

California

11-27 September 1999

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Picture: Yellow-billed Magpie

Day 1: We departed London Heathrow about 12.30 and arrived at Los Angeles at 15.00. After picking up the hire vehicles, we drove to our overnight destination of Ventura where we still had just enough daylight to look for the Brown Booby that had been present in Ventura Harbour for a few days. The words "bracing" came to mind as we walked along the breakwater, in fact, it was more like an autumn day at Portland Bill! We found a couple of birders who told us they had the bird, but unfortunately, it turned out to be a young Brown Pelican! A few common species seen in the harbour included Heermann's, Ring-billed & Western Gulls, Grey Plover, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling.

Day 2: Although today was dedicated to a trip to Santa Cruz Island, we had enough time to check Ventura Harbour again before departing. This time we were successful and soon saw the adult Brown Booby flying in from the ocean about 07.20. The bird landed on the breakwater and stayed in one spot for some time, allowing everyone to get good views. However, had we not seen it fly in, even such a large bird as the booby would have been tough to locate, blending with the breakwater as it did. Amongst the other birds around the harbour were Western Grebe, Black-crowned Night-heron, Osprey, Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, Surf-bird, Elegant Tern, Anna's Hummingbird, Common Yellowthroat and most of the same species as last night. Also present were a number of Eurasian Collared-doves that are not recognised as "countable" by the California records committee. Our trip to Santa Cruz Island left Ventura shortly after 09.00 and as we left the outer breakwater, we saw a Black Oystercatcher. Almost immediately after leaving the harbour we saw an Arctic Skua harassing a tern but that was it for quite a while! Skies were mostly overcast with patches of blue here and there, and thankfully, the sea was calm. Birds were generally few and far between but we did see about 50 Sooty & 3 Pink-footed Shearwaters and a few Red-necked Phalaropes whilst a few lucky people saw 2 Least Storm-petrels although disappointingly, no auks were seen. Perhaps the highlight of the outbound journey was a close up view of a large group of dolphins following the boat. We arrived at Prisoner's Harbour at 11.40, just as the sun was breaking through. It took about 20 minutes to unload the entire boat with multiple trips in two Zodiacs. Almost anticlimactically, Island Scrub-jays could easily be seen from the boat as we waited our turn to go ashore! About 10 birds were looking for handouts at the landing site and were extremely tame. Most were quite scruffy looking with just a few pristine adults that looked very smart. They are bigger and deeper blue than their mainland cousins with a subtle difference in their voice. We saw about 20 birds in all before leaving, the remainder being on the valley trail but still close to shore. We had three hours on the island and next turned our attention to *sedentarius* Allen's Hummingbird. From all the experience of others here we expected to be falling over them, but that didn't happen. We saw a number of females and immatures that could have been Rufous or Allen's, but not one adult male of either species. Consequently, we conservatively left them unidentified as Rufous/Allen's types although in reality, we probably saw both. Conditions were sunny and warm during our entire stay. We worked the valley trail for a short distance, but spent most of time along the riparian section where most birds were concentrated. We recorded a

total of 30 species on the Island, the most unexpected of which was a migrant Virginia's Warbler. It would certainly be interesting to see what could be found here with everyday coverage by diligent birders. Other new birds included Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, California Quail, Killdeer, Acorn Woodpecker, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Black Phoebe, Common Raven, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hutton's Vireo, Bewick's & House Wrens, Bushtit, Barn Swallow, House Finch, Orange-crowned Warbler, Song & Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak. Boarding time was 15.00 and by 15.30 we were underway, this time with blue skies, plenty of sunshine and a slightly choppy sea. Very few birds were seen on the entire trip back and we docked in Ventura at 18.00. Driving north we had hoped to stop at Andree Clark Refuge in Santa Barbara, but there wasn't enough daylight left. Arriving in Buellton, we ate at Pea Soup Anderson's where one was asked "what's the soup of the day"?

