



Field Guides Tour Report

Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierra II 2015

Sep 3, 2015 to Sep 12, 2015

Tom Johnson

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



We had multiple opportunities to marvel at the unending river of Sooty Shearwaters off Half Moon Bay. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

Early September is an excellent time to explore a vast cross-section of birdlife in central California, and we had the good fortune of great weather and a nice group that combined to make this a very rewarding experience.

We started out near San Francisco with a day of birding along the southwestern part of San Francisco Bay. This area is jam-packed with life ranging from spectacular numbers of large shorebirds (avocets, Willets, godwits) to pelicans to migrant ducks. We also found the delightful and skulky Ridgway's Rail and had some great views of this recent full-species split. One of the highlights had to be the amazing, sun-kissed views we had of Vaux's Swifts swarming overhead near San Jose. In the afternoon, we headed across the Santa Cruz Mountains and settled in at Half Moon Bay in preparation for our pelagic trip the next day.

Because of some strong winds that had built up the waves offshore, we modified our original plan and took a pelagic trip toward the Farallon Islands. As we left the harbor area, we ran a gauntlet of tens of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters and had a thrilling flyby from an adult Northern Gannet that has been spending time in the San Francisco area for the past several years - the only individual known from the Pacific Ocean! The Farallons were very exciting -- beautiful and rugged and wild. While soaking up the experience and the sights, smells, and sounds of several species of marine mammals that call the islands home, we also got to see a roost of thirteen Brown Boobies and one Blue-footed Booby! These rarities have taken up residence in the area, and they were super highlights for us on this trip. Wow -- three species of Sulids in California on one day! The rest of the pelagic trip worked out nicely, and we saw Black-footed Albatrosses, Northern Fulmars, Black, Ashy, and Fork-tailed storm-petrels, tons of Common Murres, Rhinoceros Auklets, several Tufted Puffins, and a number of other fun seabird species. For a trip that was essentially a Plan B due to the weather offshore, this was awesome!

We spent the day after the pelagic along the coast near Half Moon Bay, seeking out songbirds like Wrentit, Hutton's Vireo, Townsend's Warbler, and Tricolored Blackbirds, and coastal specialties like Snowy Plover, Wandering Tattler, and Pacific Loons. This day included a visit to a dense, dark grove of huge Coastal Redwoods, complete with a huge, yellow banana slug. A Long-tailed Weasel atop the bluffs in Half Moon Bay vied for our attention with flocks of Pacific Loons, Western Grebes, and the massive ocean-darkening flock of Sooty Shearwaters on the horizon. We even had a rare-on-the-coast Sandhill Crane fly past us in Half Moon Bay.

After wrapping up the coastal part of our tour, we drove east across San Francisco Bay and explored the Diablo Range south of Livermore. Though the area was quite dry and overall bird activity was subdued, we did really well with the California specialties we searched for, including the state endemic Yellow-billed Magpie, California Thrasher, Bell's Sparrow, Oak Titmice, and Lawrence's Goldfinch. Though we didn't find Lewis's Woodpeckers in the Diablos, we made a detour on the east side of the Central Valley to pick up some of these stunners in an oak-studded grassland.

We were based out of Sonora, on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada, for a few nights while we journeyed through some of the vast wild mountain woods. Our visit to Calaveras Big Trees State Park was nothing short of thrilling for woodpeckers -- we found 15 White-headed Woodpeckers, 2 male Williamson's Sapsuckers, and 5 Red-breasted Sapsuckers, in addition to skulky songbirds like Pacific Wrens (SO many Pacific Wrens!) and MacGillivray's Warblers. Our afternoon Mountain Quail search resulted in hearing quite a few quail and catching glimpses of several, but we were mostly left wanting more (stay tuned until later in the trip).

We crossed the Sierra Nevada at Sonora Pass, stopping at several sites en route to find mountain birds like Thick-billed Fox Sparrows, Green-tailed Towhees, and American Dippers. At the often-quiet Sonora Pass, we found a neat flock of Cassin's Finches, a high-elevation Lewis's Woodpecker, several Clark's Nutcrackers, and a flyover Townsend's Solitaire -- quite a haul!

Winding our way down the east slope, we ended up in the dramatic and bizarre Mono Basin, where we learned about the formation of limestone "tufa"

and the history of the water war in California that has put Mono Lake in the spotlight over the years.

