah Riegner



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...

























 155



























 22

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Species Observed





























[Show all details](#)

315	Brant <i>Branta bernicla</i>	 2
4	Blue-winged Teal <i>Spatula discors</i>	 1
9	Cinnamon Teal <i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>	 1
30	Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	 1
6	Mexican Duck <i>Anas diazi</i>	 1
4	Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	 1
11	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	 1
500	Redhead <i>Aythya americana</i>	 1
1	Greater Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	 1
45	Surf Scoter <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	 1
6	Bufflehead <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	 3
3	Common Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	 1
602	Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i> 	 1  3
3	Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	 1
1	Elegant Quail <i>Callipepla douglasii</i>	 1
7	Gambel's Quail <i>Callipepla gambelii</i>	 3
3	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	 2
2	Inca Dove <i>Columbina inca</i>	 2
11	White-winged Dove <i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	 3
10	Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	 1

1	Groove-billed Ani <i>Crotophaga sulcirostris</i>	▶  1
1	Lesser Nighthawk <i>Chordeiles acutipennis</i>	▶  1
1	Anna's Hummingbird <i>Calypte anna</i>	▶  1
4	Costa's Hummingbird <i>Calypte costae</i>	▶  2
4	Ridgway's Rail <i>Rallus obsoletus</i>	▶  5  2
1	Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	▶  1
1	Common Gallinule <i>Gallinula galeata</i>	▶  1
6	American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  1
6	Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	▶  1
8	American Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus palliatus</i>	▶  2
44	Black-bellied Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶  2
2	Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  1
65	Semipalmated Plover <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	▶  2
51	Wilson's Plover <i>Anarhynchus wilsonia</i>	▶  2
25	Snowy Plover <i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>	▶  1  1
8	Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	▶  3
61	Long-billed Curlew <i>Numenius americanus</i>	▶  4
60	Marbled Godwit <i>Limosa fedoa</i>	▶  3
13	Short-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	▶  2
12	Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  1
7	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>	▶  4
93	Willet <i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  4
5	Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  2
1	Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  1

15	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶ 1
2	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶ 1
9	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶ 2
307	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶ 5 4
6	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	▶ 3 1
6	Craveri's Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i>	▶ 3 2
4	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	▶ 2
599	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	▶ 6
855	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>	▶ 7
62	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶ 4
554	Yellow-footed Gull	<i>Larus livens</i>	▶ 8
3	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	▶ 2
2	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	▶ 1
4	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶ 2
165	Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	▶ 2
177	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	▶ 3
2	Least Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>	▶ 1
6	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	▶ 2 1
4	Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	▶ 1
3	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	▶ 2
1	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>	▶ 1
1	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>	▶ 2 1
15	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>	▶ 1

32	Common Loon <i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  4
74	Black-vented Shearwater <i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>	▶  1  3
79	Magnificent Frigatebird <i>Fregata magnificens</i>	▶  5
940	Cocos Booby <i>Sula brewsteri</i>	▶  5
1500	Blue-footed Booby <i>Sula nebouxii</i> 	▶  2  5
15	Brandt's Cormorant <i>Urile penicillatus</i>	▶  2  1
384	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  6
50	Neotropic Cormorant <i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	▶  1
2	White Ibis <i>Eudocimus albus</i>	▶  2
6	Yellow-crowned Night Heron <i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	▶  2
3	Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  2
1	Little Blue Heron <i>Egretta caerulea</i>	▶  1
1	Tricolored Heron <i>Egretta tricolor</i>	▶  1
7	Reddish Egret <i>Egretta rufescens</i>	▶  2
20	Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  2
4	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  3
18	Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  5
40	American White Pelican <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶  1
1180	Brown Pelican <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	▶  7
30	Black Vulture <i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶  3
38	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  7
72	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  7
2	Cooper's Hawk <i>Astur cooperii</i>	▶  2