Day 3: We began in Alisal Canyon, a delightful place to bird where we soon saw a small flock of Yellow-billed Magpies in flight but it took us a little while to find another group, conveniently feeding on the ground and perching on the wires at close range. Yes, it's only a magpie, but it is a very strikingly handsome bird. We worked our way along Alisal Road from Solvang to Nojoqui Falls County Park seeing typical birds of the area including Red-shouldered & Cooper's Hawks, American Kestrel, Anna's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Western Scrub-jay, American Robin and California Towhee. Next, we spent almost three hours in Nojoqui Falls County Park which, is a good place to see many common birds when there are no crowds. Fortunately, on this early Monday morning we had the place to ourselves. We spent most of our time in the grassy area near the entrance where the sprinklers were attracting many birds that we were able to study well. By far the best find here were a couple of Lawrence's Goldfinches in with the Lesser Goldfinches and House Finches. They were quite flighty, alternately feeding in the grass and disappearing into the trees. Eventually they perched in the clear for about a minute. We had excellent comparative views of Downy & Nuttall's Woodpeckers at the base of tree, and the former also fed on fruit. An Oak Titmouse bathed in a puddle along with Western Bluebirds and Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco's. Also here were Western Kingbird, White-breasted Nuthatch, Lark Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak and Western Tanager. Bird activity along the trail to the (almost dry) falls was considerably less. Here we recorded lots of Acorn Woodpeckers, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, House & Bewick's Wrens, Hutton's Vireo and Orange-crowned & Townsend's Warbler's. Before heading north we visited the 'old' Danish town of Solvang with it's Strawberry Crepe Sundae and other yummy delights! Although it was a little breezy when we arrived at Oceano campground around 14.30, we still managed to find a good selection of species in a short period. This is a good place for migrants and is close to the southern edge of the range for Chestnut-backed Chickadee, which were easily found. Other species seen here included Pied-billed Grebe, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Coot, Short-billed Dowitcher, Killdeer, California, Ring-billed & Western Gulls, American Mourning Dove, Anna's Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Nuttall's & Downy Woodpeckers, Western Wood-Pewee, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Western Scrub-jay, American Crow, European Starling, Marsh & Bewick's Wrens, Bushtit, House Finch, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow & Wilson's Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, White-crowned Sparrow, Western Tanager and "Bicolored" Red-winged Blackbird. After checking into our motel we spent the last hour of daylight in Morro Bay near the rock. It was windy and very cold here with the highlight being 20,000 Sooty Shearwaters working very close to shore. Several Humpbacked Whales were well offshore but easily seen with a telescope. Also seen were our first Long-billed Curlews and Western Grebes, only Surf Scoter of the trip and a heard only Canyon Wren.

Day 4: After watching two Peregrine falcons looking for an early breakfast as we left the motel, our first stop of the day was at the tidal mudflats overlook in Morro Bay State Park which was not very active in the early morning mist. Best bird here was a Pomarine Skua whilst others included around 20 American White Pelicans and 6 Black Skimmers, both new for the trip. Our main destination for today was Montaña de Oro State Park where we spent from 08.15 to 13.15. Not only is this a great birding spot, but the rocky headlands also offer some spectacular scenery. Our time here was well rewarded with 60 species including several migrants. Driving along the entrance road the lead van received a radio call from the second van advising that they had a perched Great Horned Owl, just at the time they came across a perched California Thrasher, a dilemma to be sure! The first van missed the owl but since we soon found at least 4 more perched up and singing California Thrashers, the second van got the best of the deal! Among the other birds present in the same area of chaparral were Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, 4-6 very co-operative Wrentits, Northern Mockingbird, Western Scrub-jay, Spotted & California Towhees, Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco and Lesser Goldfinch. The campground was fairly empty of people but had plenty of birds, although only in a few scattered areas. The best spot was at the creek overlook near the campground entrance where we found Western Wood-pewee, Willow & Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Warbling Vireo, Orange-crowned, Yellow, Wilson's, Townsend's & Hermit Warblers and Western Tanager. Some species along the creek and in the campground were Osprey, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered & Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrel, Anna's Hummingbird, Hairy & Nuttall's Woodpeckers, California Quail, Bewick's & House Wrens, Hutton's Vireo, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Blackpoll Warbler (a rare but regular eastern migrant, unfortunately seen by only a few) and Song Sparrow. We could see thousands of Sooty Shearwaters streaming along the coast so we walked out along the headland to a point where we could scope them, also seeing Sea Otters in the Kelp beds. Along the way we had a "field guide view" of Brandt's, Double-crested & Pelagic Cormorants perched one behind the other. On the rocks below the cormorants we found Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, Surfbird and Black Oystercatcher. After a late lunch we drove north to Monterey opting to use 101 rather than the slow and scenic Highway 1 as Stuart had driven the coast route enough to know that we didn't have that kind of time! After a getting a little lost finding our motel in Marina, just north of Monterey, we headed out to a small lake (that we had seen from the freeway) to use the last hour of daylight. Local "outdoor drinkers" informed us that the lake was Roberts Lake which, turned out to be quite productive. This is a small lake and one can get close views of the birds that seem to tolerate humans well. Among the motley group of domestics we found Clark's Grebe

approaching winter plumage (i.e. not a classic "eye in the white" bird, but with a large slightly upturned orange bill and pale gray back), several Red-necked Phalaropes and a Wood Duck.

