

California

8–24 September 2011

Participants

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Wren-tit

Leaders James P. Smith and Martyn Kenefick

Part of the magic of birding California is its vastness and diversity of habitat. We drove some 2,500 miles during our stay and witnessed everything from snow capped peaks to rocky desert. With Craig and David's constant vigilance in letting no bird go unidentified; Roger's focus on finding and identifying our mammals (and his bullying of Michael to photograph them all) together with James' excellent leadership and expertise we had all of the ingredients necessary for a magnificent tour. It is difficult to pick out highlights from such a successful tour, but who could forget our intimate appointment with both parent and young Humpback Whales on Monterey Bay, the fully grown Black Bear that strolled across the road in front of us at Mammoth Lakes, the hunting Great Grey Owl and the social Sooty Grouse by our feet in Yosemite and the huge majesty of the soaring California Condor at Los Padres. For many participants, the most sought after bird was Greater Roadrunner, a comical creature which certainly didn't disappoint and, as always, the lure of American wood warblers and our finding of large feeding flocks of Townsend's and Hermit Warblers. But most important of all, it was a fun tour and a pleasure to be part of.

Day 1 Our day started shortly after 05.00 where we met up at a cool, damp London Heathrow for our flight to Los Angeles. The first leg of 8½ hours took us to Chicago, some 3960 miles away. Despite very challenging weather conditions along the eastern seaboard of the United States, we managed to arrive only 30 minutes late for our connecting flight to Los Angeles, encountering only very slight turbulence. Immigration, baggage re-claim and customs were perfectly efficient; the security procedures straightforward but extremely slow (this weekend was to be the 10th anniversary of "9/11") making us very appreciative of the late arrival of our onward flight. Eventually, we arrived at LAX some four hours later to a warm and very pleasant afternoon with 80 degrees sunshine. Sadly, James' flight from Massachusetts was hampered by bad weather and delays. However we all met up around 17.00 local time; collected our rental vehicles and made the sometimes slow, 90-minute drive north in commuter traffic to Ventura for our first night's stay. Few birds we seen on the drive save for Western Gulls and American Crows.

Day 2 Following an inevitably tiring day's trans-Atlantic travel, today was taken at a gentle pace with plenty of fresh air. Early morning was clear and bright; the day warm with wall to wall sunshine. We drove the short distance to Ventura Harbour and boarded our vessel for the 90-minute crossing of the Santa Barbara Channel to Santa Cruz Island, the largest of the Channel Islands. Whilst the water wasn't exactly rough, the swell made for a rather bumpy crossing. In the harbour itself, we became familiar with Heermann's Gulls of all ages, both Brandt's and Double-crested Cormorants, a small party of Western Grebes, our first Great Blue Heron and paused briefly to watch a congregation of California Sea Lions hauled up on a buoy. A feature of the journey was the number of small groups of Red-necked Phalaropes criss-crossing our bow and a steady trickle of Sooty Shearwaters. We probably saw six different Pink-footed Shearwaters but the highlight was two Pomarine Skuas, one an adult with a complete set of 'spoons'. We docked at Prisoners Harbour and spent close to five hours in a relatively small area with stands of willow and eucalyptus. Our main target, Island Scrub-jay endemic to Santa Cruz, performed magnificently – we probably saw 10–12 different birds, more than on any previous Birdfinders tour. The much appreciated supporting cast was a comfortable introduction to common west coast birds with our first American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, Acorn Woodpeckers, Northern (Red-shafted) Flickers, Black Phoebes, Bewick's Wrens, Bushtits, Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers, Song Sparrows, Spotted Towhees, House Finches and Lesser Goldfinch. Of more interest were three species of hummingbird. We saw the first of many Anna's, two frosty-looking Black-chinned and were initiated into the perennial problem of distinguishing non-breeding plumaged Allen's from Rufous. The island holds a non-migratory race *sedentarius* of Allen's, the slightly de-curved bill being a useful pointer, and it's highly likely that this was the identity of our three birds. Adrian found our first Hutton's Vireo alongside a couple of very photogenic *swainsoni* Warbling Vireos. These western birds have a blue tinge to the crown and often yellowish underparts making them look very like Philadelphia Vireos at times. Craig and Arthur found, without doubt, the most exciting bird of the day by photographing a Sage Thrasher – possibly a first record for the island. Ever watchful, they also found our first Western Tanagers and Western Bluebirds. By 15.00 we set sail for the return journey and soon had company with a pod of some 45 Common Dolphins making beeline for our path and riding both bow wave and stern wake. We slowed and stayed with them whilst they played all around us for a few minutes before moving on. The sea had calmed considerably but sightings were just a repeat of the outward journey, though three intermediate morph Northern Fulmars were a first for Birdfinders on this particular crossing. As we entered harbour, the wet perimeter rocks held good numbers of waders. Most numerous were *inornata* "western" Willets (a probable armchair tick for the future) together with smaller numbers of Black Oystercatchers, dark-rumped Hudsonian Whimbrels and a lone Surfbird. A Clark's Grebe close to our jetty brought proceedings to a close. The hour long drive to Buellton was swift, and we reached our base for the night in plenty of time for a traditional tour dinner at Pea Soup Andersons – a success in its own right.

Day 3 As dawn broke, we caught the edge of a thunderstorm with a short sharp rain shower and a lot of lightning. The remainder of the day was intermittently overcast and sunny with temperatures hovering in the "low 70s". We drove just a few miles out of town through Solvang arriving at Alisal Canyon. This is more a river valley than a canyon with scattered clumps of trees and bushes on the grassy slopes and dense scrub bordering a shallow stream. New birds came through thick and fast. We found our first California Thrashers together with large numbers of California Quails and California Towhees. We had tantalising glimpses of our first Nuttall's and Downy Woodpeckers contrasting with excellent prolonged views of Wrentit, a normally shy and secretive species and a great prize so early into the trip. Western Bluebirds perched in the open whilst Western Scrub-jays were everywhere and very noisy. Anne found our main target species, Yellow-billed Magpie – a California endemic, perched atop a dead tree. A quartet of Wood Ducks flew over overhead; a species that could easily be missed on this itinerary, whilst both Violet-green Swallows and White-throated Swifts hawked for flying insects. Eventually we tore ourselves away from the car park area and walked across the bridge to overlook the rocky stream bed. Here we found Pied-billed Grebes and Green Herons, and Western and Least Sandpipers, whilst every open patch of mud held feeding Killdeers. At the far end of the river, several pairs of Wild Turkeys were clearly agitated by the bursts of lightning overhead. A 15-minute drive on a winding country road brought us to Nojoqui Falls Park, a mixture of grassland, scattered deciduous and pine trees. Whilst we added a number of new species for the tour, it's fair to say that the birding was rather slow,