On our first morning in Lee Vining, we strolled out to the edge of Mono Lake early (Brr! It was cold!) and were able to enjoy the sunrise at the South Tufa, accompanied by Sage Thrashers, Brewer's Sparrows, and about 100 flyover Pinyon Jays. We spent the afternoon around the ghost town of Bodie, where we learned about the history of this gold mining town that peaked in the late 1800s but is remarkably well-preserved today. Mountain Bluebirds escorted us around town, and after our cultural tour we turned our attention to the sagebrush hills around town in search of Greater Sage-Grouse. After what seemed like a long zig-zag back and forth through the slopes, we eventually found a few grouse slinking through the scrub. Everyone had great views, including of the hidden one that erupted from almost underfoot as we moved into position to see the others. While celebrating our success with this amazing grouse on the drive out to the highway, we found even more sage-grouse along the side of the road!

Our final full day involved a transect of the state from Lee Vining back to San Francisco, but first, we had some Mountain Quail to track down. I decided to head back over Ebbetts Pass to re-visit the Bear Valley area. This time, we ended up with a quail in the scope - quite a bit more satisfying than our first experience. Heading downslope toward Arnold, we noticed the air filling with smoke. Eventually, we ended up within a few miles of a fire that had just started rapidly increasing in size. This was the Butte fire that would later reach 70,000 acres in size and destroy 475 homes. In awe, we maneuvered past the blaze without incident, and continued across the Central Valley, across San Francisco Bay, and back to our hotel in Burlingame in time to relax before our last meal together.

I'd like to thank Chris Benesh, Jan Pierson, and Doug Gochfeld for their collaboration on guiding and bird-finding for the coastal stretch and pelagic component of the trip. Likewise, Alvaro Jaramillo of Alvaro's Adventures gets five stars for organizing and pulling off our very exciting pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay -- thanks, Alvaro. Many thanks to Caroline Lewis for her organization and support from the Field Guides office in Austin.

Thank you to everyone who came along for your company, birding interest and excitement, and good conversation along the way. I hope you enjoyed your time in California, and I look forward to seeing you out in the field again soon.

Good birding,

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)

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – Our only Brant was a scruffy individual at Pillar Point in Half Moon Bay.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Seen at scattered locations across the state.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Scattered between the coast, Central Valley, and east slope of the Sierra Nevada.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen in small numbers across the state.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Good views of a few at Radio Rd. and Charleston Slough along the edge of San Francisco Bay.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – We saw hundreds in San Francisco Bay and around Mono Lake.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – These were just arriving as fall migrants - we found them in San Francisco Bay and at Mono Lake.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Common - seen in the dozens at locations across the state.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – Our first was in San Francisco Bay at Coyote Point Park; we saw more along the coast near Half Moon Bay.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – One female was in Pillar Point Harbor in Half Moon Bay.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – We saw a few near the coast, but 150 were at Mono Lake.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

MOUNTAIN QUAIL (*Oreortyx pictus*) – These skulky quail gave us a challenge. We heard them in several locations, but our initial views were quick. Eventually we had one in the scope near Bear Valley in the Sierra Nevada.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL (*Callipepla californica*) – Fairly common; some flushed from the roadside at relatively high elevation on the east slope of the Sierra (in some great Mountain Quail habitat!).

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Wow! After an interesting walk through the ghost town at Bodie, we searched the sage for quite a while before finding a small flock of grouse. We ended up with magnificent views of these huge, cryptic birds. After our hard work, we were celebrating our sighting on the drive back to Lee Vining when, all of a sudden, we found another flock of sage-grouse alongside the road. Ah, the irony! This species tied with Clark's Nutcracker for the group's favorite bird of the trip.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – We found turkeys on our drives in the Diablo Range and on the west slope of the Sierra.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Seen during the pelagic trip and from shore in Half Moon Bay.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Great scope views in Half Moon Bay.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – One was at Charleston Slough on our first day.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – High numbers (>1500) were visible from the edge of Mono Lake. This is an important site for the species, and the number we saw is just a mere fraction of the many thousands that move through the basin during migration.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – Good views along the outer coast at Half Moon Bay.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – These were the large grebes visible near SFO Airport on our first day of birding along the edge of the bay.