Day 5: Today was the pelagic day with Shearwater Journeys departing from Monterey Bay at 07.30. Skies were overcast with a moderate breeze and even before we were a mile offshore we had seen single Pigeon Guillemot and Rhinoceros Auklets! A selection from the 34 species recorded was: 8 Black-footed Albatross, 50,000+ Sooty Shearwater (easily seen from the harbour), 1 Short-tailed Shearwater, 20 Pink-footed Shearwater, 200 Buller's Shearwater, 6 Northern Fulmar, 500+ Ashy Storm-Petrel, 10 Black Storm-Petrel, 1 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, 2 Grey Phalarope, 5 South Polar Skua, 3 Pomarine Skua, 4 Arctic Skua, 1 Long-tailed Skua, 10 Sabine's Gull, 2 Arctic Tern, 2 Common Tern, 100 Common Murre, 1 Pigeon Guillemot, 200 Rhinoceros Auklet, 4 Cassin's Auklet. Back on land at 15.00, we headed out to Elkhorn Slough, arriving at 16.35. Although the vagrant White-winged Tern was of some interest, most had already seen it in Europe. We dawdled our way around this very birdy area and ended up missing the bird by about 15 minutes. We parked by the Eucalyptus grove at Moonglow Dairy which, is coincidentally the world capital for flies! We stayed until dusk working the various ponds from the dikes. One of the nice aspects of birding here is being able to get close up views of very trusting waders. Highlights were a perched White-tailed Kite, a soaring and stooping Peregrine Falcon that put on a show for 5 minutes, an Arctic Skua dashing after terns, and several Virginia Rails out in the open. We saw a total of about 50 species including the following new for the trip to date: Green-winged & Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Greater Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Semipalmated Plover, Tree, Northern Rough-winged & Bank Swallows, American Goldfinch and Savannah Sparrow.

Day 6: We returned to Elkhorn Slough to sift through the many "Bicolored" Red-winged Blackbirds, mostly ignored yesterday, to look for Tricolored Blackbird. After finding several "iffy" looking birds, we found several classic examples with significant white edges to their red epaulettes. The various cattle enclosures were blackbird free when we arrived so we walked the dikes to the marsh in order to see the birds. Ironically, many Tricolored Blackbirds were in with the cattle when we returned to the vehicle! We birded here from 07.30-08.50am seeing a few birds that we did not see last night, 4 Eared Grebes, Black-crowned Night-heron, and 17 Canada Geese. Now it was time to swing inland for the first time as we head to Yosemite. Our route took us east through Los Banos and the San Luis refuge complex. En route in the agricultural areas we saw a few new trip birds, Swainson's Hawk, White-faced Ibis and Western Meadowlark. Somewhat disappointingly, the San Luis NWR had closed to public access yesterday to lull the birds into a false sense of security in preparation for hunting season that begins on October 15. We found more mosquitoes than birds here including the first Sharp-shinned and Northern Pintail of the trip together with a few Gadwall and Cinnamon Teal, lots of (calling) Long-billed Dowitchers, Marsh Wren and Tree Swallow. After checking into our excellent motel we drove into Yosemite N.P. with our first high elevation birding of the trip providing instant new trip birds. The views en-route were simply stunning and included brief views of White-throated Swifts. At Crane Flat, which was fairly quiet, we soon found several common species including Steller's Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Mountain Chickadee. Moving on to Chevron Meadow to look for our primary target bird, we positioned ourselves in the meadow around 05.20 and began our wait. Around 05.55 shortly after we talked about the fact that sightings are usually from the meadow's edge, a Great Grey Owl was spotted perched low along the treeline about 150 yards away. As if this view were not enough, the bird flew a little closer and perched atop a dead tree stump. Certainly the bird of the trip for many. Other birds in the meadow before and after the owl included White-headed & Hairy Woodpeckers, Vaux's Swift, Violet-green Swallow, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) and MacGillivray's Warblers.

