



Field Guides Tour Report

Slice of California: Seabirds to Sierra II 2016

Sep 13, 2016 to Sep 22, 2016

Tom Johnson

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



The presence of mammals in the header of a birding tour report shouldn't raise alarm bells about the quality of the birding on this tour -- we saw more than a few birds. It's just that these particular mammals, amazing Northern Right Whale Dolphins that we encountered on our pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay, really fit the long horizontal format of an introduction banner photo quite well. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

Our fall tour across Northern California was once again a success, with great birding and a fun group combining for a memorable experience.

We met at our airport hotel south of San Francisco and spent a day birding around the southwestern portion of San Francisco Bay. The day started off with killer views of multiple Ridgway's Rails, and then continued with a rare Ruff at the south end of the Bay, and we were also entertained by legions of shorebirds and returning waterfowl everywhere in between. The Google self-driving car that we spotted was another big highlight for the day.

The next day was spent offshore from Half Moon Bay on a pelagic trip organized by the incomparable Alvaro Jaramillo. Seabirds came fast and furious with Northern Gannet (a continuing bird -- the only known individual in the Pacific Ocean), South Polar Skua, Black-footed Albatross, all three species of jaeger, a mysterious Leach's-type Storm-Petrel, plenty of Sabine's Gulls and phalaropes, a remarkable 30 Wilson's Storm-Petrels, and much more along the way. The marine mammals were awesome too, with BLUE WHALE and Northern Right Whale Dolphin leading the highlights board.

After the pelagic trip, we spent a day along the outer coast of San Mateo County in order to find some specialty birds. Morning walks near Half Moon Bay helped us find a Pigeon Guillemot swimming underwater just below our feet, Wrentit, the newly split California Scrub-Jay, Townsend's Warbler, Vaux's Swift, and a vagrant White-winged Dove that Chris Benesh found with his group. Snowy Plovers showed well on the beach in Half Moon Bay, and we enjoyed a jaunt into a patch of coastal redwoods (and found a few Banana Slugs, too!).

Moving east away from the coast, we spent a morning traversing the dry oak forests and scrubby hillsides of Mines Road and the Diablo Range. We had many target birds in these mountains, and we left with a real bounty: a vocal California Thrasher with a Greater Roadrunner in the background, coveys of California Quail, secretive Bell's Sparrows, Oak Titmouse, Lewis's Woodpecker, and the endemic and magnificent Yellow-billed Magpie. Continuing east across the Central Valley, we arrived in Sonora, our home for two nights.

On our first morning out of Sonora, we headed into the giant sequoias of Calaveras Big Trees State Park, a real woodpecker mecca. Shortly after arriving, we ran into a noisy flock that included White-headed Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Sapsucker, and two Williamson's Sapsuckers -- what luck! Pacific Wrens, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and warblers were everywhere, and we even had some good looks at Band-tailed Pigeon and Townsend's Solitaire, too. Moving upslope after lunch, we searched and searched for Mountain Quail around Bear Valley without luck. We did, however, have a great dinner in Sonora to cap off a fun day.

We awoke early for a drive from Sonora up and over the crest of the Sierra Nevada, stopping at several choice spots that held Lewis's Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, American Dipper, Thick-billed Fox Sparrow, and Green-tailed Towhee. We heard a tantalizingly close group of Mountain Quail calling their distinctive downward spirals from the manzanita, but couldn't see these skulkers. Sonora Pass held an actively feeding pair of Clark's Nutcrackers that posed for us at close range, but we didn't see much else there, so we headed down the east side of the Sierra Nevada to Lee Vining and Mono Lake Basin. We walked around at the Mono Lake County Park and enjoyed scores of ducks and shorebirds at the edge of the water, highlighted by Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, and a thousand Red-necked Phalaropes spinning through the water.

Before dawn the next day, we headed down to the edge of Mono Lake to take in the bizarre and magnificent landscape of the lakeshore and its incredible tufa structures, and also found Pinyon Jays, close Sage Thrashers, and Brewer's Sparrows. We also ventured into the hills above Lee Vining, where Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays skulked through the juniper scrub -- my first time seeing this newly-split species in California. The other excitement we encountered was in the form of a Sharp-shinned Hawk dogfighting with several Clark's Nutcrackers over our heads -- for more than 15 minutes! In the afternoon, we drove up into the hills north of Mono Lake, spotting a close flyby Golden Eagle en route to the ghost town of Bodie. After a neat historical tour of the well-preserved town, we spread out and stalked through the sagebrush, eventually spotting several magnificent Greater Sage-Grouse flying in to land in front of us. Then, as we drove out of the park, several more grouse were spotted crouching just a few yards off the side of the road -- again, what luck!

