Trip Report — Slice of California II 2026

September 15-24, 2026 with Micah Riegner



Our group dwarfed by the Giant Sequoias at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Photo set by guide Micah Riegner.

This cross-section of California took us from the deep waters of the continental shelf, through the coastal Redwoods, across the Central Valley, and to the high Sierra Nevadas. Our birding began in the Bay Area, where our first stop was Byxbee Park at the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve. Here, after much searching, we found a San Francisco Bay Ridgway's Rail out on one of the muddy channels. In the trailside vegetation were Orange-crowned Warblers, Common Yellowthroats and a super close Chestnut-backed Chickadee. There were good numbers of shorebirds on the mudflats, including Long-billed Dowitchers, Least and Western Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits, and Long-billed Curlews. We experienced some Bay Area traffic on

our way to the Spreckles Avenue ponds, and were relieved to get out of the van and enjoy more shorebirds. Both Vaux's and White-throated Swifts were swarming overhead. A migrant Nashville Warbler was a neat surprise, too. We had lunch in Cupertino, then stopped at McLellan Ranch Preserve, where Pygmy Nuthatches were coming to the feeders along with Bewick's Wrens, and Oak Titmice. We crossed over the hills to Half Moon Bay, checked into our hotel, then spent the late afternoon out at Pillar Point watching Wandering Tattlers, Black Turnstones and Black Oystercatchers out on the rocks. In the harbor were Surf Scoters and Red-throated Loons. A pair of Wrentits appeared at close range in the parking lot—the best views I've ever had. Before heading to dinner, we stopped at the Clipper Ridge trail, where a pair of California Thrashers sang from some close bushes while Townsend's Warblers foraged nearby.



Wrentit at Pillar Point, Half Moon Bay by tour participant Lou Fleischhauer.

For our pelagic trip, we linked up with Chris's group, who had just returned from their time in the Sierras. We had an early breakfast, then met Alvaro

and his team of spotters. As we left the harbor, we saw the resident Northern Gannet sitting on the rocks—apparently, it's been around for almost a decade. We cruised further offshore, seeing droves of Sooty, and Pink-footed Shearwaters with a few smaller, Black-Vented Shearwaters mixed in. Alvaro spotted a Buller's Shearwater that was resting on the water. Perhaps something was wrong with it. As we neared the continental shelf, our first Storm-Petels appeared. Black Storm-Petrels were the most common followed by Ashy and we saw a couple of Wilson's (a lifer for me!). At one point, we came across a pod of Humpbacks feeding alongside a Fin Whale. Lots of birds were swarming, including a couple of Pomarine Jaegers (we had seen several Parasitic up to that point) and a Black-footed Albatross. On our way back to shore, the skies opened and we had great light on the Sooty Shearwaters streaming by. As we neared land, we flushed a pair of Craveri's Murrelets, which darted away, never to be seen again.



South Tufa, Mono Lake by tour participant Martha Vandervoort.

The day after our pelagic day, we joined Chris's group again for a terrestrial day south of Half Moon Bay. We left before light and drove down to Pinnacles National Park, arriving in time to see California Condors roosting on the ridgetop—they were pretty darn far away, but we could see that they were at least twice the size of the neighboring vultures. We watched for about an hour and a couple took off, then they looped back to the roosting tree. Lawrence's Goldfinch and California Quail were around too. After Pinnacles, we drove up to La Gloria Road and saw Bell's Sparrow, along with another Wrentit and a Hutton's Vireo. We stopped for Yellow-billed Magpies along the drive out. From there, we tried to reach Moonglow Dairy to see Tricolored Blackbird, but access was blocked off due to a fire. We rerouted and had lunch in Moss Landing, then continued up the coast, making various stops in Santa Cruz, then northward towards Pescadero, where we had a big flock of Red-winged and Tricolored Blackbirds in some fields along the road. We scanned Pescadero and saw Pelagic Cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, Black Turnstones and Wandering Tattler.



While searching for Greater Sage-Grouse in Bodie, we came across this American Badger peeking out of its burrow. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

From Half Moon Bay, we headed inland across the Central Valley but beforehand, we visited Tunitas Creek where we came very close to seeing a Northern Pygmy-Owl. Unfortunately, it just wouldn't move from its thicket of willows. Lots of birds were mobbing it, including a Sooty Fox Sparrow, but the owl just wouldn't budge. We then stopped at the Purisima Redwoods, where we saw huge numbers of Townsend's Warblers, Brown Creepers and Golden-crowned Kinglets in some of the tallest trees on Earth, so you can imagine how small they appeared. Before leaving Half Moon Bay, we stopped at the beach to scan for Snowy Plovers, but there were lots of people out walking around and no plovers. We then headed across the Central Valley with a lunch break in Livermore. We continued east, stopping at the Ripon WTP, where we saw Nuttal's Woodpecker and a small Cooper's Hawk circling over us. We drove on for the rest of the afternoon, stopping briefly to see Lewis's Woodpeckers before reaching the town of Sonora.