Day 7: We began on Glacier point Road where a stop at an overlook produced the first Cassin's Finches of the trip with White-headed Woodpecker and Western Bluebird. Looking down into the open area in the ravine below us, a good sized Black Bear lumbered into view before disappearing into the forest to the enjoyment of everyone. We drove on and after a few miles we came to a quick stop when we happened upon 4 Blue Grouse along the edge of the road. The birds didn't budge when the other van came along and were even reluctant to fly when traffic went by on their side of the road. We continued on to Glacier Point where we enjoyed spectacular views of Yosemite Valley and of several birds, long before the crowds arrived. We had another "field guide" look, this time at Williamson's & Red-breasted Sapsuckers on the same tree. Also here were Hairy & White-headed Woodpeckers, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, White-breasted & Red-breasted Nuthatches, Townsend's Solitaire, American Robin and 2 Black-throated Gray Warblers. We backtracked to McGurk Meadow trail to look for Black-backed Woodpecker, arriving there at 10.30 where we met a birder who had seen two at 07.30, but despite a 2 hour search we were unable to relocate them. In fact, the trail was almost birdless and we found nothing new. After a short break we crossed the road to Westfall Meadow trail which is much more open and had considerably more birds. A couple more Williamson's Sapsuckers were a quick find along with Golden-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire and Cassin's Finch. Stuart wandered off and soon heard a Pine Grosbeak calling with the group following we tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to locate. However, in the process we came across not one or two, but 3 Red-breasted Sapsuckers on the same tree! Some time later we located 3 Pine Grosbeaks feeding high in the trees with Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers, although our views were definitely unsatisfactory. Around 14.00, it started raining so we headed down to join the throngs of humanity in Yosemite Village. After a short tourist break we resumed birding a short distance west along the Merced River in Yosemite Valley. Our primary target here was American Dipper. As we neared the river, our attention was drawn to one small tree in particular that had lots of activity. The reason soon became apparent when someone said "hey, there's an owl in here". It turned out to be a very co-operative Northern Pygmy-owl that stayed in the area for the hour or so that we were there. The river was flowing so quietly that nobody really expected a dipper but we did find Common Merganser, Cooper's & Red-tailed Hawks, a flyover Band-tailed Pigeon, White-throated Swift, Acorn Woodpecker Black Phoebe, House Wren, Yellow & Wilson's Warblers, Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow. Returning to the village we

checked the near the bridge and in the stillest of still waters was, you guessed it, a preening American Dipper just a short distance away. Several times throughout the trip our group attracted attention with people stopping to see what we were looking at and nearly causing accidents. In this particularly busy location we soon had a big crowd trying to figure out what the attraction was, rather amusing! On our way back to the motel, we saw another American Dipper sitting on a rock in a more typical location with rushing water.

Day 8: We spent most of the day working our way east through the mountains towards Mono Lake. It was a cold, often rainy and sometimes sleety day and fresh snow was on many of the peaks. A roadside stop above Crane Flat produced Hairy & White-headed Woodpeckers, Townsend's Solitaire and Cassin's Finch. We spent quite some time at White Wolf campground in search of Pine Grosbeak and although we found 5 of them in two flybys, we were unable to improve on yesterday's views. Among the other birds in the campground were Cooper's Hawk and White-crowned & Lincoln's Sparrows. A stop at Yosemite Creek Canyon overlook (a spectacular spot) produced the first Clark's Nutcrackers of the trip along with more Townsend's Solitaires and singing Cassin's Finches. At Tenaya Lake was a lone California Gull. A stop at the meadow opposite Tuolumne visitor's centre was productive for new trip species with a majestically perched Prairie Falcon, a lone Cedar Waxwing and a skulking Brewer's Sparrow. Also present were several Orange-crowned Warblers of the grey headed race. A little further east at the Dana Meadows was another Prairie Falcon and more Clark's Nutcrackers. Our next stop was at Tioga Pass just beyond the park entrance, very cold here at 10,000 feet but certainly another productive location. A flock of 40-50 Gray-crowned Rosy-finches were swirling around, but they never came close enough for really satisfying views, whilst 3 Golden Eagles were perched on a nearby peak. We left as the storm clouds were gathering. The weather was much better when we reached Highway 395 some 3500 feet lower. Along the highway south of Lee Vining we saw in short order Black-billed Magpie, Mountain Bluebird, Horned Lark and Sage Sparrow. As we searched for sparrows in the sage (finding only White-crowned), an American Dipper in a small stream seemed a little incongruous. Our final stop of the day was at South Tufa at the south end of Mono Lake where we played cat and mouse in the Tufa with Gray Flycatcher and Rock Wren, some birds are tufa than others! Prolific on the lake were Eared Grebes, whereas California Gulls were just plentiful! We also found our first Yellow-headed Blackbirds of the trip.