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria nigripes*) – After we left the Farallon Islands on our pelagic trip, we headed to deep water and quickly pulled in a few of these handsome, dark albatrosses. They breed in Hawaii and move across the North Pacific.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Three of these stocky petrels were near the edge of the continental shelf edge on our pelagic trip.

PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna creatopus*) – On our pelagic trip, we found a few hundred of these large shearwaters. They are nonbreeding-season visitors from Chile. This was a milestone bird for Leslee: #600!

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Ardenna grisea*) – WOW! I'm not quite sure of the actual totals of the huge flocks we saw near Half Moon Bay, but we estimated groups of 10,000, 40,000, and 60,000 at various points. The journey on the boat as we headed out through the mass of shearwaters was one of my favorite memories from the tour.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

FORK-TAILED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma furcata*) – One came in to the back of the boat briefly on our pelagic trip.

ASHY STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma homochroa*) – We saw about 9 of these California specialties on our pelagic trip; most views were fairly brief flybys.

BLACK STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma melania*) – During our pelagic trip, one that flew by near some Ashy Storm-Petrels was larger, darker, and more bounding than the Ashies.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula nebouxi*) – One of these rare southern seabirds was standing on the cliff at Sugarloaf on the Farallon Islands with the flock of Brown Boobies.

BROWN BOOBY (BREWSTER'S) (*Sula leucogaster brewsteri*) – Though this species is typically quite rare in Northern California, a continent-wide invasion is underway, and sightings are increasing rapidly. Thirteen were hanging out with a Blue-footed Booby at Sugarloaf on the Farallon Islands. Two of the males had white in the face, indicative of the expected brewsteri subspecies.

NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*) – Truly amazing - a lone adult Northern Gannet appeared in April 2012 at the Farallon Islands off San Francisco. Since then, it has been seen in various locations around the Bay Area, and we were extremely lucky to see it fly past our boat as we headed out of the harbor at Half Moon Bay!

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) – This was the common cormorant in Half Moon Bay away from the immediate harbor. We also saw the species well offshore.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – This was the most common cormorant during our scans of the breakwaters in Half Moon Bay on the morning of our pelagic trip.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – The least common cormorant of the the tour - we did find several of these small, slim cormorants during the pelagic trip.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Ours were all along the edges of San Francisco Bay. We had close views of a tight flock of 330 at Charleston Slough.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Common in SF Bay and along the coast, where we saw 850 in Pillar Point Harbor.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Common; seen on most days.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Most of ours were along San Francisco Bay.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Seen near the coast, mostly along SF Bay.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One was at Mono Lake County Park.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – One was at Bayfront Park in Millbrae; two others were patrolling Pillar Point Harbor in Half Moon Bay before our pelagic trip departure.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Six flew in and landed during our early morning exploration of the Mono Lake South Tufa.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common and widespread; seen every day.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Our first was at Bayfront Park in Millbrae; we also saw them near nesting sites at Mono Lake. The species nests on the limestone tufa structures at Mono, but flies to other sites to forage.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Three of these handsome raptors were at Bayfront Park in Millbrae; two flew over as soon as we arrived! We then watched through the scopes as they patrolled the runways at SFO.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – One hunted ground squirrels near San Jose on our first day.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Two flew by close at Mono Lake County Park.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – We saw juveniles twice at high elevation in the Sierra Nevada.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (ELEGANS) (*Buteo lineatus elegans*) – One posed on a utility line in Half Moon Bay; we pulled off for some great views of this colorful California subspecies.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Common and widespread.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

RIDGWAY'S RAIL (SAN FRANCISCO BAY) (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) – These recently split large rails (formerly considered to be conspecific with Clapper Rail) walked around in the open in a marsh near SFO airport in Burlingame.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – Two walked along the marsh edges at Charleston Slough.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – One was at Charleston Slough on our first day.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Six at Mono Lake South Tufa were the only ones we saw.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – While we were admiring shorebirds in Half Moon Bay, a Sandhill Crane flew by behind us, heading north!
This species is rare on the coast.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – These striking shorebirds were common at several sites along San Francisco Bay.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Hundreds fed along SF Bay and at Mono Lake.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – We saw these from shore in Half Moon Bay; one also flew past offshore during our pelagic trip.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Common along SF Bay and along the outer coast.

SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*) – Twelve of these very local nesters blended in with the sand on the beach in Half Moon Bay.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – About two dozen were at Charleston Slough and Bayfront Park along SF Bay on our first day.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Widespread; seen in small numbers on most days.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Two were in the marina at Coyote Point Park on our first day along SF Bay.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – Three (including a nice bar-bellied adult retaining some breeding plumage) were in Pillar Point Harbor.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – We saw over 50 at a few sites along SF Bay; later, 3 flew over at Mono Lake.

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Very common along San Francisco Bay and the outer coast; 200 were at Bayfront Park in Millbrae.

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – We saw about a dozen of these beautiful curlews between Bayfront Park and Coyote Point near Burlingame.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – We saw a few flybys in Half Moon Bay (one was mixed with Marbled Godwits for a nice comparison); another was feeding on upland flats at Mono Lake County Park.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – Hundreds were along the edges of SF Bay. We saw 270 at Bayfront Park in Millbrae and an amazing 600 at Radio Rd.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – Our first views were close at Coyote Point Park, but we saw quite a few more of these rock-lovers near Half Moon Bay.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Several flocks ranging from 20 to 60 were on the beaches and jetties of Half Moon Bay.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Dozens of these tiny peeps were along the edges of SF Bay and also at Mono Lake.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – One juvenile was a notable sighting in a beach pool at Half Moon Bay.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Dozens were along the edge of SF Bay; our max. count was 30 at Charleston Slough.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Dowitcher ID is tough, but we had some great studies of these Pacific (*caurinus*) birds in San Francisco Bay, including hundreds at Radio Rd. We even saw the golden-marbled tertials of some juveniles and heard them give their rapid, rolling "tu-tu-tu" calls.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Over 500 were at Charleston Slough, and we had good comparisons with Short-billed Dowitchers there. Many were already in plain gray basic plumage, and we confirmed our identifications by hearing their sharp "keek" callnotes.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – Just two were in with the Red-necked Phalaropes at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR. Oddly, there had been hundreds the day before when I scouted the flock!

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – We had great views at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR and also during the pelagic trip. Most were dark-backed with golden braces.

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – One stout, pale gray-backed individual flew up off the water during our pelagic trip.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

SOUTH POLAR SKUA (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) – A few people saw this hulk at a distance on the pelagic trip, but views proved elusive for most of us.

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – At least one of these large jaegers flew past during our Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We saw these on several occasions near shore in Half Moon Bay. They have a particular fondness for terrorizing the Elegant Terns that feed close to the beach.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Common along the beach and on the pelagic trip from Half Moon Bay.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cephus columba*) – We saw one in Pillar Point Harbor and several at the Farallon Islands, including an adult that was still carrying fish in to one of the islands (presumably to some late chicks).

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – Alvaro helped us find about six of these from a blufftop in Half Moon Bay. The species has declined and is a special sighting in the area, usually found in coastal waters adjacent to mature conifer forests that are used for breeding.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – Not as common as usual; we only saw about 4 on the pelagic trip.

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – A real highlight of our adventure to the Farallon Islands was the opportunity to see 5 Tufted Puffins swimming around near this breeding site.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

HEERMANN'S GULL (*Larus heermanni*) – We saw up to 80 in one spot in Half Moon Bay. No juveniles were present, suggesting breeding failure in Mexico this year.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Rare this early in the fall, we were lucky to see a juvenile along the breakwaters in Half Moon Bay.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – We saw these scattered at a few locations on the edge of SF Bay.

WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*) – Very common along the coast. Many breed on the Farallon Islands.

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – Common, especially along SF Bay and at Mono Lake.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – One gray-primaried adult was on a breakwater in Half Moon Bay during the early stage of our pelagic trip.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – These huge terns flew past us a few times in Half Moon Bay.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – We ran across several groups of these offshore migrants during our pelagic trip.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Common in San Francisco Bay.

ELEGANT TERN (*Thalasseus elegans*) – Common in SF Bay and on the outer coast, where we saw up to 100 at Half Moon Bay.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – A count of 26 was notable for the Radio Rd. ponds. This species is quite local in the area.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common around people. [I]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – We had some good luck, finding this attractive forest pigeon at Coyote Point Park and at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Common in many areas near people. [I]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Widespread; seen on most days.

Strigidae (Owls)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – Several popped up near Alviso for some shimmery scope views in the heat.

Apodidae (Swifts)

VAUX'S SWIFT (*Chaetura vauxi*) – A trip highlight for me was the flock of about 75 migrant Vaux's Swifts wheeling around overhead near Alviso.