Kathy spotted a Barn Owl in the nest box behind our rooms, which was a neat surprise!



We watched this American Dipper foraging in a fast-moving stream in the Sierras. We could even track it underwater! Photo by tour participant Lou Fleischhauer.

Our visit to Calaveras Big Trees this year was above average. We walked the loop trail through the Giant Sequoias (those Sugar Pines are big too!), where we saw woodpeckers of all sorts, including White-headed, Hairy, Northern Flicker, and best of all, a pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers. The real surprise, however, was a covey of Mountain Quail that were quite close. They emerged from the bushes and took off after seeing us. Hermit Thrushes, Townsend's Solitaires and MacGillivray's Warblers were also along the trail. We had lunch nearby, then we drove down the Spicer Reservoir Road where we saw a Merlin, Evening Grosbeak and Red-breasted Sapsuckers. We checked Bear Valley Ski Area, which was pretty darn quiet, then drove over

to Lake Alpine and saw a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers, a fantastic way to end the day.

The day we crossed over the Sierras, we stopped first at Cascade Campground, where we spent about an hour watching Clark's Nutcrackers, White-headed Woodpeckers, and eventually, a Northern Pygmy-Owl that was calling from one of the super tall trees. Thick-billed Fox Sparrows were scratching around on the road. From the campground, we drove on to Donnell Vista then onward towards Sonora Pass with a stop for American Dipper along the way. At Sonora Pass, we saw Red Crossbills and Pine Siskin—both were new for the trip. We had lunch in Bridgeport then scanned the Bridgeport Reservoir where there were Clark's and Western Grebes, White-faced Ibis on the mudflats, and a flock of Least Sandpipers. We then checked into our hotel in Lee Vining and in the late afternoon we drove up Lundy Canyon, which was cold and windy.



Of the three Northern Pygmy-Owls we encountered, this one showed the best. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

The next morning, we visited South Tufa of Mono Lake and had fun exploring the lakeshore and adjacent sage country. There were thousands of Eared Grebes on the water and numerous Brewer's Blackbirds warming up on the tufa towers. In the sage country, we saw Sagebrush Sparrows, some flyover Pinyon Jays, and best of all, a Prairie Falcon, which we followed along the road. At one point it veered off and landed on a distant hillside, then it took off and shot right overhead on its way to the lake. We had an enormous breakfast back in town, then we birded Crawley Lake, where we saw Sage Thrashers, Vesper and Savanna Sparrows, and a line of Tree Swallows on the fence wires. We had a mid-day break, then left for Bodie. After our history tour with Lee, we scoured the hillsides for sage-grouse. In doing so we turned up a Badger that was hiding out in the bushes. We would have totally glazed by it were it not for my thermal scope!

Before our long drive back to the coast, we birded Log Cabin Mine Road above Lee Vining, where we had a close encounter with a Northern Pygmy-Owl getting mobbed by Yellow-rumped Warblers. We had breakfast, then drove all the way crossed the Sierras and the Central Valley to catch the last rays of sun at Coyote Point where we saw Forster's Terns and a close Long-billed Curlew, our last birds of the trip.

I'd like to thank Caroline in our office for setting everything up for us and you all for joining me in California. I look forward to our next Field Guides adventure!



Mountain Quail at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

Mammals

Least Chipmunk (Neotamias minimus) Common around Lee Vining.
Long-eared Chipmunk (Neotamias quadrimaculatus) These were the chipmunks at Calaveras Big Trees.

California Ground Squirrel (Otospermophilus beecheyi)
Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (Callospermophilus lateralis) Seen along the road at Sonora Pass.
Eastern Fox Squirrel (Sciurus niger)
Douglas's Squirrel (Tamiasciurus douglasii) Abundant especially at Calaveras Big Trees.
American Badger (Taxidea taxus) What a surprise! We were scanning for sage-grouse when we found one of these instead, honestly, a much rarer find!
Humpback Whale (Megaptera novaeangliae) We had an incredible time watching them feed during our pelagic trip.
Fin Whale (Balaenoptera physalus)
Coyote (Canis latrans) Seen near South Tufa, Mono Lake.
California Sea Lion (Zalophus californianus) Seen during the pelagic trip.
Harbor Seal (Phoca vitulina) Out on the rocks at Pescadero.
Mule Deer (Odocoileus hemionus) The common deer we encountered throughout the trip.