although Red-shouldered Hawks put on a fantastic display and our imitations of a Northern Pygmy-Owl attracted the angry attention of up to six Oak Titmouse (or is it Titmice?) plus several White-breasted Nuthatches and Hutton's Vireos. Acorn Woodpeckers were everywhere with resident gatherers tapping the fruits into their appropriate slot on tree trunks and in the open fields and sycamore trees flocks of Brewer's Blackbirds fed together with several accompanying Red-winged Blackbirds. Whilst watching a particularly photogenic Nuttall's Woodpecker feeding on a low branch we managed to entice a much larger male Hairy Woodpecker into view but as midday drew near, bird activity began to taper – a fitting moment to retire for lunch in the variety of eating places in the quaint nearby Danish town of Solvang. The early part of the afternoon was spent steadily driving north passing an extraordinary flock of 25 Yellow-billed Magpies perched on overhead wires en route! North of San Luis Obispo, we made our way out to Montano de Oro State Park for our final birding of the day. Whilst passerines initially seemed few, our patience was rewarded with a purple patch beside a densely vegetated small stream. We had been lured to the area by calling Chestnut-backed Chickadees but over the course of the next hour found not only Wilson's, Yellow and Townsend's Warblers but, of much greater west coast value, a 1st winter Blackburnian Warbler – a first for Birdfinders in California, which was immediately put onto the local "hot line". Add to the mix a particularly confiding Downy Woodpecker and our first White-crowned Sparrows and we have a pretty successful stop. The final hour of the day was spent walking out onto the headland overlooking roosts of Brandt's Cormorants, which included several smaller, thinner-billed Pelagic Cormorants, whilst the sea itself initially appeared almost devoid of birds. Moving further round, we stopped to watch a Pigeon Guillemot sat motionless on the water when all of a sudden a much smaller *Alcid* appeared alongside. This individual was far from motionless, frequently diving and staying underwater for long periods. Whilst light conditions prevented a detailed look at plumage, this was clearly a moulting Marbled Murrelet, an excellent find this far south. Also of interest were a couple of passing Pacific Divers together with an adult Pomarine Skua minus its tail giving chase to some distant terns, but the thousands of Sooty Shearwaters that have so often graced the waters off this headland were not present this year. All that was left was the short drive to Morro Bay and an excellent dinner courtesy of the harbourside Great American Fish Company.

Day 4 Leaving shortly after first light, in cool, overcast conditions and temperatures in the low 60s, we drove the short distance to Morro Bay beach and had an hour of excellent pre-breakfast birding. We concentrated on a couple of small areas of flooded salt marsh and exposed mud. Pride of place goes to three extremely photogenic Baird's Sandpipers, our first Wilson's Phalarope and small parties of confiding, spinning Red-necked Phalaropes, whilst we also found our first (of many hundreds) Marbled Godwits and Long-billed Curlews together with Semipalmated Plovers and Ring-billed Gulls. Following a quick "McDonalds breakfast", we returned to view extensive tracts of saltmarsh beside Morro Bay golf course. Over the water our first Elegant Terns squawked just like Sandwich Terns whilst perched on the perimeter dead trees were Ospreys, Peregrine Falcons and a Belted Kingfisher. In the distance, high tide roosts included 75 American White Pelicans and across the road, the golf course fairway held a feeding flock of 60 non-breeding plumaged American Goldfinches – a most unusual sight out west, and especially for this tour. We drove on another mile or so, parked up and walked paths out onto another huge area of saltmarsh teeming with shorebirds. Amongst the godwits and curlews were hundreds of Western Sandpipers, several Short-billed Dowitchers and a winter-plumaged Red Knot. In the distance, both American Avocet and Forster's Tern were picked out. By late morning it was time to make the steady, scenic drive north along the coastal highway towards Monterey making a number of stops at seaside lookouts en route. As the sun broke through, thermals of warm air were rising off the rolling grassy hills and as we drove north raptors began to appear with regularity causing us to break our journey several times to enjoy the show. Most were Red-tailed Hawks with some American Kestrels, but over a stretch of 20 miles, up to 15 Golden Eagles soared lazily over the hills and sometimes over the road. At one particular stop, at least five different eagles graced the air at once, plus we saw the first Coyote of the tour slinking through the grasses. Eventually we reached the first coastal overlook and whilst eating our picnic lunches, James managed to pick out two Marbled Murrelets in the distance (but in much better light and in calmer seas than yesterday). We found small groups of Black Turnstones feeding in the kelp on the tide line and a party of five Surf Scoters lazily sat offshore. At a second similar stop a few miles further north, the cumulative Black Turnstone count reached over 80 together with an exceptional total of 20 Surfbirds! The bay was dotted with lines of surface kelp, each inhabited with

a number of Sea Otters lying on their backs and scratching their tummies – well after all it was a Sunday afternoon. A final coastal stop took in a large colony of Elephant Seals. Most of the females were lying flat out on the beach whilst a few males grunted noisily from the shallows. Birds were much the same as at the previous stops and so the photographers amongst us momentarily transferred their allegiance to confiding and playful California Ground Squirrels. As we entered the Los Padres National Forest, the route became more atmospheric with towering cliffs right beside us. North of Gorda, we screeched to a halt to enjoy a five minute aerial show by a California Condor that absolutely dwarfed the Turkey Vultures with whom it shared the thermal. From an initial population of just 11 adult birds taken into captivity, there are now over 100 free flying adults in the recovery programme in California. With such a good target bird “in the bag”, we joined steady Sunday afternoon traffic all the way to Monterey, albeit with a brief stop to enjoy an ice-cream and our first Steller’s Jay of the tour.