They seemed to be investigating a chimney, and were also clearly feeding on aerial insects. Good, close views of these swifts can be tough to come by, and these were easily my best views ever.

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – One zoomed through the Vaux's Swift flock at Alviso; others were circling around up high at Bear Valley Ski Area.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – The common hummingbird around the San Francisco area.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – We saw the species at Coyote Point Park; another was a surprise flyover at high elevation at Bear Valley Ski Area in the Sierra.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – After missing these on Mines Rd., it was great to find a pair of these striking woodpeckers in oak savannah on the eastern edge of the Central Valley.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Two were with our Lewis's Woodpeckers on the edge of the Central Valley.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – We kicked things off with some great views of males at Calaveras Big Trees SP, and saw a few more during our Sierra transit.

RED-BREADED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) – Fairly common in the Sierra Nevada - we had some exceptional views of this species at Calaveras Big Trees SP and at Mono Lake County Park.

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER (*Picoides nuttallii*) – Good views were had eventually at Coyote Point Park; we heard and saw a few others as well.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One was at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve on the coast; two others were at the Mono Lake County Park.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Good looks at Calaveras Big Trees SP and Mono Lake County Park, where we compared them to Downies.

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides albolarvatus*) – Woah! We had wonderful views of these highly desired woodpeckers at Calaveras Big Trees SP, and ended up tallying about 15 individuals. Some of them fed on Giant Sequoia trunks right in front of our faces - simply spectacular.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – The Red-shafted form was fairly common in the Sierra Nevada.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – A few hollered and showed off fairly close by at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – These small falcons were mostly roadside sightings during our drives.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – One circled high over the coastal highway south of Half Moon bay.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – One really showed off as it fed at Calaveras Big Trees SP. The scope views and comparison of this big vested fella with a Western Wood-Pewee were really special.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*) – Good views in the Sierra, including a comparison with a larger Olive-sided Flycatcher.

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – One put in a frustratingly brief appearance in the sage scrub at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*) – One put on a show for us at Hartley Springs Campground south of Lee Vining. We studied its long-tailed, short-winged shape, tapered white eyering, and nervous behavior.

PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax difficilis*) – We found a few of these "Western" Flycatchers along the coast.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – Fairly common near the coast.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – We saw a particularly close individual at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – One was on lower Mines Rd.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – One perched up in the open just up the sage slope from the Mono Lake South Tufa.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

HUTTON'S VIREO (*Vireo huttoni*) – This kinglet-like vireo was at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary on the coast.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – We found two individuals mixed in with flocks of other songbirds - one at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary and another at Clarks Fork in Stanislaus NF.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – We saw flocks of 100-200 on consecutive days flying between pine forest and Lee Vining. On a few occasions, they passed directly overhead, quite low, letting us really soak up their amusing nasal calls and beautiful gray-blue plumage.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Very common in conifer forest in the Sierra; our highest count came from Calaveras Big Trees SP.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (COASTAL) (*Aphelocoma californica californica*) – These were at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary along the coast.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Fairly common in open areas east of the Sierra.

YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica nuttalli*) – These state endemic beauties were on Mines Rd. and in lower Del Puerto Canyon, where we had our best views. [E]

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – We saw a few flying back and forth around Lee Vining, but our best views were definitely at Sonora Pass.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common; seen almost every day.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Common; seen every day.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – One flew over at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – We found flocks of 15 and 60 at Charleston Slough and Alviso, respectively.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Widespread.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – Common in forest in the Sierra Nevada.

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Common near the coast and in the Sierra; we saw gray-flanked birds near the coast and chestnut-flanked birds at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

OAK TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus inornatus*) – These drab oak specialists formed the nucleus of a mixed songbird flock near Del Valle Reservoir in the Diablos.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSH TIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – Boisterous flocks were in the scrub at several locations along SF Bay.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Common in the conifer forests of the Sierra Nevada; at least 30 were at Calaveras Big Trees SP!

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – The birds east of the Sierra Nevada were of the Interior West group, while those along Mines Rd. were of the Pacific group. This species is a candidate for a future split.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – Common at a few sites along the coast and near Mono Lake.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – We had a lovely experience with these creepers at Calaveras Big Trees SP, where we found 7.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – Our only one was during one of the stops we made in search of thrashers along Mines Rd.