Day 9: An early start for the Crowley Lake area where we watched fairly thick fog replace the darkness. Our quest for Sage Grouse looked to be in serious jeopardy until we met some hunters who gave us a location about 5 miles away. After only 3 miles we came across an open area where the fog was a little less thick. Several of us saw rocks that turned into rocks but one person found rocks that moved, eventually becoming 6 superb Sage Grouse catching the very weak early morning sun. Also in this general area were Northern Harrier, Cinnamon Teal, Killdeer, at least 3 Sage Thrashers, Sage & Vesper Sparrows and Brewer's Blackbird. Heading back to Mammoth Lakes for breakfast, we came across Black-billed Magpie, Rock Wren and our first Pinyon Jay of the trip, a surprising lone bird. With the backdrop of the snow covered mountains behind the sage plains and Hot Creek Geyser steaming nearby it had been an excellent start to the day. After a late breakfast we headed up to Sagehen summit on Highway 120. Along the highway near South Tufa we found 2 Golden Eagles whilst 400 Pinyon Jays streamed noisily overhead. There were plenty of Sage Thrashers but Green-tailed Towhees proved somewhat elusive. In the woods en-route to the summit we found White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Mountain Chickadee and numerous Clark's Nutcrackers whilst at the summit Cooper's & Red-tailed Hawks, American Robin, Sage, Brewer's Chipping, & White-crowned Sparrows and a more obliging Green-tailed Towhee were found. Back in the valley below we checked the east end of Mono Lake from a Highway 395 overlook seeing Northern Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, American Avocet, huge numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes and many California Gulls. In Mammoth we checked Lake Mary but it had far more people than birds, the exception being Brown Creepers which were everywhere. Definitely a highlight was a very friendly Mountain Chickadee that ate out of Stuart's hand. On a fast flowing stream we found another American Dipper before sleet and hail that put a premature end to the fun.

Day 10: We began in the White Mountains south-east of Bishop, primarily to look for Juniper Titmouse which, we found with difficulty near the campground at Cedar Flat. Also in the area was another large flock of 300 Pinyon Jays, Western Scrub-jay, Spotted Towhee, White-breasted Nuthatch and Rufous-crowned & White-crowned Sparrows whilst a surprise was a flyover of 53 Greater White-fronted Geese. We continued on up the mountain to look at the ancient Bristlecone Pine forest at 10,000 feet. Some of the trees here are over 4000 years old. It was very windy and cold here and the oxygen was definitely thinner. Birds were very scarce with only Clark's Nutcracker and Mountain Chickadee common although several Pygmy Nuthatches were new. As we headed south on along Highway 395 we found our first desert species of the trip, starting with a Greater Roadrunner that ran across our path in textbook fashion. In the scrub behind a gas station we found Verdin and Black-throated Sparrow. Instead of going directly to Mojave (our overnight destination) we birded our way through the Kern River valley along Highway 178. Habitat here is a mix of rocky hillsides, desert-riparian and a few ranches with agricultural areas. Even though the road is quite busy here, roadside birding was enjoyable. At various roadside stops and ranches we found Cooper's Hawk, a large group of California Quail, several Greater Roadrunners, including a couple of nicely perched up birds, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Say's & Black Phoebes, Western Scrub-jay, Common Raven, Loggerhead Shrike, the first Phainopepla of the trip seen by just a couple, Western Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Cactus & Rock Wrens, Lesser Goldfinch, House Finch, Savannah & Lark Sparrows and Red-winged & Brewer's Blackbirds. We continued south on Kelso Creek Road towards Butterbrecht Spring for an evening try at Mountain Quail. The road system here however, is a maze of sandy unmarked tracks and we missed our turn through nobody's fault. What followed was a very interesting hours journey over appalling tracks which most people would think twice about taking a four-wheel drive on!

