



Field Guides Tour Report

SLICE OF CALIFORNIA: SEABIRDS TO SIERRA 2014

Aug 30, 2014 to Sep 8, 2014

Chris Benesh & Tom Johnson

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



The South Tufa at Mono Lake set an otherworldly scene for one stellar morning of birding east of the Sierra Nevada - from phalaropes and grebes to shrikes and sparrows. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

Late August and early September mark a great point in the calendar to investigate a broad swath of biogeography in California, certainly one of the USA's birdiest states. Fall migration is in full swing for songbirds, the shorebird show is primed, and the seabird spectacle close to shore is, well, spectacular.

We began the tour with a nice sampling of habitats along the southwestern edge of San Francisco Bay, enjoying regional specialties like the newly split Ridgway's Rail and the spectacle of many thousands of shorebirds. Heading east across the Diablo Mountains, we visited several drier habitats. In the oak grasslands and scrubby slopes of Mines Rd. and Del Puerto Canyon, we found the California endemic Yellow-billed Magpie and the recently split Bell's Sparrow, along with the highly charismatic Lewis's Woodpecker and mysterious Lawrence's Goldfinch. We then continued east to the foot of the Sierra in Sonora, where we spent two nights.

Our first day of birding in the Sierra Nevada featured the Giant Sequoia grove at Calaveras Big Trees State Park, full of birds including a group favorite - White-headed Woodpecker. We also had amazingly close views of an enchanting Pacific Wren as it sang its complex, bubbly song from a brushpile. Heading higher into the mountains, we began our careful search for Mountain Quail, with a long stalk eventually culminating in good views of the quail for all members of the group. Amusingly, as soon as we started downhill after a long search on foot, Chris spotted a Mountain Quail standing on the side of the highway!

The next was spent birding our way over the Sierra crest at Sonora Pass en route to Lee Vining and Mono Lake. In the mountains, we enjoyed such montane specialties as American Dipper, Thick-billed Fox Sparrow, and Olive-sided Flycatcher. We even ran across some nice flocks of migrant songbirds, including many warblers and a super vocal Cassin's Vireo.

After an enjoyable time in the mountains, the high desert, conifer forest, and hypersaline lake habitat contrasts of the Mono Basin made for an otherworldly scene during our two night stay in Lee Vining. Highlights here included the legions of Red-necked Phalaropes, American Avocets, Eared Grebes, and California Gulls feeding against the backdrop of volcano cones, tall mountains, and stark limestone tufa formations in the storied waters of Mono Lake. Trips around the Mono Basin yielded such amazing birds as Greater Sage-Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, and Red Crossbill.

After an inspiring visit to the east side of the Sierra Nevada, we left the Mono Lake area and had a long day of driving back to the west, ending on the Pacific Ocean at Half Moon Bay where we stayed through until the end of the tour. This leg of the journey was anchored by a marvelous pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay on the Huli Cat, organized by our friend Alvaro Jaramillo of Alvaro's Adventures. On relatively placid seas, we absorbed many encounters with a strong cast of seabirds, including six alcids and ten tubenoses. Highlights of the trip included two close Tufted Puffins in breeding plumage, a few close passes from a Flesh-footed Shearwater, and a close and stunning Laysan Albatross that was camped out alongside a fishing vessel

along with almost 40 Black-footed Albatrosses. Photos of the Laysan Albie documented a set of leg bands, including a clear shot of its unique identifying code! Mammals were also great, with a duo of Dall's Porpoise (AKA Panda Tuna) streaking in from the port side to ride under the boat's bow.

A final day along the San Mateo Co. coast led us through Monterey Cypress clumps and rocky promontories along the ocean and up into a grove of impressive Coastal Redwoods in search of Wrentit, Townsend's Warbler, Snowy Plover, and Wandering Tattler. We even found a crisp juvenile White-tailed Kite and got to watch an offshore feeding frenzy of seabirds and Humpback Whales at Pescadero State Beach. A nice Italian dinner with a finishing touch of creme brulee was the perfect way to cap off this tour as the sun sank into the Pacific Ocean.