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – 2 were at Mono Lake County Park.

PACIFIC WREN (PACIFICUS GROUP) (*Troglodytes pacificus pacificus*) – Our views at Calaveras Big Trees SP couldn't have been better. We found about 15 of these tiny wrens there.

MARSH WREN (PALUDICOLA GROUP) (*Cistothorus palustris paludicola*) – After some effort, we finally had nice views of these wrens in the cattail marsh at Mono Lake County Park.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – One was bopping around in the scrub near the parking area at Charleston Slough.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – A family group bobbed on the rocks along the Clarks Fork of the Stanislaus River.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – These were at several conifer locations in the Sierra, including Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Paradoxornithidae (Parrotbills, Wrentit, and Allies)

WRENTIT (*Chamaea fasciata*) – Nice views (eventually!) at Burleigh Murray Ranch State Park near Half Moon Bay. This is a special, unique species found along the Pacific Coast of the US.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

- WESTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia mexicana*) – Nice studies of some scaly youngsters at Sunnyvale Baylands Park
- MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia currucoides*) – Seen at several open locations east of the Sierra, with our best views certainly coming from within the ghost town of Bodie.
- TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) – One of these slim mountain thrushes flew over us during our exploration of Sonora Pass.
- AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Rather common in the Sierra Nevada.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

- CALIFORNIA THRASHER** (*Toxostoma redivivum*) – After a few stops in hillside chaparral along Mines Rd., we found a confiding pair of these large, floppy thrashers. This is another California specialty species that we were very pleased to encounter.
- SAGE THRASHER** (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – These small, streaky thrashers hunted alkali flies on the shore of Mono Lake as we admired them at close range.
- NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – We saw these daily in the lowlands near the coast.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

- EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common and widespread. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

- AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – This was a write-in species that I failed to actually write in during our checklist review sessions on the tour (sorry)! We saw three flying overhead, calling, at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

- ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – A few were scattered throughout the tour, including at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary, at Mines Rd., and in the Sierra Nevada.
- NASHVILLE WARBLER (RIDGWAYI)** (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla ridgwayi*) – We had some nice views of this tail-wagging, western form of Nashville Warbler at the Calaveras Big Trees SP. Coincidentally, this form was formerly called "Calaveras Warbler".
- MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER** (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – A few males in the Sierra Nevada were wildly accommodating.
- COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – We found a few scattered individuals in thickets along the coast and in the cattail marsh at Mono Lake County Park.
- YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – We had brief views on our first day along SF Bay.
- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – Common in the Sierra Nevada. Our peak numbers were the flocks along Clarks Fork of the Stanislaus River.
- BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – We saw two at different spots in the Sierra.
- TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*) – 2 were at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary along the coast.
- HERMIT WARBLER** (*Setophaga occidentalis*) – We saw two way up high in the huge trees at Calaveras Big Trees SP.
- WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Common in forested groves along the coast and also at Calaveras Big Trees SP in the Sierra.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

- CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*) – Our only sighting of the trip came from the Mono Lake area.
- BREWER'S SPARROW** (*Spizella breweri*) – Common in the sage scrub near Mono Lake. We also saw about 75 near Bodie.
- LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Our only Lark Sparrows posed briefly along lower Mines Rd. in the Diablos.
- FOX SPARROW (THICK-BILLED)** (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) – This bizarre form of Fox Sparrow looks very distinctive with its hefty, silver-colored bill. A few of these lookers posed for us in high scrub in the Sierra Nevada below Sonora Pass.
- DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*) – The Oregon subspecies group was a common sight in forest during our travels. We found them along San Francisco Bay and also in the Sierra Nevada.
- WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (ORIANTHA)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) – We saw a few scattered individuals of these dark-lored, "Mountain" White-crowned Sparrows in the Sierra Nevada.
- WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (NUTTALLI)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys nuttalli*) – This is the White-crowned Sparrow subspecies found on the coastal part of our journey near Half Moon Bay.
- SAGEBRUSH SPARROW** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – Though we didn't get to spend a whole lot of time watching them, 2 of these thrasher-like sparrows posed briefly in the sagebrush near Mono Lake. This is the widespread interior taxon of the split that separated this species from Bell's Sparrow; well to the south of Mono Lake on the east slope of the Sierra Nevada, Sagebrush Sparrow contacts the canescens form of Bell's Sparrow.
- BELL'S SPARROW (BELLI)** (*Artemisiospiza belli belli*) – A concerted effort finally yielded a softly singing bird in the upper stretches of Mines Rd., a breeding site for this recent split. This is the coastal subspecies.
- VESPER SPARROW** (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – These stocky sparrows with white in the tail were at Mono Lake and in Bodie.
- SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – We found them along the edge of San Francisco Bay and also at Mono Lake.
- SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – 2 were at Pillar Point in Half Moon Bay.
- CALIFORNIA TOWHEE** (*Melospiza crissalis*) – Common near the coast.
- GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – We had several excellent views of this beautiful sparrow in the Sierra Nevada.
- SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*) – We saw surprisingly few of these large, striking sparrows - 2 were at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