Day 11: A before breakfast start for a trip to Butterbredt Spring. Roadside near the "black pipe" we found a small group of Chukar to start the day well. This time we found the right road (we had passed right by it the previous evening but the sign could only be seen from the other direction!). We spent from 07.10-08.45 at the spring but unfortunately, the only quail we found were California Quail. However, there were other good birds including Western Scrub-jay, Rock & Bewick's Wrens, Loggerhead Shrike, California Towhee, Orange-crowned & Yellow Warblers, Sage & White-crowned Sparrows, Lesser Goldfinch and a nice Hammond's Flycatcher which was new for the trip. Vaughan decided to head-but a Joshua Tree here, not a good move! On the return journey we found another group of Chukar. Driving along Jawbone Canyon we pulled in at a point where we planned to begin walking in the wash to look for Le Conte's Thrasher. Our hopes were not high, wrong time of the day (and year come to that) so Vaughan stopped to ask Stuart if it looked a good spot whereupon not one or two, but 3 Le Conte's Thrashers obligingly perched atop a small bush and excellent 'scope views were had by all. Luck had certainly returned to our side! As we drove down Neuralia Road on the way to California City, Stuart noted a woodpecker flying across the desert and landing on a power pole. Quickly stopping we scoped the bird to find that it was a Red-naped Sapsucker. The bird eventually worked its way down the road along the poles, the nearest thing to a tree in this environment. Now we knew luck was with us as they are at best uncommon in Southern California in winter and it was September! After a late breakfast (the excellent Omelet House" in California City), we headed to Central Park in California City, a noted migrant trap. The park held some migrants but no surprises, just some residents and common migrants such as Pied-billed & Eared Grebes, Great Blue Heron, Ruddy Duck, Mallard, American Kestrel, American Coot, Spotted Sandpiper, Belted Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, an unidentified myiarchus (probably Ash-throated), Marsh Wren, Warbling Vireo, Northern Mockingbird, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Yellow-rumped (Audubon's), Black-throated Gray & Wilson's Warblers and Common Yellowthroat. We had considered skipping Galileo, another migrant trap; however, we were fortunate to run into Matt Heindel who had already been there that morning. He told us that the place was full of birds and he had already found some goodies. We spent an all-too-short 2 1/2 hours at the Silver Saddle Resort in Galileo where we picked up a few good migrants and other species new for the trip. Birding here in this literal oasis in the desert was very enjoyable and the birds obviously like it here. We saw many of the same species as at California City plus Chestnut-sided, Black-and-White & MacGillivray's Warblers, American Redstart, Yellow-breasted Chat and Lincoln's & Song Sparrows. Perhaps the best bird though was a Clay-colored Sparrow in with several Chipping Sparrows. A very alert Barn Owl watched us watching it in a Cottonwood. Also seen were Willow and Pacific-slope Flycatchers whilst feeding on one of the lush lawns was a Swainson's Thrush along with 6 Lazuli Buntings. Hummingbirds were represented by Anna's and several Rufous/Allen's types, most likely Rufous. As we neared Indio, a Lesser Nighthawk was seen from the minibus.

Day 12: Leaving our overnight location of Indio we began birding on Lincoln Road at the north end of the Salton Sea. Here we recorded about 50 species in less than 2 hours. In the huge numbers of birds we added a few new trip species including our main target Yellow-footed Gull (somewhat uncommon at the north end) plus Redhead, Wilson's Phalarope and Abert's Towhee. After a quick stop at Varner Harbour State Recreation area on the east side where there were numerous Caspian Terns and a single Franklin's Gull, we moved to the more productive south end and birded at the Wister Unit, along Davis Road and several roads that lead north from Davis to the sea, along Garst Road, at Red Hill, and at the NWR Headquarters. The Wister Unit produced Common Ground-dove (fairly common at most south end locations), Lesser Nighthawk, Western Wood-pewee, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Orange-crowned, Nashville & Wilson's Warblers and Abert's Towhee. Along Davis Road we found huge numbers of Northern Shovelers together with Green-winged & Cinnamon Teal, 2 Peregrine Falcons, Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plover and our first Great-tailed Grackles of the trip. On Noffsinger Road we saw more Yellow-footed Gulls and added American Bittern, Snowy Plover and Savannah (Large-billed) Sparrow. Garst Road produced Common Moorhen, Greater Roadrunner, Laughing & Franklin's Gulls and Black, Forster's & Caspian Terns. We met a birder who had seen Mew and Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Red Hill Marina but we saw only Ring-billed, California, Herring and Laughing. Also here were several Clark's Grebes, a few flyover Greater White-fronted Geese and Wilson's Phalarope. As usual, the area near headquarters (Sinclair Road) had obliging Burrowing Owls. Ramer Lake was slightly disappointing with little landbird activity but a 90 minute session yielded 30 species including Cinnamon teal, Green Heron, White-faced Ibis, Cooper's Hawk, Greater Roadrunner, Lesser Nighthawk, Gambel's Quail, Willow Flycatcher, Verdin, Tree Swallow, Abert's Towhee and Yellow-headed Blackbird. We finished the day at Las Flores Drive in Brawley searching for desert species with great success finding Gila Woodpecker, White-winged Dove, Gambel's Quail, Cactus Wren, Black-headed Grosbeak and Abert's Towhee as well as a superb roosting Great Horned Owl which pleased those in Stuart's minibus who had missed the previous one.