Fish

Blue Shark (Prionace glauca) We saw the tip of the dorsal and pectoral fins poking out of the water.
Ocean Sunfish (Mola mola) We saw a few on our pelagic trip.

Reptiles

Gopher Snake (Pituophis catenifer) We saw one crossing the road at Crawley Lake.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: **https://ebird.org/tripreport/575902**

You can download a combined PDF of this page and the eBird report at this link: **https://fieldguides.com/triplists/ncx26TRIPLIST.pdf**

-- Micah

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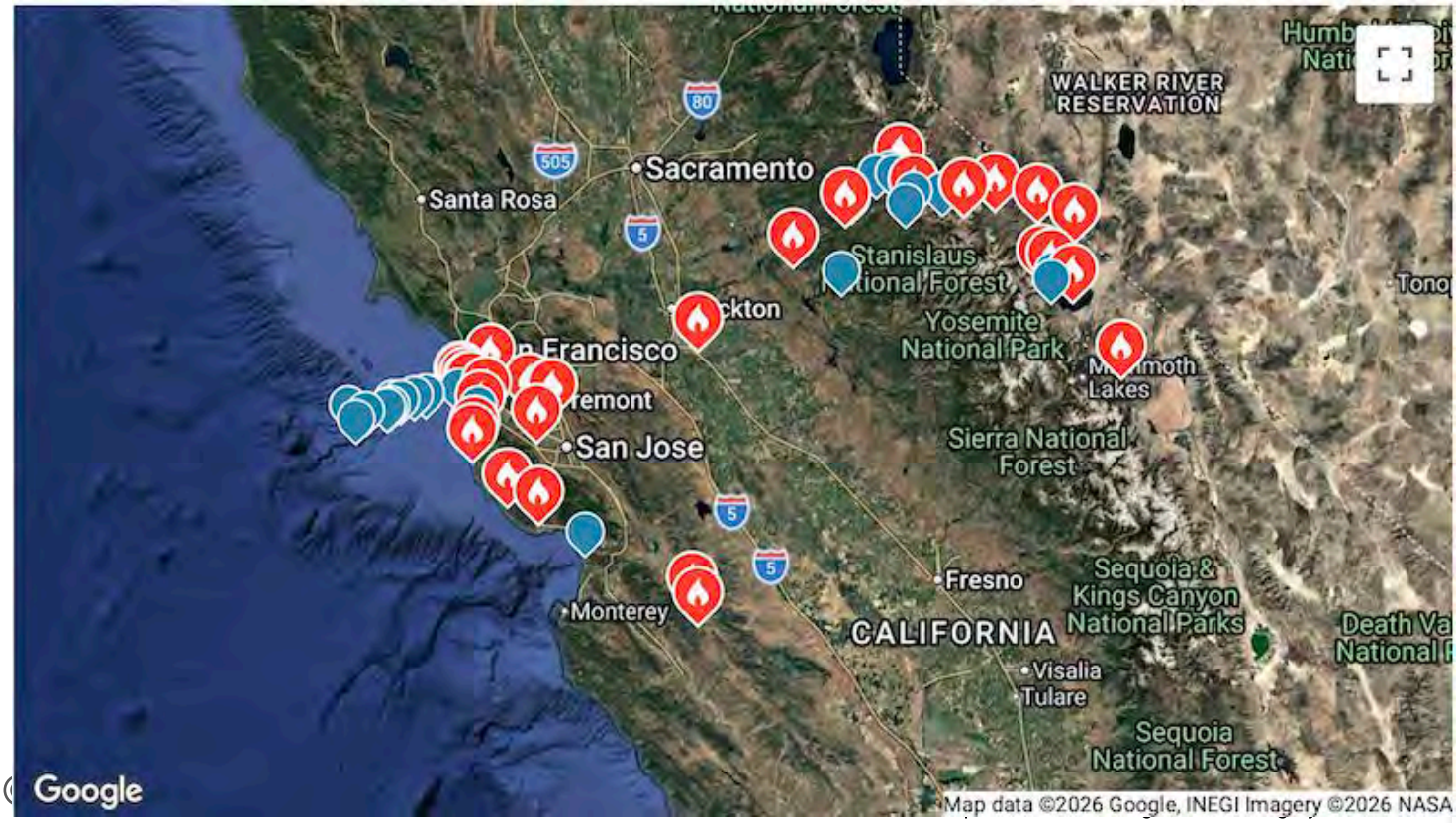
Field Guides Birding Tours --SLICE OF CALIFORNIA: SEABIRDS TO SIERRA 2026 (with Micah Riegner)