- WESTERN TANAGER** (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – We found several migrants in the Sierra; we even found a few out in the sage brush at Bodie (clearly not breeding habitat)!
- BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – We found one on the coast at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. Another was feeding in the neighborhood behind the diner in Lee Vining.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

- RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – We saw these widespread blackbirds near Pigeon Point and also low down on Mines Rd.
- TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius tricolor*) – These California specialties were in a mixed blackbird flock at Pigeon Point and also in the dry

oak savannah up high in the Diablo Range.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – A few sang from scrubby fields at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR near Alviso.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Common around Half Moon Bay and Lee Vining.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – About 25 were at Pigeon Point with the Tricolored Blackbirds, and we saw 2 others at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Common, especially near towns.

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – About fifteen of these montane finches were feeding and calling at Sonora Pass. Most were immatures or females, but we did find a few red males.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – 20 were at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary on the coast. They were also widespread in the Sierra in small numbers.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*) – We mostly missed these widespread finches; however, a few were at Mono Lake County Park during one of our checks there.

LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH (*Spinus lawrencei*) – These inconspicuous but delightful finches were the highlight of some hot, sunny post-lunch birding in Del Puerto Canyon.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Seen only along the coast at Fitzgerald Marine Sanctuary near Moss Beach.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in towns. [I]

MAMMALS

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – Common around Lee Vining. We had some nice views at Mono Lake County Park.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – This was the bunny we saw in the dry lowlands of the Bay Area.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – A few were along the roadsides in the sage desert of the Mono Basin.

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – Common in sage and open forest on the east slope of the Sierra. We saw a few very nicely at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

MERRIAM'S CHIPMUNK (*Tamias merriami*) – This was the chipmunk we saw at the edge of the redwood grove near Half Moon Bay

LONG-EARED CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrimaculatus*) – This striking chipmunk is endemic to the Sierra Nevada. We saw it well in several locations including Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*) – Seen well at Bear Valley.

CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) – Common and widespread.

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – This was the well-patterned, cute, chipmunk-like squirrel that we saw a few times in the Sierra. A memorable sighting was along the edge of the road at the Bear Valley Ski Area.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Around the San Francisco Bay Area; introduced here. [I]

WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus griseus*) – We saw a few of these large, gray squirrels while driving through the Sierra forests.

CHICKAREE (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) – This was the common small squirrel in the Sierra Nevada. It is also called the Douglas Squirrel.

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*) – A few folks had glimpses of these small, plain gray backs slipping through the water during the pelagic trip.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – A few of these enchanting, medium-sized whales were feeding off of Half Moon Bay. We even saw one from the van while driving north near Pacifica.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – We found this large canine near Mono Lake. These western Coyotes are smaller than the ones in the Eastern United States.

LONG-TAILED WEASEL (*Mustela frenata*) – One of these handsomely patterned weasels popped up along a bluff in Half Moon Bay as we were trying to scope seabirds in the surf.

CALIFORNIA SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus*) – This was the common sea lion of the coastal waters between Half Moon Bay and the Farallon Islands.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – These rowdy, blonde sea lions were stouter and larger-headed in comparison to the California Sea Lions. We saw them at the Farallon Islands.

NORTHERN FUR SEAL (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – Our trip to the Farallon Islands afforded us the chance to see hundreds of these sleek mammals at their only major concentration point in California.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – We saw these spotted gray pinnipeds on the outer coast; one was also at Coyote Point Park in San Francisco Bay.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – We saw this large-eared deer along the slopes of the Sierra Nevada.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 205 bird taxa and 21 mammal taxa