Happily, we ended up having a perfect run of weather, and a long list of excellent birds followed suit. Chris and I really enjoyed traveling with everyone through such a beautiful and diverse array of habitats. We both hope to see you out in the field again soon.

-Tom Johnson

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*) – A few of these handsome western ducks were mixed in with large flocks of waterbirds at Charleston Slough in Mountain View on our first day.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – One bird along the breakwaters at Coyote Point on the first day was unusual for the date and location.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – One at Coyote Point in San Francisco Bay was a bit odd; numbers along the outer coast were more expected.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

MOUNTAIN QUAIL (*Oreortyx pictus*) – This was a big highlight species of the tour. Along Highway 4 on the west slope of the Sierra, we trudged around beautiful high elevation forest in pursuit of calling quail, which eventually showed themselves after a long game of cat and mouse. Then we saw several more flocks from the car while driving around in the Sierra.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL (*Callipepla californica*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – We found a flock of 12 of these handsome chickens in the sage outside the ghost town of Bodie, north of Mono Lake.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Flyby migrants over the ocean.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Several flew past as migrants along the coast, but we did have scope views of swimming birds as well, including one adult that seemed to be in full breeding plumage.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – We saw thousands of these at Mono Lake.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – This was the grebe that we saw in the ocean from Half Moon Bay and points south along the coast.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – These made up most of the grebes that we saw along the west side of San Francisco Bay on the first day of the tour.

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

LAYSAN ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) – This was a beautiful rarity that we found sitting on the water near a trawler on our pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay. It was in the company of 38 Black-footed Albatrosses. Close examination showed that this bird was banded, and photos allowed the band to be read - this juvenile Laysan Albatross was banded as a chick in its nest on Guadalupe Island, Mexico in February 2014. Remarkable!

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria nigripes*) – These ended up being common offshore from Half Moon Bay - we even found a group of 38 (and one Laysan Albatross) on the water near a trawler.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus creatopus*)

FLESH-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus carneipes*) – Chris spotted this rarity as it flew up the wake of our boat on the Half Moon Bay pelagic trip. This dark chocolate tubenose breeds in Australia and New Zealand and is a treasure to find off central California.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*) – On the last afternoon of the trip, we found a large feeding flock of Sooty Shearwaters and other seabirds just off the beach at Pescadero. These long distance migrants were accompanied by at least three Humpback Whales.

BLACK-VENTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) – Warm water encouraged numbers of this species north to central California this summer. We had quick looks from the pelagic trip and also from shore in a feeding frenzy at Pescadero State Beach.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – Two of these came up our slick and showed off their white rumps and fluttery wingbeats during the pelagic trip.

ASHY STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma homochroa*) – A few of this California Current specialty made appearances with the Black Storm-Petrels throughout the day on the Half Moon Bay pelagic.

BLACK STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma melania*) – This was an unusually good year for the species off central California; we had great views as these large storm-petrels loped past on their long wings during the Half Moon Bay pelagic.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) – This was the most common cormorant in the harbor at Half Moon Bay and along the outer coast.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Hardly "pelagic", this slim cormorant was outnumbered by Brandt's and Double-crested Cormorants on the tour. However, we did get to see a few, including great looks of some standing on the breakwaters in Half Moon Bay.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – These move north along the Pacific Coast after breeding in Mexico.