Day 5 A much anticipated day to be spent out on Monterey Bay with Debi Shearwater. First thing was clear and calm, if a little chilly as we boarded the *Check Mate* for a 07.30 departure. For most of the day, we were to enjoy uninterrupted sunshine. Initially the sea was absolutely flat calm making finding birds sat on the water an easy task. By late morning, the wind had picked up a bit but viewing conditions were still ideal. The day proved to be absolutely exceptional for sea mammals both in terms of species diversity and, especially close prolonged views. Our first pod of cetaceans was a group of Dall’s Porpoises, which stayed with us for a short while. In the distance we could see a lot of splashing. As we neared the source, it became apparent that we were in the company of a huge school of Risso’s Dolphins and at one point as we stopped the boat we were absolutely surrounded by them. All of a sudden, in the midst, an adult and a young Humpback Whale surfaced. We then spent an enchanting 30 minutes that will remain forever in our memories. These were inquisitive, friendly whales that seemed as intent watching us as we were watching them. We could see, hear and smell their air blows as they drifted alongside us. We could watch them submerge just below the boat, swim under the keel and re-emerge on the other side. They rolled over on their sides looking up at us and gently raised both fin and tail flukes out of the water, almost as if they were waving at us. They seemed to encourage curiosity amongst the dolphins, many of which swam in extremely close to check us out. As the whales slowly drifted off and we picked up speed, Risso’s rode our bow wave and were there joined by 4–5 black, finless Northern Right-Whale Dolphins, much rarer in these waters but not really as extrovert. Later in the afternoon, we caught up with another Humpback who treated us to an extraordinary behavioral display. It angled its body in the water at about 60 degrees with its rear half totally exposed and repeatedly thrashed the surface with its enormous tail flukes. Debi referred to this as “percussive behaviour” presumably some means of communication but no one knows exactly why. This went on for at least 10 minutes while we sat in the water no more than 70 yards away with great plumes of spray exploding with every tail smash. It certainly communicated with birds as before long five adult and three exquisite juvenile Sabine’s Gulls were drawn in to see what was going on. At one point it looked as if they were getting too close for comfort and might pay the ultimate price for hovering just out of reach of this enormous tail – for me, personally, this was the absolute highlight of the entire tour. And that brings us to the seabirds found during the day. On the plus side, everybody on board had excellent and close views of the species on show – something that rarely happens on a pelagic trip. On the minus side, shearwater numbers were low and some expected species were missing altogether. *Alcids* stole the show. We found up to 40 Cassin’s Auklets, higher numbers and better views than had been found on most previous Birdfinders tours, and perhaps as many as 100 Rhinoceros Auklets, the latter being particularly photogenic. The rarest bird of the day was another triumph for Birdfinders as James called out a non-breeding plumaged Tufted Puffin, huge by comparison alongside a “Rhino” and all dark sooty grey with a huge orange bill. Of course, there were Common Guillemots (Murre’s) by the score. Continuing the theme of large numbers, we witnessed raft after raft of juvenile Red-necked Phalaropes throughout the day. We certainly saw several thousand. Less expected however, were up to 500 Grey Phalaropes sometimes intermixed, sometimes in their own groups. With practice, appreciating the slightly larger size and Bonaparte’s Gull-like jizz of the latter was as easy a separating feature as was the paler mantle colour, the whiter face and, in flight, the more prominent wing stripe. From one size extreme to the other: at least 25 Black-footed Albatrosses appeared in our wake during the day, of all ages with upper tail coverts colour being the aging indicator. They would wheel around the boat or sit like huge rocks amongst the scavenging Western Gulls forever off of our stern. Northern Fulmars put on a great

show. We found perhaps 30. Most were intermediate or dark phased but even the few pale phased birds looked quite different from those we regularly see in Europe – perhaps another future armchair tick? Shearwater numbers were low. We probably saw no more than 350 Sooty's and 75 Pink footed, and for the first ever on a September Birdfinders trip, no Buller's were found. Large flocks of storm petrels had been reported in the Bay but it's a huge area to cover and Debi just couldn't find them. We had to make do with respectable "fly past" views of 7–8 Ashy Storm-petrels. On the plus side, we did extremely well for skuas (or jaegers if we had gone native). All came in close to the boat, some staying around to harry the loyal procession of gulls in our wake. Most regularly seen were Pomarine, including a couple of adults with full spoons. A few Arctic Skuas (all light morphs) came into see what the fuss was all about before continuing their journey and one adult Long-tailed Skua, minus its tail, appeared rather briefly but extremely close in. Finally a dark-morph South Polar Skua (and called a skua by all others on board) was found sat off of our port side before being picked on by an aggressive if fool-hardy Pomarine. It just flapped away nonchalantly into the distance. By 15.30 we were back ashore. No one had been seasick and everyone had huge smiles on their faces. There was still time for some final birding just to the south amongst the kelp-strewn rocks at Point Pinos. Full credit once again goes to Craig who managed to pick out our target bird, a single Wandering Tattler foraging about just above the water line on a distant group of rocks – fortunately we were to get much closer views of an obliging individual towards the end of the tour. There then just remained a drive through heavy commuter traffic in Monterey before a celebratory dinner – in Denny's!

Day 6 A chilly start to the day with patchy coastal fog. Our first birding site, Moonglow Dairy, lies just a few miles to the north of Monterey. This is a private dairy farm, however birders are currently welcomed. It is also a prime site for Tricolored Blackbird. The protocol here is to find a blackbird flock, usually close to cattle feed, and sort them, with care, into Red-winged Blackbirds which have orange-red lesser coverts and creamy yellow median coverts, Bi-colored Blackbirds (a California variant of Red-winged) where the greater coverts are red, and all other feathers black and our target Tricoloreds. Here the males have dark red lesser coverts and bold whitish median coverts. Females can also be separated by their whitish throats, overall frosty appearance and thinner bills. As the mist cleared, and we got our eye in, we managed to separate all three forms, with perhaps 35 Tricoloreds amongst a couple of hundred birds. Below the cattlepens, and bordering the tidal salt marsh are a series of reed-fringed slurry ponds. The most numerous birds on show were Red-necked Phalaropes and Western and Least Sandpipers. The highlight however, was a further five Baird's Sandpipers! We generally only get one Baird's per tour on the California trip. From the reedy margins, we managed to entice both Sora and Virginia Rails into view. Common Yellowthroat and Marsh Wrens showed briefly to some, but remained rather elusive and skittish. Overhead, we saw our first White-tailed Kite whilst a "ring tail" Northern Harrier quartered the salt marsh. A flock of 28 American White Pelicans flew into roost and Al managed to glimpse an American Avocet before it landed, out of sight. By late morning we had made the short journey to the coast at Moss Landing. Perhaps the most popular sight was the loose group of 25 Sea Otters all floating on their backs in the shallows, some with paws covering their eyes from the midday sun. From the beach there was a steady stream of Sooty Shearwaters going past and a trio of Surf Scoters flew along close to shore. Much of the afternoon was taken up with the eastwards drive to Mariposa, our base for the next two nights. We made one stop to scan the eastern end of San Luis Reservoir. Here the regulars include an extremely large raft of American Coots together with many Ruddy Ducks and Black-necked Grebes. However, whilst patiently scanning through the flocks, we built up a healthy wildfowl list including several pairs of Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Cinnamon and Green-winged Teals; together with single female Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead and Redhead. The temperature hit the low 90s by mid afternoon and so the vehicles air conditioning systems were hard at work for the first time until we reached our extremely comfortable hotel accommodation with restaurant just a car-park away.