Day 13: After overnight rain in El Centro the humidity was high and the roads quite muddy. On Forrester Road were lots of Cattle Egrets with White-faced Ibis flying over and more Burrowing Owls. Stuart almost got stuck in the mud making a U-turn but Vaughan had to go one better! Fortunately, we were able to borrow a chain and some kind soul stopped to pull us out! By now it was already warm and sticky as we began our search for Crissal Thrasher near Sheldon Reservoir south-west of Brawley. After much walking in the mud we finally located a singing bird but managed only a brief glimpse. The tamarisk lined wash (with adjacent desert scrub and agricultural fields) was quite productive though, and we saw Killdeer, Lesser Nighthawk, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Horned Lark, Verdin, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Tree & Barn Swallows, Warbling Vireo, Orange-crowned, Yellow & Wilson's Warblers, White-crowned, Brewer's & Lark Sparrows, Abert's Towhee, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Red-winged & Brewer's Blackbirds and Western Meadowlark. A tough start to the day from which we emerged about 3 inches taller! We headed east to Anza-Borrego State Park in search of more desert species, arriving there at 11.30 when it was quite warm. At the excellent centre, we had superb views of Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin & Black-tailed Gnatcatcher before moving on to nearby Palm Canyon. As if getting muddy helping with the rescue of the minibus were not

enough, Stuart then proceeded to get stung by a Bee, some people get all the excitement! We did well here finding both Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Black-throated Sparrow. We tried again without success for Crissal Thrasher on Yaqui Pass Road and finished our desert birding near Yaqui Well seeing Cactus, House & Bewick's Wrens, more Black-tailed Gnatcatchers and Black-throated Sparrow, California Towhee and a singing California Thrasher. Almost everyone still needed Phainopepla and in the Cuyamaca Mountains we had excellent views of several in the town of Julian. Some other birds around town were Red-shouldered Hawk, Western Bluebird and good size flocks of both Band-tailed Pigeon and Cedar Waxwing. A stop at Lake Cuyamaca produced about 25 species including an amazing 17 White-tailed Kites. Also present were American Bittern, Wood Duck, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Pintail and our only Ring-necked Duck of the trip. We finished the day at Paso Picacho Campground where Mountain Quail are regularly seen but you've guessed it, we trudged the Fire Tower Road from 17.30-19.00 without success. We did however, see Band-tailed Pigeon, Acorn & Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Northern (Red-shafted) Flicker, Steller's Jay, Western Scrub-jay, Pygmy & White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Mountain Chickadee, Western Bluebird and American Robin.

Day 14: We began at Otay Lakes for our first stab at the California Gnatcatcher. Although they can be tricky, with 18 people in the field we had little trouble in finding the birds, just seeing them! However, everyone eventually saw them well. Conservatively, we recorded 10 California Gnatcatchers which, somewhat surprisingly, were all in pairs. A more difficult bird turned out to be Sage (Bell's) Sparrow. Although a few were accidentally flushed as we looked for the gnatcatchers, when we turned our attention to the sparrows we couldn't find any! Eventually however, we found a couple of birds on the other side of the road. Other birds here included White-tailed Kite, Nuttall's Woodpecker, California Thrasher, California & Spotted Towhees, and Vesper, Savannah & Rufous-crowned Sparrows. Next stop was Tijuana Slough NWR where we found our target Clapper Rail (the Light-footed sub-species) with little difficulty. We checked the slough and ocean sides along Seacoast Drive finding 30 species including Western Grebe, Osprey, White-tailed Kite, Heermann's Gull, Caspian, Elegant & Forster's Terns and Arctic Skua. Next we birded at Imperial Beach 13th Street (Northern Harrier, lots of Red-necked Phalaropes and a few Bank Swallows); Chula Vista F Street (Red Knot, Grey & Snowy Plovers), along the Silver Strand (many Black Skimmer and Elegant & Royal Terns side by side); and finished up back in San Diego along the flood control channel where we found Little Blue Heron, Blue-winged Teal, more Clapper Rails and numerous common species.

