



SLICE OF CALIFORNIA: SEABIRDS TO SIERRA 2013

Aug 31, 2013 to Sep 9, 2013
Chris Benesh

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



The highway below Sonora Pass. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

The 2013 Slice of California tour coincided with a couple of noteworthy events, most notably prolonged drought conditions which left some areas tinder dry and prone to fire. Shortly before the trip began, a fire broke out in the section of forest adjacent to Yosemite National Park. By the time it was contained in late October, the fire had burned 402 square miles, making it the third largest fire in California history and the largest in the Sierra Nevada. Fortunately for us, the fire stayed south of our birding destinations. Aside from some smokey conditions west of Sonora Pass, we were largely unaffected. Aside from this, we enjoyed some fine weather and a wonderful assortment of birds and other critters, from Banana Slugs to Humpback Whales.

It was a treat spending time with all of you in this diverse part of the world. I hope to have the opportunity to travel with each of you again in the future. Until then, good birding! — Chris

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – After a bit of searching, we located the stakeout female at Pescadero Beach.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

MOUNTAIN QUAIL (*Oreortyx pictus*) – After a fair bit of searching, we connect with a huge covey of some thirty birds high in the sierras on the road to Spicer Meadow Reservoir. This was the runaway winner of the favorite bird survey.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL (*Callipepla californica*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Whew! We sweated this one out. After the first three vaporized in front of us, we connected with another lone bird that gave us great views.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*)

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – We struck the mother lode with more than twenty at Coyote Point on the last day of the trip.

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria nigripes*) – About a dozen of these magnificent birds seen on our pelagic trip.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus creatopus*)

GREAT SHEARWATER (*Puffinus gravis*) – The looks were brief, but quite an exceptional bird on the west coast. Rather few records from California.

BULLER'S SHEARWATER (*Puffinus bulleri*) – This has to be one of the most elegant of all of the shearwaters.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*)

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – A few of these were mixed in with the storm-petrels in deep water.

ASHY STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma homochroa*) – Nice views of the this local endemic.

BLACK STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma melania*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

NORTHERN GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*) – A quick look at one in the sierras.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (CALIFORNIA) (*Buteo lineatus elegans*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris*) – Nice looks at this species near the airport in San Francisco. Recent fieldwork has suggested that more than one

species is involved. Clapper Rails in the west are proposed to be split and called Ridgway's Rail, *R. obsoletus*. Stay tuned!

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) [I*]

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – A pair of these out near Bridgeport Reservoir were noteworthy.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*)

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – Great views of this species at Princeton Harbor.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*)

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*)

SURFBIRD (*Aphriza virgata*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – A few of these were present at Mono Lake.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – What a beautiful bird. Well seen on the pelagic trip.

HEERMANN'S GULL (*Larus heermanni*)

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*)

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Eleven at Bridgeport Reservoir was a big number.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ELEGANT TERN (*Thalasseus elegans*)

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

SOUTH POLAR SKUA (*Stercorarius macconnicki*) – Great looks on the pelagic of some six birds.

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*)

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – We ended up seeing four birds in total off of Pescadero Beach.

CASSIN'S AUKLET (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*)

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*)

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – Two good looking birds on the pelagic.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [II]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [H]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Apodidae (Swifts)

BLACK SWIFT (*Cypseloides niger*) – Catching all of us by surprise was the sudden appearance of six birds flying around Pillar Point for just a few minutes. Rare anywhere along the coast, this was the first local sighting anyone I spoke with could remember.

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*)

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*)

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We were fortunate to connect with three birds along Mines Road.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)

RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus ruber*)

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER (*Picoides nuttallii*)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides albolarvatus*) – This handsome species was well seen at the Calaveras Big Trees. Voted the second most popular bird of the trip!

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – We got lucky with this one, finding one straight away in a relative fresh burn south of Lee Vining.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – One flew right overhead when we were visiting the South Tufa.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*)

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

WILLOW FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax traillii*) [*]

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

CASSIN'S VIREO (*Vireo cassinii*) – Most of these had departed, but we did connect with one!

HUTTON'S VIREO (*Vireo huttoni*)

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – Sally spotted our first ones, and we eventually saw a fair number in the Jeffrey Pines south of Mono Lake.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (COASTAL) (*Aphelocoma californica californica*)

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica nuttalli*) – There must have been close to fifty of these at the north end of Mines Road. [E]

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*)

OAK TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus inornatus*)

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – It is worth mentioning that we had two vocal types of White-breasted, just in case they split them in future. The ones along Mines Road and then the ones we had on the east slope of the sierras.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

PACIFIC WREN (SOUTHERN) (*Troglodytes pacificus pacificus*) – Great looks at these spunky birds in the redwood grove along the coast and again in the sierras.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Nice views of a couple of birds at Clarks Ford.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*)

Sylviidae (Sylviids, Parrotbills and Allies)

WRENTIT (*Chamaea fasciata*) – Good views of several on our first day of birding near Half Moon Bay. The taxonomy of this bird continues to puzzle researchers.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Nice to see their splash of blue among the old buildings of Bodie.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – Great looks at some near the shore of Mono Lake.

CALIFORNIA THRASHER (*Toxostoma redivivum*) – Along Mines Road.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Ptilonotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – It took quite a bit of work initially, but we got it well.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*)

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*)

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

CALIFORNIA TOWHEE (*Melospiza crissalis*)

BREWER'S SPARROW (*Spizella breweri*)

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*)

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

SAGE SPARROW (INTERIOR) (*Artemisospiza belli nevadensis*) – The AOU recently split this bird, which is now known as Sagebrush Sparrow, *A. nevadensis*.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

FOX SPARROW (THICK-BILLED) (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) – Locally common in the sierras.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)
WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (NUTTALL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys nuttalli*)
DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*)
BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius tricolor*) – We saw a big group of forty plus near the Pigeon Point lighthouse.
WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)
YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)
BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)
BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

PURPLE FINCH (WESTERN) (*Haemorhous purpureus californicus*)
CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*)
HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)
RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*)
PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)
LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)
LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH (*Spinus lawrencei*) – We did connect with a couple of these along Mines Road.
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) **[H]**

MAMMALS

BRUSH RABBIT (*Sylvilagus bachmani*)
NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*)
DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)
BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)
LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*)
LONG-EARED CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrimaculatus*)
LODGEPOLE CHIPMUNK (*Tamias speciosus*)
YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*)
BELDING'S GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus beldingi*)
CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus beecheyi*)
FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)
WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus griseus*)
CHICKAREE (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*)
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)
PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*) – A spectacular show of these on the pelagic trip where several hundred were present.
NORTHERN RIGHT WHALE DOLPHIN (*Lissodelphis borealis*) – Smaller numbers of these torpedo-like mammals showed off for us.
HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*)
HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)
NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)
SEA OTTER (*Enhydra lutris*) – One seen initially on the rocks at Pescadero Beach was noteworthy both out of the water, and a bit north of their stronghold in Monterey Bay.
CALIFORNIA SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus*)
STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – Quite a collection of these on one of the buoys we passed on the pelagic.
HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*)
MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – These included the Black-tailed Deer near the coast.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 197 bird taxa and 25 mammal taxa