From Lee Vining, we had plenty of ground to cover to return to the Bay area, so we retraced some of our steps before heading to San Rafael in the North Bay. Following a delicious final tour dinner at a lovely Thai restaurant, we gathered in a brisk breeze at the McNear Brick & Block on the edge of the bay, where 1,700 Vaux's Swifts were swirling overhead. Though many swifts had apparently arrived early to roost due to the wind, we still enjoyed the amazing spectacle and watched as hundreds of swifts stalled together and then toppled into the massive chimneys of the brickyard. This was the final birding of our tour, and we happily piled back into the van, drove through the city hills of San Francisco, and returned late to our airport hotel near SFO.

I really love the cross-section of the state that we visited on this tour and the impressive diversity of birds that we were able to find in just over a week, but both paled in comparison to the pleasure of traveling with this group. Thank you so much for your companionship, enthusiasm, bird-spotting skills, and flexibility along the way. I hope to bird with you again down the road. Big thanks also go to Caroline Lewis for her hard work in setting up our transportation, lodging, and access permits behind the scenes from our Austin office.

As a followup, I wanted to share a link to Scott Harvell's photos from the trip. Scott has a flickr album at this address:
<https://www.flickr.com/gp/133052166@N07/57132y>.

See you in the field!

-- Tom

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*) – Common, especially around San Francisco Bay.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – At scattered freshwater sites throughout the tour.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Small numbers were in ponds around the San Francisco Bay area.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen at most of the freshwater ponds we visited that hosted ducks. Around 1000 were at the very birdy Bridgeport Reservoir.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – A few were mixed with the large numbers of ducks and shorebirds at Charleston Slough near Mountain View.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Two were at Charleston Slough near Mountain View on our first day.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Quite common, especially around San Francisco Bay.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Fall arrivals were trickling in during the tour - we saw them along SF Bay and also at Bridgeport Reservoir.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Commonly seen at freshwater lake sites and some saltmarshes visited throughout the tour.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – The slightly later tour dates this year allowed us to find some waterfowl that normally haven't arrived by the time we run the tour. Twenty of these handsome divers were at Bridgeport Reservoir along with a bounty of other waterfowl.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A male and female were at Bridgeport Reservoir with the Redheads and many other waterbirds on our last full tour day.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – We tallied 47 in inshore waters on the day of the pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Small numbers were seen east of the Sierra Nevada, including at Mono Lake County Park and Bridgeport Reservoir.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

MOUNTAIN QUAIL (*Oreortyx pictus*) – The birds that we found along Highway 108 in the Sierra Nevada called loud and close, but we just couldn't convince them to come out for views. [*]

CALIFORNIA QUAIL (*Callipepla californica*) – Common along Mines Road, especially on the beach at Del Valle Reservoir.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Our experience with the sage-grouse "hunt" in the ghost town of Bodie was one of the most satisfying experiences of the tour for me. We got out in the right habitat, put in quite a bit of well-planned effort, and eventually saw the birds. And then, when we were pretty much satisfied, we saw more grouse walking along the road as we drove away so that everyone had perfect views. Fantastic!

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Fairly common in the Diablo Range.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – One of these slim loons was in the surf just offshore in Half Moon Bay.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Several flew past and we also scoped a couple in the water in Half Moon Bay.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – A few flew over us in inshore waters during the pelagic trip. The big feet hanging behind these lunkers were a good ID tip-off.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – 11 were at the south end of San Francisco Bay, and 3 more were at Bridgeport Reservoir.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Extremely common at Mono Lake.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – Ours were in nearshore waters in Half Moon Bay.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – The distant birds that we saw near the SFO airport on our first day ended up being our only sightings of the trip.

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria nigripes*) – The fishing boat that we pulled up alongside during the pelagic trip had an attendant fleet of albatrosses waiting for fish handouts. These magnificent birds were new for several people on the tour, and we saw them really well!

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – A few scruffy immature birds zipped past us during the pelagic trip, but the one that swam right up to the back of our boat gave us outstanding views of all of the plates on its bill and even a detailed look at the double-barrelled nasal tube.

PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna creatopus*) – Fairly common, especially well offshore.