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*) – Brief views of two birds at the southern edge of San Francisco Bay near San Jose.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – We saw one juvenile along the coast at Pescadero on our last afternoon.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – These were gratifyingly common in the mountains and along the east slope of the Sierra.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (CALIFORNIA) (*Buteo lineatus elegans*) – One immature that we saw soaring over the road in Mono County was unusual for the area.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

RIDGWAY'S RAIL (*Rallus obsoletus*) – This newly split species was a popular feature of the first day of the tour. We had splendid views of several individuals along a salt marsh along the western edge of San Francisco Bay.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Large flocks impressed us both in San Francisco Bay and at Mono Lake.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*) – These small, pale plovers are quite restricted in this part of their range. We found a small group during a walk on the beach in Half Moon Bay.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – A group of seven, including both adults and juveniles, performed spectacularly at close range on the rocks at Pillar Point.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – One was on a breakwater at Coyote Point early in the tour.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – This is the common turnstone of the west coast; we had great views both in San Francisco Bay and along the outer coast.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – This is a scarce migrant near the coast in central California. We were lucky to find one at Charleston Slough in Mountain View.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – A smattering of these slender phalaropes were mixed in with avocets at the southern edge of San Francisco Bay.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – We saw these both at Mono Lake and also offshore on the pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

SOUTH POLAR SKUA (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) – One of these bruisers flew past the back of the boat after Alvaro spotted it coming in from far away.

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – We had a few views of these large jaegers offshore on the pelagic trip, including an adult-type with rounded "spoons" as its elongated central tail feathers.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – We debated the identification of a juvenile jaeger that we saw very well during the Half Moon Bay pelagic, eventually agreeing that it was a Long-tailed Jaeger. Even when you see these birds well, they can be tough to separate from one another. Some notes on the ID accompany the photo below.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Common offshore.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – We were lucky to find one juvenile in the harbor at Half Moon Bay on two days.

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – One of these just south of the harbor in Half Moon Bay was a lucky find. This diminutive alcid dove frequently but showed off its striking black-and-white plumage.

CASSIN'S AUKLET (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) – We had a few glimpses of these on the pelagic trip. They mostly look like pale-bellied gray grapefruits trying to fly away from the boat as quickly as possible.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – We only saw a few of these offshore on the pelagic trip. They are more puffin-like than other auklets, and we even got to see a vestige of the breeding horn on one or two.

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – During our pelagic trip, two adults in fine shape swam around at close range, providing for excellent views.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – There were several opportunities to see singles and small groups of these attractive, long distance migrants offshore during the pelagic trip.

HEERMANN'S GULL (*Larus heermanni*) – We saw no juveniles during the tour, but there were plenty of subadults and adults along the coast. Apparently this year's breeding season in Mexico was quite poor for the species.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*)

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*)

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – One adult was standing on a breakwater in the harbor at Half Moon Bay at the beginning of our pelagic trip.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – One flew past at the Mono Lake South Tufa, and we saw more offshore during the pelagic trip.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – These were the common medium-sized terns that we saw, primarily in San Francisco Bay.

ELEGANT TERN (*Thalasseus elegans*) – These striking orange-billed terns move north after breeding much farther south in Baja and southern California. We saw hundreds in Half Moon Bay and in San Francisco Bay.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – We saw several of these in the Sierra Nevada, including one that we scoped from a Subway restaurant in Sonora.

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

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – Just a few people in the second vehicle got to see one along the road in the lower stretches of Del Puerto Canyon. It soon ran up the rocky slope and out of sight.

Strigidae (Owls)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – A few of these terrestrial owls were standing around at a nesting site near San Jose.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – A squadron of these zoomed around at close range at the Parrots Ferry Bridge on the west side of the Sierra Nevada.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – This is the common hummingbird throughout most of populated lowland California. We saw a few around San Francisco Bay and Half Moon Bay.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – One of these startlingly dark woodpeckers flew over (with crow-like flaps) a few times at a pasture near the junctions of Mines Rd. and Del Puerto Canyon.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – After a few unsatisfying views of females earlier in the tour, a stunning male fed low on a pine at close range in a burn south of Lee Vining.

RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) – Several of these handsome and feisty woodpeckers were fun to see on the huge tree trunks of Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER (*Picoides nuttallii*)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides albolarvatus*) – We ended up having quite a few of these striking woodpeckers in the Sierra Nevada after our first views at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – We saw a female well in a burn south of Lee Vining at the exact same spot where we also had excellent views of Williamson's Sapsucker and Hairy Woodpecker!