Day 15: We began at San Elijo Lagoon north of San Diego. We concentrated mostly on landbirds and a 3-hour session produced 50+ species. The best couple of birds were probably an Olive-sided Flycatcher seen flycatching in typical fashion atop a snag, and a much more secretive Ash-throated Flycatcher that stayed quite low in the bushes. We also came across 4 more California Gnatcatchers. Other birds included White-tailed Kite, a superb perched Cooper's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Clapper Rail, Sora (the only bird of the trip), Elegant Tern, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Western Wood-pewee, California Thrasher, Marsh Wren, Wrentit, Lincoln's Sparrow and California Towhee. Further north our next stop was at Bolsa Chica State Ecological Reserve, where we had good views of Savannah (Belding's) Sparrow. The Least Terns seem to have left but we did find at least 1 Common Tern and many Forster's. Also here were Ruddy Turnstone Red Knot, Dunlin (the only one of the trip) and Wilson's Phalarope. Our final birding destination for the day was Palos Verdes Peninsula to look for Allen's Hummingbird. Imagine our dismay when we arrived at Averill Park to find a band and massive crowds for a Mexican wedding and a birthday party! Despite the hubbub we did find plenty of hummers, an Anna's and a definite Rufous but the only possible Allen's had a couple of rusty feathers in the mantle, one for the conscience! We worked the flowers and a feeder in the nearby streets with similar results. We also checked Forrester Drive where we found 2 more California Gnatcatchers, Say's Phoebe and Hammond's Flycatcher and Point Fermin where we saved a little time finding a Spotted Dove. We returned to the park but still no male Allen's.

Day 16: We could allocate only the morning for birding and headed to Chilao in the San Gabriels to look once again for Mountain Quail. The feeders here are a reliable place and when the ranger said he had seen them at yesterday's afternoon feeding around 16.30, spirits were high. After fresh food had been placed in the feeders around 09.00, birds began to appear. Unfortunately, the only quail that showed up were California Quail. C'est la vie. Rather than try again for Allen's Hummingbird the group opted to remain at Chilao until 11.30 for some relaxed birding before heading to the airport. We saw about 30 species here and added one new trip bird, Purple Finch. Other birds included Cooper's Hawk, White-headed & Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Pygmy Nuthatch, Vaux's & White-throated Swifts, Oak Titmouse and Western Bluebird. We returned the minibuses at 13.30 and arrived at the airport at 14.30 for the return flight home at 17.30 which was delayed for 90 minutes due to the late arrival of the aircraft.

Day 17: Arrived back at London Heathrow about midday having seen all of the California specialities except for Allen's Hummingbird and Mountain Quail, though not through lack of effort. We recorded a high total of 268 species plus 4 sub-species through the hard work of all the group, plus a good number of mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects which are recorded on a separate list. There were many highlights of the tour ranging from Great Grey Owl to Humpback Whale and the scenery was simply stunning.

Mammals

Long-eared Myotis
Western Pipistrelle
Black Bear
Sea Otter
Coyote
California Sea Lion
Harbour (Common) Seal
California Ground-squirrel
Belding's Ground-squirrel
Golden-mantled Squirrel
White-tailed Antelope-squirrel
Townsend's Chipmunk
Least Chipmunk
Western Grey Squirrel
Chickaree
Deer Mouse
Muskrat
California Vole
Black-tailed Jackrabbit
Desert Cottontail
Mountain Cottontail
Brush Rabbit
Mule Deer
Humpback Whale
Common Dolphin
Risso's Dolphin
White-sided Dolphin

Reptiles

Red Coachwhip
Desert Spring Lizard
Western Whiptail
Western Fence Lizard
Western (Terrapin) Pond Turtle
Red-eared (Terrapin) Pond Turtle
Painted (Terrapin) Pond Turtle

Amphibians

Western Spadefoot
Pacific Tree Frog
Mountain Yellow-legged Frog

Butterflies

Monarch
Queen
Speyeria sp. Fritillary
Gulf Fritillary
Faunn's Fritillary
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
American Painted Lady
West Coast Lady
Buckeye
California Sister
Lorquin's Admiral
Western Tiger Swallowtail
Pale Tiger Swallowtail
Pipevine Swallowtail
Pine White
Small White
Common Sulphur
Orange Sulphur
Sleepy Orange
Mormon Metalmark
Wright's Metalmark
Marine Blue
Western Pygmy Blue
Purplish Copper
Woodland Skipper
Fiery Skipper
Field Skipper (=Sachem)
Large White Skipper
Common Chequered Skipper

Dragonflies

Green Darner
Common Blue Darner
Variegated Meadow Fly
Black-mantled Glider
Western Pondhawk
Roseate Skimmer