BULLER'S SHEARWATER (*Ardenna bulleri*) – One sleek gray-and-white beauty shot by at close range during the pelagic trip. The species was fairly scarce off California this fall.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Ardenna grisea*) – Hundreds were in flocks that streamed by us when we were in inshore waters during the pelagic trip.

BLACK-VENTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) – A few small groups of these tiny, muddy-plumaged shearwaters trickled by as we started to head offshore during the pelagic trip.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – One is usually a surprise on a California pelagic trip, but we found an oily patch of water with around 30 of these Southern Hemisphere breeders pattering around on the surface. Very strange!

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) – This one should be in "quotes" on the list. We saw one storm-petrel extremely well during the pelagic trip, but Chris, Alvaro, and I are still not sure of its identity. This bird had a white rump but was missing quite a few rump feathers and was re-growing some tail feathers, which caused confusion about its real plumage pattern. In any event, this was something within the Leach's-complex, not a Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel (an idea we toyed with while watching the bird at sea). It seems possible to me that it could have been a northern (nominate) Leach's, but the apparently small size and flight style really seemed strange for that taxon.

ASHY STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma homochroa*) – Several of these California breeding-endemic seabirds fluttered past the boat. While the views weren't incredible, the birds were close enough a few times to discern the bat-like flapping style and the dark gray-brown coloration.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*) – For the second year in a row, we saw the only Northern Gannet known in the Pacific Ocean. This time, it was sitting with cormorants on the side of Pillar Point just north of Half Moon Bay.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) – This cormorant is common inshore along the outer coast, and is also the most commonly seen offshore cormorant.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Encouraging numbers were seen around Pillar Point, just north of Half Moon Bay.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Common along the protected outer coast (like in the harbor at Half Moon Bay) and also in San Francisco Bay, where it is the most common cormorant.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Sightings along the southwest side of San Francisco Bay included 130 at Charleston Slough. Around 100 were also at Bridgeport Reservoir later in the tour.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Seen each day when we were along the coast and around San Francisco Bay.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Common; seen many times, especially near the coast.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Common near the coast.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Seen several times near the coast.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One was at the edge of Del Valle Reservoir in the Diablos.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Fairly common along San Francisco Bay and the outer coast.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – 150 were in a big flock flying over the road in front of us in the Central Valley. Another 40 were at Bridgeport Reservoir.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

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

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One was fishing near Pescadero; another was on the other side of the state at Bridgeport.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – After an initial distant view at Charleston Slough, we found a few close birds hovering next to us near Pigeon Point, including a gorgeous peach-washed juvenile. On the final evening of the tour, a pair hunted in the wind in San Rafael.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We had a nice, close flyby on the drive in to Bodie.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Fairly common, especially east of the Sierra.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – A few flew over the group during our time in the Sierra Nevada. The most memorable was one that was toying with a few Clark's Nutcrackers upslope from Lee Vining.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Our only sighting was on the final afternoon as we drove through Berkeley.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – The only one was at Bridgeport Reservoir at the end of the tour.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (ELEGANS) (*Buteo lineatus elegans*) – Good views at Coyote Point Park and along the coast in Half Moon Bay.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – One was a lingering surprise as it kited over Del Valle Reservoir in the Diablo Range.

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

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

RIDGWAY'S RAIL (SAN FRANCISCO BAY) (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) – At least four of these range-restricted large rails were parading around on the mudflats just south of SFO near San Francisco.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – One was at the edge of the small patch of marsh at Charleston Slough.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Common; seen at many sites on the tour. Around 2000 were probably recent arrivals at Bridgeport Reservoir.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Seen at a few sites around San Francisco Bay at the beginning and end of the tour.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Common in San Francisco Bay and also at Mono Lake.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Our first two were at Coyote Point Park; more were in the harbor at Half Moon Bay.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Common around San Francisco Bay; a few were on the outer coast, too.

SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*) – 12 of these scarce, small plovers were sheltering on the beach in Half Moon Bay.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Fairly common on mudflats near Millbrae in San Francisco Bay.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Common; seen almost every day.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – Great views along the edge of San Francisco Bay.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – The views at Millbrae were fantastic – we even compared them to adjacent Whimbrel. A few others were in the Central Valley and Mono Lake, too.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – Very common in San Francisco Bay.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – We enjoyed close views of these rockpipers at Coyote Point Park and in the Half Moon Bay area.