Day 7 Again it was clear and bright first thing. The plan was to drive northeast to Yosemite National Park and climb "non-stop" up to Glacier Point to beat the crowds. With just a quick break to watch an American Dipper on the Merced River, we easily wound our way up close to 7000 ft through spruce and pine forests and were almost the first vehicles in the car park. Our plan paid dividends as over the course of the next 15 minutes, we watched five Sooty Grouse posing, preening and generally ambling around the perimeter. To say they were tame and approachable does

not do them justice; at times they were too close to focus binoculars on. Still enjoying the early morning tranquility, a pair of Red-breasted Sapsuckers posed atop a bare snag, an American Robin shuffled through the undergrowth, a black-tailed Mule Deer fed nervously and David saw us all off by glimpsing the head of a Bobcat, perhaps the reason for the deer's demeanor. James describes birding Yosemite as "birding feast or famine". The remainder of the morning was a proverbial banquet of excellent views of quality birds. Despite the ever growing crowds, it was quite possible to walk a short way off of the beaten track and stand quietly, all alone looking down on scattered pines. First to show were a small group of Slate-coloured *schistacea* Fox Sparrows, much greyer around the head and mantle than birds further east and quite possibly a future species in their own right. Next we had brief views of a White-headed Woodpecker at the very top of a bare tree. Whilst it quickly flew off, it was to return to the same perch later in the morning to offer a lengthy look. Throughout the morning we had intermittently heard a Northern Pygmy-owl calling; sometimes fairly close and definitely attracting the attention of trumpeting Red-breasted Nuthatches. Ever vigilant, Anne announced that she had found the culprit in her telescope and for the next 10 minutes, we watched this diminutive hunter flit from tree to tree, always landing in view. That this was the same bird that had been calling in the car park is a little unlikely, but an excellent bird that would have made many seasoned American birders happy. Our final quality find in this area was a female Williamson's Sapsucker (sadly on this tour we were never to find a male), again perched out in the open. Glacier Point had truly done us proud and now it was time for lunch. It's not unusual for forest birding to be pretty quiet in the mid-afternoon. Much of our walk down to McGurk's Meadows was indeed the "famine" of James' analogy. However, the quiet was broken when two different busy and fast moving feeding flocks passed through the middle canopy. The main ingredients were Mountain Chickadees; the noisiest participants again Red-breasted Nuthatches. But it was the rest that caught our eye with a few each of Hermit, Black-throated Grey, Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Some of the party saw a Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglets were calling, but out of sight. We then drove for an hour, with a brief stop at a viewing area to watch both White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows at eye level. More feeding swallows at Wawona contained several fast moving, but easily identified Vaux's Swifts, our first of the tour and a lifer for most. As the day began to draw in, we were lined up alongside the edge of a meadow with just one bird in mind. For all of us, the next 15 minutes will long be remembered with much affection as in perfect light we watched a Great Grey Owl fly from one low perch to another, occasionally dropping to the ground in search of breakfast. It was quite a dark individual, much darker than those seen on previous trips – but what about those lemon-yellow eyes! The drive back to Mariposa took just over two hours. Those that were alert and awake in bus No1 saw a young Black Bear scoot out of the gloom, cross the road and disappear into the forest. We arrived back at the hotel a bit late for a group dinner – but that didn't stop Craig and Arthur grabbing a late night meal.

Day 8 Another daybreak start saw us beside the Merced River watching presumably the same American Dipper before heading once again into Yosemite. As we climbed unsteadily passing the 7000ft marker towards Crane Flats, a large number of White-throated Swifts soared overhead. The next few hours were spent slowly sifting through large mixed species feeding parties along the road to Tamarack Flats. Most surprisingly, the dominant species was Hermit Warbler; between us we probably saw about 30 with smaller numbers of Yellow-rumped and Townsend's together with single Nashville, Wilson's and Black-throated Grey Warblers. The supporting cast included at least 20 Red-breasted Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees. We managed to entice two Cassin's Finches into the tops of the pines. Both were brown streaky birds but one was singing so we presumed it was a young male. Brian and I briefly saw a Townsend's Solitaire fly over, two White-headed Woodpeckers flew in to see what the fuss was all about, and those who had missed yesterday's Brown Creeper made up for it this morning. Late morning and early afternoon was spent on an incredibly scenic drive east, in glorious sunshine, climbing to around 9000ft at Tuolumne. We stopped at a couple of view points with steep rocky crags and extensive tracts of coniferous forest. At one viewing area we played hide and seek with a pair of Townsend's Solitaires before they eventually gave themselves up for all to see. By contrast, Clark's Nutcrackers were flying to and fro, sometimes right over our heads but never perched for long enough to satisfy the photographers in our group. Eventually we reached Tuolumne Meadows. An incredibly approachable Prairie Falcon sat out on a bare snag close to the road, eyeing up the Prairie Dogs and Ground Squirrels out on the meadow whilst a couple of black-tailed Mule Deer nonchalantly grazed nearby. After a hot snack lunch,

we walked out onto the meadows which were, to a large extent, devoid of birds. We found both Song and *oriantha* White-crowned Sparrows but little else. Walking back, the wind picked up, rain clouds started to quickly move in and it became decidedly chilly. We left Yosemite by Tioga Pass at a height of 9900ft and descended a short way before stopping at another view point. It was perhaps only 500ft lower but it certainly felt warmer. By patiently scouring the skies above the far hillsides we managed to find both adult Bald Eagle and probably three different Golden Eagles soaring past together with a dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk. We then descended steeply before spending a fruitless search for Mountain Bluebird along Saddlebag Lake Road, an area of grassy hills and scattered rocks and trees. Our final birding of the day was to be at the shore of Mono Lake. In the adjacent scrub, we all had excellent views of Sage Thrasher but, sadly for the rest of the group, Anne alone saw a Green-tailed Towhee. Out on the water, Black-necked Grebes were everywhere, in the shallows California Gulls dined on brine flies, which they stirred up with their feet, and behind them a rufous-breasted juvenile Northern Harrier drifted by. The final new bird of the day came as quite a surprise, given the habitat. Perched on columns of tufa along the shore line, amongst a group of Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds were six male Yellow-headed Blackbirds but their heads were a deep orange, not the usual jasmine yellow. As the sun set, we took the short drive to Mammoth Lakes, our base for the night where some opted to dine Italian and some Mexican.