16 – 23 Sep 2026 (8 days) Link-only



California, United States

Alpine | Calaveras | Mono | Monterey | San Benito | San Francisco | San Joaquin | San Mateo | Santa Clara | Santa Cruz | Tuolumne

Micah Riegner



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

191 Species Observed

57 Checklists

LIFERS 1

Species Observed

Show all details

3	Canada Goose	*Branta canadensis*	1
249	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	3
15	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	3
2	American Wigeon	*Mareca americana*	1
33	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	7
3	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	2
10	Green-winged Teal	*Anas crecca*	3
1	Ring-necked Duck	*Aythya collaris*	1
7	Surf Scoter	*Melanitta perspicillata*	3

12	**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser*	1
302	**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*	2
6	**Mountain Quail** *Oreortyx pictus*	1
13	**California Quail** *Callipepla californica*	3
2	**Wild Turkey** *Meleagris gallopavo* ⊛	1
61	**Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia* ⊛	4
4	**Band-tailed Pigeon** *Patagioenas fasciata*	2
9	**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* ⊛	5
5	**Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura*	3
26	**Vaux's Swift** *Chaetura vauxi*	2
20	**White-throated Swift** *Aeronautes saxatalis*	1
1	**Black-chinned Hummingbird** *Archilochus alexandri*	1
6	**Anna's Hummingbird** *Calypte anna*	3
5	**Ridgway's Rail** *Rallus obsoletus*	1
1	**Virginia Rail** *Rallus limicola*	1
1321	**American Coot** *Fulica americana*	5
312	**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus*	3
609	**American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana*	4
27	**Black Oystercatcher** *Haematopus bachmani*	7
45	**Black-bellied Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*	2

11	**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus*	5
8	**Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus*	2
17	**Hudsonian Whimbrel** *Numenius hudsonicus*	2
2	**Long-billed Curlew** *Numenius americanus*	2
24	**Marbled Godwit** *Limosa fedoa*	3
105	**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*	4
1	**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata*	1
9	**Red Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*	3
234	**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*	8
2	**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*	2
5	**Wandering Tattler** *Tringa incana*	2
19	**Prairie Willet** *Tringa inornata*	5
3	**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*	2
48	**Black Turnstone** *Arenaria melanocephala*	6
80	**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*	3
80	**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla*	4
42	**Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri*	2
7	**Parasitic Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus*	5
3	**Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus*	3
5	**Rhinoceros Auklet** *Cerorhinca monocerata*	4

2	Cassin's Auklet *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*	2
154	Common Murre *Uria aalge*	14
4	Craveri's Murrelet *Synthliboramphus craveri*	1
23	Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*	4
1419	Heermann's Gull *Larus heermanni*	11
10	Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*	4
772	Western Gull *Larus occidentalis*	21
342	California Gull *Larus californicus*	14
5	Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*	1
4	Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*	3
791	Elegant Tern *Thalasseus elegans*	6
5	Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*	3
2556	Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*	4
251	Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*	6
4	Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus clarkii*	2
7	Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*	4
1	Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*	1
2	Common Loon *Gavia immer*	2
7	Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*	3
2	Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*	2

12	Ashy Storm-Petrel *Hydrobates homochroa*	4
15	Black Storm-Petrel *Hydrobates melania*	2
2	Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*	2
116	Pink-footed Shearwater *Ardenna creatopus*	10
5	Buller's Shearwater *Ardenna bulleri*	5
3992	Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*	16
19	Black-vented Shearwater *Puffinus opisthomelas*	5
1	Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*	1
628	Brandt's Cormorant *Urile penicillatus*	9
10	Pelagic Cormorant *Urile pelagicus*	4
52	Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auritum*	10
50	White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*	1
1	Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*	1
11	Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*	5
2	Green Heron *Butorides virescens*	1
5	Great Egret *Ardea alba*	5
8	Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*	6
176	American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*	6
2578	Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*	13
6	California Condor *Gymnogyps californianus*	1