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – As Chris pointed out, these looked tiny hanging off the sides of the sequoias at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. At one point, we had both Pileated and White-headed Woodpecker in view together.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – One made a close flyby and scared the shorebird flocks at Mono Lake County Park.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – We had two good views, including an immature bird that perched below eye level for us in Stanislaus National Forest in the Sierra.

PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax difficilis*) – We found a few migrants near San Francisco, and even heard the slurred position note of the species. Further study of the "Western" Flycatcher complex might reveal a lack of differentiation between Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

CASSIN'S VIREO (*Vireo cassinii*) – One sang and showed nicely along a river below Sonora Pass in the Sierra Nevada.

HUTTON'S VIREO (*Vireo huttoni*)

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – This was a marvelous experience. Immediately upon entering the Jeffrey Pines at Mono Crater, we were met by a stream of ~250 talkative Pinyon Jays. We had close views perched and especially in flight of these curious and nomadic birds, often with Clark's Nutcrackers nearby for comparison.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

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

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica nuttalli*) – This was the only California endemic bird species that we saw on the tour (the other, Island Scrub-Jay, is found well away from the itinerary of this tour). The oak grasslands along Mines Rd. east of San Francisco Bay were productive, and we had great looks of this charismatic corvid. [E]

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Nutcrackers found us several times in the Sierra Nevada and in the Mono Basin. Perhaps most memorable were the super vocal birds that flew just over our heads as they followed flocks of Pinyon Jays around at Mono Crater.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Gray-flanked birds near San Francisco and Chestnut-flanked birds in the Sierra Nevada offered us a neat contrast and a spark for discussions of biogeography in California.

OAK TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus inornatus*)

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltiriparus minimus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – This was one of the most common birds that we saw in the conifer forests of the western Sierra Nevada. Impressive!

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – We saw two forms of this polytypic tree-climber on the tour. The nuthatches around San Francisco Bay were the Pacific Coast birds, while those east of the Sierra crest (such as at the Jeffrey Pine forest at Mono Crater) were from the Interior West subspecies group.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

PACIFIC WREN (SOUTHERN) (*Troglodytes pacificus pacificus*) – We had excellent views of several of these tiny wrens at Calaveras Big Tree State Park. One sat up and sang for us at length, while another tailless individual did its best mouse impression at our feet on the forest floor.

MARSH WREN (PACIFIC) (*Cistothorus palustris paludicola*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Paradoxornithidae (Parrotbills, Wrentit, and Allies)

WRENTIT (*Chamaea fasciata*) – This curious passerine, unique in North America, proved elusive until late in the tour when we found some confiding individuals at Burleigh Murray State Park near Half Moon Bay.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Several of these magnificent open-land thrushes were hovering and perching up for us near the ghost town of Bodie during our search for sage-grouse.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – A memorable sighting was the Townsend's Solitaire that we scoped in the sequoia groves of Calaveras Big Tree State Park. It looked positively tiny in comparison to the huge trees!

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CALIFORNIA THRASHER (*Toxostoma redivivum*) – Mines Rd. proved to be fruitful for nice views of a few of these chaparral specialists.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – At the Mono Lake South Tufa, several Sage Thrashers ran around eating alkali flies at our feet. These were some of the best looks imaginable of this typically retiring species.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Ptilonotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

PHAINOPEPLA (*Phainopepla nitens*) – One male played hide-and-seek with us on Mines Rd. in the Diablos.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

NASHVILLE WARBLER (WESTERN) (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla ridgwayi*)

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – We found a few migrants during the Sierra Nevada portion of the trip, including a memorable male at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

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*)

HERMIT WARBLER (*Setophaga occidentalis*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – We had some great looks at this bird at the Donnell Vista along Hwy 108 in the Sierra Nevada. We also found more in the Mono Basin later on in the tour.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

CALIFORNIA TOWHEE (*Melospiza crissalis*) – These were ubiquitous along the western part of our route near San Francisco.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

BREWER'S SPARROW (*Spizella breweri*) – These small, unassuming sparrows greeted the morning with us at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*) – One at Sunnyvale Baylands Park was a rarity for late August along San Francisco Bay - it also ended up being the only Vesper Sparrow of the trip!