Day 9 Every cloud has a silver lining. We gathered by the buses at 06.15 – well most of us did. Two of the party had a misbehaving alarm clock. A sharp awakening was administered meaning just a ten minute delayed start. Under normal circumstances, the identity of such culprits would remain solely within the group but, two minutes out from town, a fully grown Black Bear casually loped across the road in front of us – if we had left on time, we'd have missed it. Arthur and Craig, we thank you! We made our way towards Mammoth Hot Springs seeing our first Black-billed Magpies en route, and then spent an hour or so overlooking an area of sage brush, oxbow lakes and water meadows. Our prime target was Greater Sage-grouse and we found them almost straight away, eventually seeing well over 30. An excellent supporting cast included at least 10 Sage Thrashers, several Western Meadowlarks, Green-tailed Towhees and Say's Phoebes plus single Brewer's and Sage Sparrows. Nearby at the hot springs themselves, a noisy flock of at least 50 Pinyon Jays stole the show. We then spent an age trying to locate a distant Rock Wren on the opposite boulder strewn slope only to find one at the edge of the car park itself! Following a late morning brunch in Bishop, we drove initially south and then east before climbing back up to 6000ft to scour the dwarf junipers at Cedar Flats. Our main target here was the range restricted Juniper Titmouse, although a Grey Flycatcher was a surprising bonus, and both showed well to most. Having missed Mountain Bluebird at Saddlebag Lake, we decided to climb further up into the Ancient Bristlecone Pine National Forest. At 10200ft the air was distinctly thinner and clambering the slopes from the road left us a little short of breath. Our efforts were rewarded however. Not only did we find a fly catching troop of 12 Mountain Bluebirds but also an exquisite, frenetic feeding flock of about 15 Pygmy Nuthatches, and a couple of Chipping Sparrows. The scenery was simply majestic, some of the best of the entire tour. The rest of the afternoon was spent driving southwards on the eastern slope of the snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains before turning east to reach Ridgecrest, our base for the next two nights. We dined at a surprisingly excellent Chinese Buffet with a broad range of eatables to suit all tastes.

Day 10 Our prime goal today was a quest to find the “desert phantom”, Le Conte's Thrasher, and it is essential to be in the field well before any heat haze becomes an issue. We left at a chilly but cloudless dawn and drove south across the Mohave Desert to an area of sage scrub near California City. Habitually these thrashers are rather secretive and run rather than fly although they can perch up, especially in the early mornings. Our lucky streak was holding good, we found two most obliging birds within 20 minutes of arriving on site, one seen down to about 40 metres. The area also produced good numbers of Sage Sparrows and our first Loggerhead Shrike of the tour. The rest of the morning and early afternoon, either side of brunch, saw us working the pines, willows and eucalyptus trees inside Central Park, California City, a known “migrant hot spot”. We did extremely well. As we arrived, a party of geese strutted across the field beside the car park – but these couldn't and shouldn't be dismissed as feral. The rear three birds comprised of two Ross's Geese and an Aleutian Cackling Goose. All three of these were wild winter visitors to California that had simply not migrated back north. Moving alongside them was a White-faced Ibis, a species we

were to become extremely familiar with further south. Another surprise find was an immature Swainson's Hawk that glided past. This was easily identified. Much more puzzling however were two circling largish *accipiters*. They may well have been both Cooper's Hawks but to James' experienced eye, the jizz just didn't seem quite right. Pride of place in terms of scarcity value went to a male Chestnut-sided Warbler, in non-breeding plumage but still complete with chestnut sides. Perhaps rarer, but only seen by Craig and David, was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak that had been reported the previous day by local birders. Also noteworthy were a couple of Olive-sided Flycatchers, always perched at the very top of pines, a Cassin's Vireo and an American Redstart (another scarcity from the east). If we add into the mix good numbers of Wilson's, Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers; Western Tanagers and Western Woodpeewees, fly catching Anna's Hummingbirds and very approachable Lark Sparrows, it was a pretty productive morning. After a hearty brunch, we returned to the park just after midday to work an area not covered during our morning visit. The sun was high in the sky with temperature in the upper 80s and the park was, to all intents and purposes, devoid of people. Star bird for the afternoon was an extremely confiding, tiny, moulting male Costa's Hummingbird perched low in a tamarisk and right out in the open. Equally to our photographers delight, and totally dismissive of our presence, a perched Cooper's Hawk. In between times, we inadvertently flushed a Barn Owl from its pine tree roost and found a handful of "brown and buff" Lazuli Buntings, and two more American Redstarts. A lone *Empidonax* flycatcher eluded a thorough identification but was likely a Dusky. There followed a drive through Jawbone Canyon before climbing up over a ridge on rough dirt tracks to spend the rest of the afternoon working the trees at Butterbredt Springs. This is a small oasis set amongst sage-covered hillsides with Joshua trees and can be a very "birdy" spot – today it was best described as quality at the expense of quantity. We found two more American Redstarts, a few Western Tanagers and a Nuttall's Woodpecker and then it was all about flycatchers and the extremely complex *Empidonax* group. Inside the wood we identified a Pacific-slope Flycatcher with strong white eye-crescents barely meeting at top and bottom and a soft lemon-yellow flush to the underparts. Outside we came across two much larger Willow Flycatchers with strong, long bills, no discernible orbital ring and short primary projections. On the way back to the main road, an immature Golden Eagle repeatedly swooped and circled low over the hillside in front of us – a fitting end to a magnificent day and another evening at the Chinese buffet.