45	**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*	6
1	**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*	1
4	**White-tailed Kite** *Elanus leucurus*	3
1	**Sharp-shinned Hawk** *Accipiter striatus*	1
2	**Cooper's Hawk** *Astur cooperii*	2
5	**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius*	4
2	**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	2
3	**Red-shouldered Hawk** *Buteo lineatus*	3
2	**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni*	2
12	**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*	6
1	**American Barn Owl** *Tyto furcata*	1
4	**Northern Pygmy-Owl** *Glaucidium gnoma*	3
3	**Belted Kingfisher** *Megaceryle alcyon*	3
2	**Williamson's Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*	1
8	**Red-breasted Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus ruber*	3
2	**Lewis's Woodpecker** *Melanerpes lewis*	2
12	**Acorn Woodpecker** *Melanerpes formicivorus*	3
2	**Black-backed Woodpecker** *Picoides arcticus*	1
4	**Nuttall's Woodpecker** *Dryobates nuttallii*	1
3	**Hairy Woodpecker** *Leuconotopicus villosus*	3

14	White-headed Woodpecker *Leuconotopicus albolarvatus*	2
10	Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*	7
3	American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*	3
1	Merlin *Falco columbarius*	1
2	Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	2
1	Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus*	1
5	Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*	5
2	Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya*	1
2	Hutton's Vireo *Vireo huttoni*	2
2	Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*	2
7	Pinyon Jay *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*	3
14	Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*	6
12	California Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma californica*	5
1	Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*	1
6	Yellow-billed Magpie *Pica nuttalli*	2
9	Clark's Nutcracker *Nucifraga columbiana*	3
34	American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*	8
23	Common Raven *Corvus corax*	11
18	Mountain Chickadee *Poecile gambeli*	6
8	Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Poecile rufescens*	2

4	Oak Titmouse	*Baeolophus inornatus*	3
4	Horned Lark	*Eremophila alpestris*	1
2	Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	1
5	Violet-green Swallow	*Tachycineta thalassina*	2
15	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	4
5	Bushtit	*Psaltriparus minimus*	1
10	Wrentit	*Chamaea fasciata*	5
3	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	*Corthylio calendula*	1
11	Golden-crowned Kinglet	*Regulus satrapa*	2
5	White-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta carolinensis*	3
4	Pygmy Nuthatch	*Sitta pygmaea*	1
20	Red-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta canadensis*	4
5	Brown Creeper	*Certhia americana*	3
6	Pacific Wren	*Nannus pacificus*	2
1	Western Marsh Wren	*Cistothorus paludicola*	1
3	Bewick's Wren	*Thryomanes bewickii*	3
2	American Dipper	*Cinclus mexicanus*	1
40	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris* *	4
3	California Thrasher	*Toxostoma redivivum*	2
3	Sage Thrasher	*Oreoscoptes montanus*	1

1	Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*	1
5	Western Bluebird *Sialia mexicana*	2
2	Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides*	1
1	Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi*	1
2	Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*	1
20	American Robin *Turdus migratorius*	6
16	Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*	3
4	House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* *	2
4	American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*	1
1	Evening Grosbeak *Hesperiphona vespertina*	1
67	House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*	8
1	Purple Finch *Haemorhous purpureus*	1
10	Cassin's Finch *Haemorhous cassinii*	3
6	Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*	1
3	Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*	2
3	Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*	2
11	Lawrence's Goldfinch *Spinus lawrencei*	2
5	Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*	3
10	Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*	9
42	White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*	12

1	**Golden-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia atricapilla*	1
4	**Sagebrush Sparrow** *Artemisiospiza nevadensis*	1
1	**Bell's Sparrow** *Artemisiospiza belli*	1
1	**Vesper Sparrow** *Pooecetes gramineus*	1
8	**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis*	2
8	**Song Sparrow** *Melospiza melodia*	3
1	**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolnii*	1
7	**California Towhee** *Melozone crissalis*	4
6	**Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus*	3
5	**Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta*	1
88	**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus*	6
65	**Tricolored Blackbird** *Agelaius tricolor*	2
10	**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater*	3
163	**Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus*	11
5	**Orange-crowned Warbler** *Leiothlypis celata*	3
1	**Nashville Warbler** *Leiothlypis ruficapilla*	1
2	**MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei*	1
4	**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas*	1
40	**Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*	7
1	**Black-throated Gray Warbler** *Setophaga nigrescens*	1

12	**Townsend's Warbler** *Setophaga townsendi*	2
2	**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla*	1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

40	phalarope sp. *Phalaropus sp.*	1
1	jaeger sp. *Stercorarius sp. (jaeger sp.)*	1
200	gull sp. *Larinae sp.*	1
520	cormorant/shag sp. *Phalacrocoracidae sp.*	2