SURFBIRD (*Calidris virgata*) – These chunky shorebirds were on the rocks in the harbor at Half Moon Bay.

RUFF (*Calidris pugnax*) – Wow! A female-plumaged bird was mixed in with dowitchers at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay NWR. This Eurasian vagrant is annual in California in small numbers, but it was a real treat to find it during our tour.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – About 400 were flying around near the Snowy Plovers on the beach in Half Moon Bay.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Fairly common at wetland sites.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Quite common in San Francisco Bay; a few more were along the outer coast.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – I was surprised to not hear any of these normally common shorebirds during our checks of several good shorebird locations along San Francisco Bay, but we eventually saw a juvenile Short-billed fairly well in the harbor at Half Moon Bay.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Common in large flocks around San Francisco Bay. In many cases, we were able to hear the birds calling to confirm IDs.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Common offshore from Half Moon Bay; >1000 were also at Mono Lake as seen from the Mono Lake County Park.

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Common on the pelagic trip, especially in the farthest offshore sections.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Three were flying around the harbor at Coyote Point Park on stiff wingbeats.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – One was on the rocks below Coyote Point Park, and another was on the rocks in the harbor at Half Moon Bay.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Singles were at Millbrae and Radio Road on the edge of San Francisco Bay.

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Very common along San Francisco Bay; a few were also along the outer coast and at Mono Lake.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – We heard one calling on the first morning at Millbrae.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

SOUTH POLAR SKUA (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) – We had 3 sightings on our pelagic trip. The first showed extremely well as it patrolled an unlucky flock of shearwaters.

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – About 10 were identified on our pelagic trip. Some adults with nice tail "spoon" projections were seen, too.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We saw about 5 during the inshore part of our pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay.

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Two singles flew by during the offshore portions of our pelagic trip. These small, slim jaegers have almost tern-like flight at times (though at other times they are devilishly hard to ID!).

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Common on the pelagic trip; we scoped others from shore near Half Moon Bay, too.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – One was swimming around at close range in Princeton Harbor at Half Moon Bay. We even saw this bird flying underwater as we stood above it on a small bluff.

CASSIN'S AUKLET (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) – Roughly 18 of these "gray grapefruits" were seen at scattered intervals during the pelagic trip.
RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – Some close views of swimming birds during the pelagic trip. At least 20 seen.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – Roughly 80 were seen far offshore during our pelagic trip. They were concentrated in the same areas as some of our dolphins and both species of phalaropes.

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – Ours were on the beach in Half Moon Bay and across the state at Mono Lake County Park.
HEERMANN'S GULL (*Larus heermanni*) – Common along the outer coast. We only saw adults and subadults - no juveniles. The species has suffered very poor breeding success in Mexico over the last few years.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – Common along San Francisco Bay at the beginning and end of the tour.

WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*) – Very common along San Francisco Bay and the outer coast.

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – Common across the state, including at Mono Lake where they breed.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A few were along the edge of San Francisco Bay; others were at Half Moon Bay and at Mono Lake.

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

ELEGANT TERN (*Thalasseus elegans*) – Good numbers of these Mexican breeders were in San Francisco Bay and in Half Moon Bay.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – We saw 32 at Radio Road in Redwood Shores. The species is a relatively recent arrival to Northern California.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in towns and cities. [I]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – Great views of one perched on a low snag above us at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Common now in towns all over the tour route. [I]

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Chris Benesh found a vagrant at feeders near Fitzgerald Marine Reserve while leading the other Field Guides tour. Happily, that was our next stop, and we saw the bird a short while later. Thanks, Chris! The species is quite rare on the coast here.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Fairly common, but we saw far more collared-doves on this tour.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – Two were along Mines Road in the Diablo Range.

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – One was in the trees at Dechambeau Ranch near Mono Lake.

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – At least two were near Alviso on our first day.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON POORWILL (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*) – One was calling near Mono Lake during our night birding adventure there. [*]

Apodidae (Swifts)

VAUX'S SWIFT (*Chaetura vauxi*) – One was flying around over Fitzgerald Marine Reserve near Half Moon Bay on day 3. About 1700 more were seen going to roost in San Rafael on the final evening of the tour.

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – A swarm of 40 was over New Melones Lake on the west slope of the Sierra.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*) – Common around San Francisco Bay and the coast.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – One was at Coyote Point; another was along Mines Road.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – We found a pair near the Junction at the top of Mines Road thanks to a tip from Chris Benesh. Another one (perhaps a migrant) was checking out the lone trees at Donnell Vista in the Sierra Nevada.