1	Northern Harrier <i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  1
4	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  2
1	Western Screech-Owl <i>Megascops kennicottii</i>	▶  1
3	Belted Kingfisher <i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	▶  2
15	Gila Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>	▶  7
6	Ladder-backed Woodpecker <i>Dryobates scalaris</i>	▶  1  4
4	Gilded Flicker <i>Colaptes chrysoides</i> 	▶  2  3
1	Crested Caracara <i>Caracara plancus</i>	▶  1
3	American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  3
1	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  1
1	Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	▶  1
3	Monk Parakeet <i>Myiopsitta monachus</i> *	▶  1
2	Gray Flycatcher <i>Empidonax wrightii</i>	▶  2
4	Black Phoebe <i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	▶  3
1	Eastern Phoebe <i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	▶  1  1
2	Say's Phoebe <i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  2
1	Vermilion Flycatcher <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	▶  1
2	Ash-throated Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	▶  2
1	Nutting's Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus nuttingi</i>	▶  1
6	Gray Vireo <i>Vireo vicinior</i>	▶  1  2
1	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  1
5	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  3
19	Verdin <i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>	▶  5

15	Mangrove Swallow <i>Tachycineta albilinea</i>	▶ 📄 2
6	Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶ 📄 2
7	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	▶ 📄 2
7	Black-tailed Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila melanura</i>	▶ 📄 4
2	Black-capped Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila nigriceps</i>	▶ 📄 2
2	Rock Wren <i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	▶ 📄 2
1	Canyon Wren <i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>	▶ 📄 1
2	Northern House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶ 📄 2
1	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶ 📄 1
3	Cactus Wren <i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	▶ 📄 1 📄 3
1	Happy Wren <i>Pheugopedius felix</i>	▶ 📄 1
3	Sinaloa Wren <i>Thryophilus sinaloa</i>	▶ 📄 2
1	Curve-billed Thrasher <i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Bendire's Thrasher <i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	▶ 📄 1
9	Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶ 📄 4
18	Phainopepla <i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	▶ 📄 4
10	House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶ 📄 4
6	Lesser Goldfinch <i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶ 📄 1
3	Chipping Sparrow <i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶ 📄 1
1	Black-chinned Sparrow <i>Spizella atrogularis</i>	▶ 📄 1
52	Brewer's Sparrow <i>Spizella breweri</i>	▶ 📄 2
1	Black-throated Sparrow <i>Amphispiza bilineata</i> 📄	▶ 📄 1 📄 1
22	Lark Sparrow <i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	▶ 📄 2

- 2 **Lark Bunting** *Calamospiza melanocorys* ▶ 📄 1
- 38 **White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys* ▶ 📄 6
- 1 **White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* ▶ 📄 1 📷 1
- 2 **Vesper Sparrow** *Pooecetes gramineus* ▶ 📄 1
- 1 **Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis* ▶ 📄 1
- 7 **Song Sparrow** *Melospiza melodia* ▶ 📄 1
- 3 **Canyon Towhee** *Melospiza fusca* ▶ 📄 1
- 7 **Green-tailed Towhee** *Pipilo chlorurus* ▶ 📄 2
- 1 **Streak-backed Oriole** *Icterus pustulatus* ▶ 📄 1
- 15 **Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus* ▶ 📄 1
- 14 **Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* ▶ 📄 2
- 1 **Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis* ▶ 📄 1
- 2 **Orange-crowned Warbler** *Leiothlypis celata* ▶ 📄 1
- 1 **MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei* ▶ 📄 1
- 2 **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* ▶ 📄 2
- 1 **Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga petechia* ▶ 📄 1
- 13 **Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata* ▶ 📄 4
- 6 **Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* ▶ 📄 2
- 1 **Pyrrhuloxia** *Cardinalis sinuatus* ▶ 📄 1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 50 **Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus/scolopaceus* ▶ 📄 1
- 1 **Lesser/Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes/melanoleuca* ▶ 📄 1
- 1 **Northern Cardinal/Pyrrhuloxia** *Cardinalis cardinalis/sinuatus* ▶ 📄 1