Day 11 Much of today was spent driving south through the desert to the Salton Sea. However, there was still some very important birding to be done en route. Our main break was taken over the lunch period at Big Morongo canyon where the hummingbird feeders held our attention for some time. As expected, the dominant species was Anna's Hummingbird – we saw probably around 30 birds coming into drink including several males with full crimson-red throats. We found three Costa's Hummingbirds including one magnificent breeding-plumaged male; several frosty looking Black-chinned Hummingbirds and several more Rufous/Allen's "birds with rufous in the plumage". It's likely that almost all of these were Rufous Hummingbirds. One, however, was showing all of the characteristics of a Broad-tailed Hummingbird. The grain and suet feeders were equally busy. Amongst the many House Finches coming into feed was one orange variant male. These orange or yellow colour variants make up less than 1% of the House Finch population, and one of course there is a well documented case of a vagrant in the UK that appeared as an orange-yellow variant but later moulted into a classic red male. Three Black-headed Grosbeaks put in frequent appearances, two non-breeding plumaged males and a third paler bird, and both Ladder-backed and Nuttall's Woodpeckers were attracted to the suet. For some, the star of the show had no feathers whatsoever. A large Red Coach Whip snake likely to be at least 6ft in length slowly slithered through the leaf litter – these are non venomous, but can be quite aggressive and this was a truly magnificent specimen. Earlier in the day, some local birders reported a Prothonotary Warbler (a California rarity and 'hot line' species) close to the marsh boardwalk. However, the hot midday sun was hardly conducive to finding small passerines in this dense cover; we tried but to no avail. We did, however, manage to find another Cassin's Vireo and most heard (but only Craig saw) a Northern Waterthrush – the latter another good 'eastern' wood-warbler and rare anywhere in the west. Nice work Craig! We enjoyed far greater success at the ball park adjacent to Covington Park. This is a traditional site for Vermilion Flycatcher and a pair put on a stunning performance whilst the supporting cast of Lark, Chipping and Vesper Sparrows, Verdin and Lazuli Bunting were arguably garnered even more interest. A Cedar Waxwing spotted by James alone did not reappear and was a surprising miss for the overall tour. We then motored steadily south down the western shore of the Salton Sea

stopping at Salton City. It was 98°F at 17.00 but a gentle breeze made conditions quite comfortable. Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets were everywhere, hundreds of Black Terns flew south offshore, and we found our first Caspian Terns and the only Red-breasted Mergansers of the tour. With the sun lowering in the sky and skeins of thousands of White-faced Ibises flying over, it was time for the final drive to Brawley and our base in the most comfortable hotel of the tour for the next two nights.

Day 12 As anticipated, this was by far the hottest day of the tour to date. Mid-afternoon temperatures broke 100°F, but only just... the daytime peak was actually about 17 degrees below average making for a much more comfortable experience this year. The superb birding of Imperial County all started in the car park at Brawley where almost all of us watched a Gila Woodpecker stuck to the trunk of a palm tree across the street. There are three different strategies for birding the Salton Sea. Firstly, of course, there are target species to find. There is then the sheer spectacle to enjoy of literally thousands and thousands of birds in all directions and, finally, there is the thrill of sifting through the flocks in the hope of finding something unusual. We enjoyed all three today. The first few hours of the morning were spent looking out over the shoreline and adjacent cultivated fields in the southeastern corner of the sea and it was here that we found our most wanted species. Yellow-footed Gull is a post-breeding visitor to the Salton Sea and occurs nowhere else in the United States. Almost immediately, we found eight adults and several immatures close in and well within camera range. They fed amongst large numbers of Caspian Terns, California and Laughing Gulls, several Ring-billed Gulls and a couple of American Herring Gulls. Waders were simply everywhere. American Avocets and Western Sandpipers in their thousands, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Dowitchers and Least Sandpipers by the hundred, and impressively, more Snowy Plovers (now split from Kentish Plover) than had ever been found on a Birdfinders tour before, a couple of Stilt Sandpipers, a juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper and our first Pectoral Sandpiper. Not looking out of place by any means, but not countable in California, were three flamingoes, doubtless the same three that we encountered at the same spot on the 2009 tour. Distance prevented a specific identification, but it would certainly be interesting to find out more about these birds and how they got the Salton Sea. Two of the most sought after and enigmatic birds of the region are Burrowing Owl and Greater Roadrunner. As we drove the farm roads towards the shoreline, the owls were perched up on small earth mounds as if on sentry duty and, after several brief and distant sightings most of us saw a Greater Roadrunner up close and personal. The numbers of herons, ibises and pelicans seen throughout the morning were staggering. A flock of perhaps 500 American White Pelicans sat out on the water, Great Blue Herons and Great White Egrets were constantly in view, and every grassy field held feeding groups of White-faced Ibises. We ended the morning in the shade at the Sonny Bono Wildlife Refuge. Here we enjoyed exceptional views of day-roosting Lesser Nighthawks, coveys of Gambel's Quail rushing from one patch of shade to the next, a Barn Owl remained loyal to the same palm tree roost, nesting Verdins, ground feeding Abert's Towhees, and finally an unexpected but seriously welcomed surprise. Roger picked out two Black-tailed Gnatcatchers. This desert, scrub-dwelling species is normally extremely secretive and requires time and patience out in the full glare of the sun. This morning we were able to watch from the comfort of the shade as they flitted from tree to tree, always in view. Not done with this, and with his habit of watching inland whilst we were looking out over the water, Roger also picked up a *rostratus* Large-billed Savannah Sparrow perched on overhead wires, again this may well become a species in its own right in the near future. By now, it was seriously hot – time to take the only siesta of the tour. We re-grouped at 15.00 to be told it was so hot David had kept his boots in the fridge for the last few hours! Indeed it was 102 degrees throughout the afternoon and still 100 when we finally returned at 19.00. We had an open agenda for the afternoon, having found all of our key target species during the morning. Just south of Calipatra, we looked out over some flooded fields containing hundreds of Cattle Egrets and found over 40 Wilson's Phalaropes mingling together with two more Baird's Sandpipers, Pectoral sandpipers and a whole host of Least Sandpipers. Back on the shoreline, the evening roost of gulls, terns, waders and herons was even more impressive than the numbers seen during the morning. James picked out a fine adult Ruff with bright orange legs. For reasons best known to itself however, this bird was the most aloof of all the waders and frequented a particularly weedy stretch of shore. As we approached for closer views, only one bird took off and of course it was the Ruff! It circled but never landed again and disappeared into the distance behaving just like flighty old world wader. Thousands of Black Terns had now joined in the throng and we found our only Gull-billed Tern for

the tour. The build-up of ducks, mainly Northern Shoveler could well have reached the thousands. At our final site, and motivated by reports of a Franklin's Gull from the previous day, Craig's sharp eyes picked out a slightly smaller and darker-naped gull amongst the roosting Laughing Gulls. It was facing away from us but soon turned its head to show a smaller bill, prominent eye crescents and a much more extensive black rear-hood – a 1st winter Franklin's Gull, and another great find by Craig. We stayed late for the sunset, but didn't have far to go for dinner tonight – the restaurant on the other side of the hotel car park did us proud.