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) – Though we heard some at Gazos Creek near the coast, the best experiences were with at least ten along Mines Road in the Diablo Range.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – A male and a female were at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – One adult male was a rare sighting at Dechambeau Ranch near Mono Lake.

RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) – Good views at several locations in the Sierra Nevada. The close bird that was feeding at Mono Lake County Park gave us some impressive scope views.

NUTTALL'S WOODPECKER (*Picoides nuttallii*) – Several good experiences along San Francisco Bay and on Mines Road.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One showed well at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve along the coast.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Ours were at Del Valle Regional Park and Calaveras Big Trees SP on this trip.

WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides albolarvatus*) – Common in the Sierra Nevada, especially at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Fairly common, especially in the montane part of the tour route.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Good views at close range of this impressive woodpecker along Clarks Fork of the Stanislaus River.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Sightings were scattered along the route.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We saw these impressive falcons on five days of the tour! For me, the most impressive one was the bird that took a few swings through the Vaux's Swift cloud on our final evening.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

WILLOW FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax traillii*) – One was a migrant at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR.

PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax difficilis*) – We saw two in the western part of the route. One was a migrant in the garden at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR, and the other was in breeding habitat in the Purisima Redwoods near Half Moon Bay.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – This striking flycatcher was fairly common - our first was on the first morning at Millbrae.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Several sightings split between the coast at Half Moon Bay and the dry openlands east of the Sierra Nevada.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – One was quite vocal at the Mono Lake South Tufa.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

HUTTON'S VIREO (*Vireo huttoni*) – Good views along Gazos Creek and in the Diablos at Del Valle Regional Park.

CASSIN'S VIREO (*Vireo cassinii*) – One was singing at the Donnell Vista in the Sierra Nevada, but we didn't manage any meaningful views of it. [*]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – Flocks were scattered in the Mono Basin between the lake and the craters to the south. The nasal voice of this nomadic corvid is simply wonderful to hear.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Common, both in coastal mountains and in the Sierra Nevada.

CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma californica*) – Great views of these confiding jays at Pillar Point. One was on the roof of our van at one point! This species name is the coastal version of what was previously called "Western Scrub-Jay".

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) – This is the inland taxon that was recently elevated to species status after "Western Scrub-Jay" was split. We made special effort to track these birds down in the hills above Lee Vining. Much skulkier than California Scrub-Jays, it took a little while before we had convincing views of these noisy but furtive beasts.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Common east of the Sierra Nevada.

YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica nuttalli*) – This California endemic put in a great showing along Mines Road in the Diablo Range. [E]

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – We had several really nice sightings in the Sierra Nevada and the Mono Basin. Our best views were of two birds feeding together atop Sonora Pass. Others were flying around with a pesky Sharp-shinned Hawk above Lee Vining.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common throughout.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Fairly common, especially in the eastern portion of the tour route.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – These open-land birds were around Mono Lake and on the road to Bodie.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – One showed fairly well (but briefly) over Don Edwards SF Bay NWR.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Low numbers on this trip overall, but the 50 that we saw at Charleston Slough on the first day were nice.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Several were in the San Francisco Bay area and near Mono Lake.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – Common at higher elevations in the eastern part of the state (including the Sierra Nevada).

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Gray-flanked birds showed nicely at Coyote Point Park near Burlingame, while chestnut-flanked birds were at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

OAK TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus inornatus*) – We tracked down these plain titmice near the picnic area at Del Valle Regional Park.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – We heard these active songbirds more than we saw them, but some good views were at Don Edwards SF Bay NWR and at the spring where we saw the Lawrence's Goldfinches on Mines Road.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Common in the Sierra Nevada, especially at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – We saw Pacific-race birds along Mines Road. Interior west nuthatches with their distinctive voices were in the pines at Mono Craters east of the Sierra.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – Odd distribution - we saw these little guys at Coyote Point Park and along the coast, and also at Mono Craters, but nowhere in between.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – Scattered sightings in conifers including at Coyote Point Park and at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – We heard one singing in the rocky hills above Lee Vining. [*]

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – One was at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve on the coast.