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

BELL'S SPARROW (BELL'S) (*Artemisiospiza belli belli*) – Coastal Bell's Sparrows were a great highlight of our birding drive up Mines Rd. in the Diablo Range. These tidy sparrows showed off their high contrast helmets, smooth backs, and warm flanks. This is the western representative of the recently split "Sage" Sparrow complex.

SAGEBRUSH SPARROW (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – The "Sage" Sparrows at the Mono Lake South Tufa were this species, as shown by their streaked backs and weak facial patterns. Sagebrush Sparrow is the interior representative of the "Sage" Sparrow complex.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

FOX SPARROW (THICK-BILLED) (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) – To easterners, these look majorly different from the Red Fox Sparrows back home. In the Sierra Nevada, we got to hear the Green-tailed Towhee-esque song and also saw several of these handsome and bizarre sparrows.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (MOUNTAIN) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) – We found some Mountain White-crowned Sparrows along a willow-bracketed stream near Sonora Pass in the Sierra Nevada.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (NUTTALL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys nuttalli*) – These were the coastal White-crowned Sparrows that we saw around Half Moon Bay.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEEK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius tricolor*) – This California specialty roves around in large flocks in late summer; we intersected some at a water tank in the Diablo Range and again along the coast south of Half Moon Bay, where we got to compare them with Red-winged Blackbirds.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – We even saw this species offshore during the pelagic trip from Half Moon Bay. One circled the boat and briefly landed.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – We saw these montane finches scattered around up high in the Sierra Nevada. The best views were probably at the Minaret Vista above the Mammoth Mountain ski area.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A small group of these enigmatic finches eventually came out for us during our search near the ski area at Mammoth Mountain. Their flight calls and large bills revealed that these were likely the expected "Type 2" or "Ponderosa Pine" Red Crossbills.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH (*Spinus lawrencei*) – A flock of "Larry Gold" was a nice highlight of a sweltering day on Mines Rd. and Del Puerto Canyon, where we had some extended views of these small finches attended water at Adobe Springs.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

EVENING GROSBEEK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) – Our only one was a brief flyover during the Mountain Quail expedition in the Sierra Nevada.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

BRUSH RABBIT (*Sylvilagus bachmani*)

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – These were the "cute" bunnies that we saw near Mono Lake.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – We saw many of these tiny chipmunks on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, including out in open sage near

Mono Lake.

MERRIAM'S CHIPMUNK (*Tamias merriami*)

LONG-EARED CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrimaculatus*)

LODGEPOLE CHIPMUNK (*Tamias speciosus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*) – One of these bruisers briefly interrupted our Mountain Quail hunt in the Sierra.

CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus beecheyi*)

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus griseus*)

CHICKAREE (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) – Also called Douglas Squirrel.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Uncommon in Half Moon Bay, we saw a few of these close to shore on our way out on the pelagic trip.

RISSO'S DOLPHIN (*Grampus griseus*)

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*)

DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – We had a really great show from these pint-sized cetaceans. On their way in to bow ride during the Half Moon Bay pelagic trip, they rushed the surface, creating rooster tail splashes. Honorary name = "Panda tuna".

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – We saw a few on the pelagic trip, but the more extended views came on the last afternoon of the trip on a seawatch from Pescadero, where 3 of these lunks were feeding under a swarm of Sooty Shearwaters and other seabirds.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

LONG-TAILED WEASEL (*Mustela frenata*) – One handsome individual popped up along the path at Pillar Point, Half Moon Bay.

CALIFORNIA SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus*) – These were the common pinnipeds on the Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – This was the big blonde sea lion near the albatross trawler on the Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

NORTHERN FUR SEAL (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – Half Moon Bay pelagic trip

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*)

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 207 bird taxa and 26 mammal taxa