Day 13 This morning began on foot, checking out the residential streets and scrubby area adjacent to and behind our hotel. Here we quickly picked out White-winged Doves and a couple of Cactus Wrens but our third target, Inca Dove, took a bit more patience. This particular area of scrub has been extremely useful over the years and it was sad to see that a lot of vegetation clearance had taken place since last year. This morning's supporting cast of Northern Harrier, Gambel's Quail, Common Ground-dove, Verdin, amazingly several more Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Western Tanager and Abert's Towhee made it a particularly productive session. Frustratingly, Craig was the only person who saw a large dark swift heading down the river channel – it could only have been a Black Swift here, but perhaps was some compensation for having to leave Brawley with Gila Woodpecker managing to elude him. Local knowledge always helps make the most out of a tour so we found ourselves driving south to El Centro before heading west and then onto farm roads towards Fig Lagoon. En route, a roadside stop provided our first sizeable flock of hirundines with some 20 Cliff Swallows hawking insects over the fields. On arrival at the lagoon, we quickly located our target species, the uninspiring Neotropic Cormorant, actually a state rarity that had been present for much of the month. To be frank, it was distant, roosting in a dead tree together with a number of the larger Double-crested Cormorants but easy to pick out by a combination of smaller body size, proportionately longer, slimmer tail and the lack of orange on the throat. Of more interest however, was a Sora that kept chasing a nearby Long-billed Dowitcher and, for our ever growing mammal list, a couple of Racoons sneaking around the edge of the reeds. The bushy hillside around us produced good quality birds. A particularly scruffy Western Kingbird (the only one to be seen on the tour) perched up on some overhead wires, a pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers sat on one particular bare-branched tree, we all saw a couple of Brewer's Sparrows but only a few of us got onto a Nashville Warbler flitting through the undergrowth. We then drove steadily west, close to the international border fence, at some point climbing through a barren and rocky landscape before finally turning north into a much more vegetated and picturesque setting. The area held two target species for us – Lawrence's Goldfinch and Mountain Quail. It was hot and still at midday and despite a good effort, we endured our first important miss of the tour. We checked out the camp ground and gully at Kitchen Creek in the Laguna Mountains without success although Hutton's Vireo, Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Black-throated Grey Warbler were some consolation, but perhaps, after an incredible streak of fortune, our luck was beginning to change. We heard goldfinches twice, but on both occasions they were Lessers – such is life. We then carried on towards our late lunch stop, the small town of Julian replete with its Birdwatchers Store and numerous eating establishments all boasting the local apple pie – and lovely it was too. En route, we quickly stopped to enjoy our first and only Phainopepla of the tour, perched Northern Rough-winged Swallows and a covey of Wild Turkeys. After a lunch break, much of it spent watching the Anna's Hummingbirds at the car park feeders, we retraced our steps south to view over Lake Cuyamaca. Here we found more hirundines flying low over the water including good numbers of Violet-green Swallows with a few Bank Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows admixed. Two more Soras were seen, one particularly close and confiding. Two pairs of Wood Ducks eventually showed themselves right underneath the far reedy shoreline whilst over head a pair of Ospreys repeatedly hunted (without apparent success) over the water. As if to show the Ospreys how it's done, an immature Merlin then flew over our heads clutching a Barn Swallow in its talons, and there was also a White-tailed Kite that appeared with soaring Red-tails on the opposite side of the lake. From here we made another speculative stop for the goldfinch and quail at Green Valley Park without success but did enjoy perhaps 20 Acorn Woodpeckers flying around all over the place, and good views of White-breasted Nuthatch. There then just remained a rather frenetic highway drive through the back of San Diego in ever increasing and fast flowing commuter traffic to San Ysidro, our base for the next two nights, almost nestled against the Mexican border and overlooking the sprawling town of Tijuana.

Day 14 It became immediately obvious, the moment we stepped out of our rooms that we were back on the coast. Dawn was a chilly 55 degrees with a sea mist – in fact it was quite miserable. Nevertheless we drove north east to Otay Lakes and gradually the visibility cleared – but it was still fleece-wearing weather. Despite this, we had found our target bird by 07.15. California Gnatcatcher inhabits Californian coastal sage scrub and is restricted in range to the southern part of the state and the Baha Peninsula. It is quite a skulker but we soon had two calling birds, a thin “whiney buzz” coming from bushes either side of us. Over a period of some 30 minutes both birds showed well intermittently. Once they had gone on their way, their place was taken by inquisitive Wrentits. Closer to the lake shore, Orange-crowned Warblers and Common Yellowthroats joined in feeding parties with noisy Bushtits, and there was another Townsend’s Warbler. Sometimes quality birds appear in the strangest of circumstances. We had driven perhaps just a mile down the winding road, actually just looking for somewhere to turn the vehicles safely. On reaching a series of large buildings and an open yard (actually the local Sky Dive outfit) we pulled up suddenly as the folks in bus no1 had noticed a Greater Roadrunner creeping along the side of a hedge, but was temporarily out of view. Compensation was immediately found in the form of a pair of Cassin’s Kingbirds perched on utility wires and a Blue-grey Gnatcatcher in the undergrowth, then the roadrunner decided to take in some sun. It trotted across the field in full view for several minutes causing us to notice a flock of perhaps 50 Horned Larks quietly feeding on some bare muddy patches, and behind them a dead tree held no fewer than six White-tailed Kites. Time for a celebratory brunch at the International House of Pancakes! By midday we were back at the coast and spent several hours on the beach spit which reaches the Tijuana river mouth. The whole area is continuously buzzed by US Naval helicopters who have a training area conveniently pitched overlooking the tangle of bushes that separate US soil from the border. Birds had obviously become totally accustomed to the noise and took no notice whatsoever. Offshore, Western Grebes were dotted all along the coastline; one pair putting on a magnificent synchronised courtship dance (sadly minus the walk across the water). Rather surprisingly, two Black-necked Grebes, a species more normally associated with fresh water, swam closer to shore. There was obviously plenty of seafood to be had close to the surface as parties of Brown Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants repeatedly joined together for a splash and dive session. This in turn attracted predators including a small pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins and a few Arctic and Pomarine Skuas. The rising tide had brought large numbers of waders onto the muddy river sides. Willets were in their hundreds with tens of Marbled Godwits and Short-billed Dowitchers alongside and on the opposite bank at least 70 Snowy Plovers chased the brine flies mimicking the adjacent small group of Sanderlings. Most of the seabirds roosting were Elegant Terns although four larger, plumper and heavier-billed Royals were alongside as were a group of Forster’s Terns. Slightly further up-river, the most unlikely species found amongst this roost was a couple of male Cinnamon Teals. Walking slowly back along the raised shingle bank was rewarded by excellent views of both single Pacific Golden-plover (more regular in California than American Golden-plover) and the darker, heavily streaked “Belding’s” Savannah Sparrow. Our final target should be credited to David. We all gathered at the end of the boardwalk intent on scanning the channel for the localised brighter, heavier billed and pale footed race *levipes* of Clapper Rail – David found one preening near the top of the bank in full view for some while. Finally, we birded right up against the border at Dairymart Sod Fields. This, as the name implies is an area devoted to the cultivation of grass turf. In the wetter, newly laid, areas we found several Hudsonian Whimbrels and Long-billed Curlews together with a lone Pectoral Sandpiper whilst a large, female Peregrine Falcon sat in the middle of a distant field. This year we found no odd-balls (we have seen Baird’s Sandpipers and American Pipits on previous tours), but again enjoyed more White-tailed Kites in what had been stellar tour for this species. A slightly earlier return to our motel (there was still an hour of daylight left) ensured a bit of relaxation after a fine day’s birding.