PACIFIC WREN (PACIFICUS GROUP) (*Troglodytes pacificus pacificus*) – Our first was in the Purisima Redwoods on the coast, but we saw several more in the sequoias at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

MARSH WREN (PALUDICOLA GROUP) (*Cistothorus palustris paludicola*) – A few were seen poorly along the edge of San Francisco Bay, and another showed briefly at close range on the boardwalk at Mono Lake County Park.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Fairly common, especially in the coastal parts of the route.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Ours was bobbing on the rocks in the Clarks Fork of the Stanislaus River.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – These tiny songbirds came down out of the Giant Sequoias at Calaveras Big Trees SP to show off their crowns.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Three were at the Donnell Vista in the Sierra Nevada.

Paradoxornithidae (Parrotbills, Wrentit, and Allies)

WRENTIT (*Chamaea fasciata*) – The birds at Pillar Point in Half Moon Bay showed spectacularly near the parking lot. We heard the bouncing ball songs of this curious species on many occasions.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – A few were along Mines Road in the Diablos.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Common around Bodie, where we saw them hovering in characteristic fashion.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – These slim thrushes put in several nice appearances for us at Calaveras Big Trees SP and Donnell Vista.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – We heard one calling at Calaveras Big Trees SP, but one showed really nicely during our second stop at Donnell Vista.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – These familiar thrushes were at scattered locations including Coyote Point Park, Del Valle Reservoir, and Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CALIFORNIA THRASHER (*Toxostoma redivivum*) – Two showed very nicely along Mines Road, and we heard another one singing at New Melones Lake.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – These small, streaky thrashers were incredibly accommodating at the Mono Lake South Tufa site.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common and widespread in settled areas. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – One was a flyby during the pelagic trip - this was an uncommon offshore sighting!

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Ten were at Mono Lake County Park.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Singles appeared at several locations in the Sierra Nevada.

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) – We found two birds in the Lee Vining area by first hearing their dry, tacking calls; however, both were very skulky, and only a couple people saw one of them.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – A few were at coastal locations including Don Edwards SF Bay NWR.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – At least ten were at Charleston Slough and a few other SF Bay sites on our first day.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – This western form of Yellow-rumped Warbler was common in the Sierra Nevada.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – A few posed for us high in the trees at Calaveras Big Trees SP and also at Donnell Vista.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*) – These beautiful warblers put in an especially nice appearance at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and also at Gazos Creek and Calaveras Big Trees SP.

HERMIT WARBLER (*Setophaga occidentalis*) – One dull individual was in a flock of songbirds and woodpeckers at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Good looks at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BREWER'S SPARROW (*Spizella breweri*) – A few called but didn't cooperate along the edge of Mono Lake, but then one decided to start singing from the top of a sage out in the open - fabulous scope views.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – One immature flew by us and then perched briefly at the Mono Lake South Tufa. Though it didn't stick around for great views, this one was a bit of a surprising sighting for our tour route.

FOX SPARROW (*Passerella iliaca*) – Sooty Fox Sparrows were the ones that we found as migrants along the coast in Half Moon Bay.

FOX SPARROW (THICK-BILLED) (*Passerella iliaca megarhyncha*) – These distinctive Fox Sparrows came out and posed for us in the Sierra Nevada at Donnell Vista and Clark's Fork.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – "Oregon" race birds were seen throughout the tour route.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (ORIANATHA) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) – We found a few of these dark-lored montane breeders in the Sierra Nevada.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Many of the birds that we saw along the eastern portion of the route (in the Sierra Nevada and the Mono Basin) were migrants of this subspecies group.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (NUTTALLI) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys nuttalli*) – This is the resident coastal subspecies that we saw near San Francisco and Half Moon Bay.

SAGEBRUSH SPARROW (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – A bit of searching in the sage near Mono Lake eventually turned up a few responsive individuals of these subtly marked sparrows.

BELL'S SPARROW (BELLI) (*Artemisiospiza belli belli*) – We did find 2 of these contrasty, dark-headed sparrows along the upper reaches of Mines Road in the Diablo Range, but they didn't show particularly well at all this time!

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – One was seen by a few in the group at Bodie.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Fairly common around San Francisco Bay. We also saw one flying offshore during the pelagic trip.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Most of ours were along the coast and San Francisco Bay, but we also saw one at Clark's Fork of the Stanislaus River in the Sierra Nevada.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolnii*) – We found two migrants near the coast - one was in a fennel patch with Yellow Warblers at Charleston Slough, and the other was at Pillar Point.

CALIFORNIA TOWHEE (*Melospiza crissalis*) – This drab, approachable towhee is very common in the coastal portions of our tour route.

RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – One was along the same stretch of stream where we saw Lawrence's Goldfinches in the Diablos.

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Excellent views during our second stop in at the Donnell Vista in the Sierra Nevada.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – A few were in coastal scrub near Half Moon Bay, and another called from the understory at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – Migrants were at Coyote Point Park and in the oaks at the base of Mines Road.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Flocks of "Bicolored" Blackbirds were along San Francisco Bay and the outer coast.

TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius tricolor*) – These declining and range-restricted blackbirds were in a few flocks along the coast in Half Moon Bay on our first day of the tour.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Ours were east of the Sierra Nevada. The best views were of a bird that was perching on tufa formations at the edge of Mono Lake.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Common; seen every day of the tour.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – A few were mixed in with Tricolored and Red-winged Blackbird flocks in Half Moon Bay.

Eringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Common on the coastal part of the tour.

PURPLE FINCH (WESTERN) (*Haemorhous purpureus californicus*) – These were mixed in with Lawrence's and Lesser Goldfinches along Mines Road.

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – Good views at Sonora Pass and Donnell Vista.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – Ours were in the Sierra Nevada.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*) – Fairly common around the San Francisco Bay area. Several were with Lawrence's Goldfinches on Mines Road.

LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH (*Spinus lawrencei*) – These stylish, nomadic finches were concentrated along a stream along Mines Road in the Diablo Range.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Several were on the coast at the feeders near Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in towns and cities. [H]

MAMMALS

BRUSH RABBIT (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) – We had some brief views during our coastal birding day out of Half Moon Bay.

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – These cute bunnies were around Mono Lake - many were on the lawn at Mono Lake County Park.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – This is the common small bunny around the south end of San Francisco Bay and the Diablos.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – These big-footed bunnies were bounding along the roads in the Mono Basin - several were seen during our night drive.

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – Abundant in the sagebrush around Mono Lake. We saw several perched atop chunks of tufa near the lake's edge. I'm still trying to track down an identification on the chipmunks that we saw at the porch feeders at Virginia Lakes, and will update you if/when I figure it out.

LONG-EARED CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrimaculatus*) – Common at various sites in the Sierra Nevada - we had our first really good looks at Calaveras Big Trees SP.

CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) – Common, especially around San Francisco Bay and in the Diablo Range but also in the Sierra Nevada.

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – A few of these "chunky chipmunks" (not chipmunks at all, but they look similar) were in the Sierra Nevada.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – These introduced squirrels are fairly common at well-planted sites around the Bay Area.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – A few were in parks and lawns as we drove through Livermore.

WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus griseus*) – These gray squirrels ran across the road frequently as we drove the windy roads of the Sierra Nevada.

CHICKAREE (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) – These small "Douglas's Squirrels" were common in the Sierra Nevada forests.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – When we walked out to the beach in Half Moon Bay to search for Snowy Plovers, some of these familiar inshore dolphins were traveling along the surfline.

PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*) – A massive herd of hundreds of individuals surrounded our boat in the afternoon hours of the Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

NORTHERN RIGHT WHALE DOLPHIN (*Lissodelphis borealis*) – These sleek ocean grayhounds were mixed in with a huge herd of Pacific White-sided Dolphins during our pelagic trip. The lack of a dorsal fin and the slim profile give this dolphin a very unusual look.

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*) – A few of these dark, small cetaceans slipped along the surface during the morning exit from the harbor on our Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – These stocky "Panda Tuna" put on a good show by bowriding on the New Captain Pete during our pelagic trip.

BLUE WHALE (*Balaenoptera musculus*) – The large individual seen during our Half Moon Bay pelagic trip was incredibly impressive. It was amusing to see such a massive creature with such a puny dorsal fin. The largest animal known on Earth.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Plenty of these active whales were feeding near the surface during our Half Moon Bay pelagic trip.

BOBCAT (*Lynx rufus*) – One caused a bit of mid-afternoon pandemonium as we were driving from the Purisima Redwoods back to the coast near Half Moon Bay. What was that crazy cat doing out in that field in broad daylight?

CALIFORNIA SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus*) – All over the harbor and on some offshore buoys around Half Moon Bay.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Common around the harbor in Half Moon Bay.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Coastal "Black-tailed" deer were in the Diablo Range. We found interior Mule Deer east of the Sierra Nevada.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 216 bird taxa and 23 mammal taxa