Day 15 The one thing we had to do today was drive north to Los Angeles and we therefore tried to work in an itinerary to try and catch up with species missed earlier in the tour – and there were three obvious candidates. It would prove to be a frustrating birding day, but we made the best of it. It was a distinctly cool and misty start when we drove north and then west to watch the sea from Point Loma – our target bird being Black-vented Shearwater. The visibility had been pretty poor for most of our stay and the sea a mill pond broken only by lines of kelp. During the brief time that we had, Craig alone saw a distant group of six small shearwaters that were, by default, Black-vented, flying behind the kelp line. The rest of us had to make do with several Pomarine and Arctic Skuas together with a

couple more Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Owen however, came up with a Wandering Tattler much, much closer than the distant bird we had found at Monterey, a pleasing bird for most of our party. The middle of the day was spent exploring a number of sites in the Laguna Mountains for our nemesis Lawrence's Goldfinch which are highly nomadic and Mountain Quail which are highly secretive, and we drew a blank on both counts. We had to content ourselves with several sightings of Wild Turkey, White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, numerous Acorn Woodpeckers, dozens of Yellow-rumped Warblers, Western Bluebirds and Chipping Sparrows, single Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Western Wood-pewee and a fairly close encounter with a Coyote. Julian provided a convenient place to lunch once again, and then late afternoon saw us joining the hordes, and commuter traffic all the way into Long Beach, our base for the final night of the tour. The car pool had been a godsend, as had David's navigation skills. We were left to enjoy a final meal together at 'The Olive Garden', described by some as the best meal of the tour – a fitting end to a great 15 days.

Day 16 Today it was all about travelling east – our journey was staggered and fragmented as, in two groups, we bade farewell to James who had marshalled us magnificently as always, and flew initially to Toronto, Canada and then onto London arriving at varying times on Saturday morning. Birds recorded, and not otherwise documented in this report are Snowy Egret, Canada Goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Chukar, Common Gallinule (Moorhen), Grey Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Common Tern, Mourning Dove, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Common Starling, Black-billed Magpie, House Sparrow, Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco, Brown-headed Cowbird, Purple Finch, Red Crossbill and Pine Siskin. In all, we found 271 species of bird, saw 30 species of mammal, and, not forgetting, 20 different butterfly species and 6 amphibians/reptiles and, just as importantly, made a lot of new friends.

Martyn Kenefick
Birdfinders

Supplementary list of Mammals, Butterflies, Amphibians, Reptiles and other Insects Compiled by Roger Terrell

Mammals

California Sea Lion – *Zalophus californianus*
Northern Elephant Seal – *Mirounga angustirostris*
Harbour Seal – *Phoca vitulina*
Northern Fur Seal – *Callorhinus ursinus*
Short-beaked Common Dolphin – *Delphinus delphis*
Risso's Dolphin – *Grampus griseus*
Northern Right Whale Dolphin – *Lissodelphis borealis*
Bottle-nosed Dolphin – *Tursiops truncatus*
Dall's Porpoise – *Phocoenoides dalli*
Harbour Porpoise – *Phocoena phocoena*
Humpback Whale – *Megaptera novaeangliae*
Sea Otter – *Enhydra lutris*
Black Bear – *Ursus americanus*
Coyote – *Canis latrans*
Bobcat – *Lynx rufus*
Black-tailed Mule Deer – *Odocoileus hemionus*
Elk – *Cervus elaphus*
Northern Raccoon – *Procyon lotor*
Yellow-bellied Marmot – *Marmota flaviventris*
Black-tailed Jackrabbit – *Lepus californicus*

Western Gray Squirrel – *Sciurus griseus*
Desert Cottontail – *Sylvilagus audubonii*
Brush Rabbit – *Sylvilagus bachmani*
Douglas' Squirrel – *Tamiasciurus douglasii*
California Ground Squirrel – *Spermophilus beecheyi*
Belding's Ground Squirrel – *Spermophilus beldingi*
Cascade Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel – *Spermophilus saturatus*
White-tailed Antelope Squirrel – *Ammospermophilus leucurus*
Lodgepole Chipmunk – *Tamias speciosus*
Least Chipmunk – *Tamias minimus*

Butterflies

California Sister – *Limenitis bredowii*
American Painted Lady – *Cynthia virginiensis*
Painted Lady – *Cynthia cardui*
Buckeye – *Precis coenia*
Silver spotted Skipper – *Epargyreus clarus*
Southern Blue – *Hemiargus ceraunus*
Silver studded Blue – *Icaricia acmon*
Small White – *Pieris rapae*
Monarch – *Danaus plexippus*
Tiger Swallowtail – *Papilo glaucus*.
Red Admiral – *Vanessa atalanta*
Orange Skipper – *Copaeodes aurantica*
Western Tawny Skipper – *Copaeodes aurantica*
Coronis Fritillary – *Speyeria coronis*
Satyr Anglewing – *Polygonia satyrus*
Silvius Comma – *Polygonia faunus silvius*
California Dogface – *Colias eurydice*
Common Sulphur – *Colias philodice*
Sooty Wine – *Pholisora catullus*
California Hairstreak – *Satyrium californica*

Amphians, Reptiles and other Insects

Northern Pacific Tree Frog
Sierra Tree Frog
Red Coach Whip Snake
Desert Spiny Lizard
Northern Fence Lizard
Snapping Turtle
Praying Mantis
Katydid
Antlion
Water Boatman
Wolf Spider
Stick Insect

Also seen

Pacific Sunfish