

Northern California

Across the Valley: From the Sierra to the Coast

A view of Mono Lake (N. Dyson)

Guide: Josh Engel with Iain Campbell
Participants: Neil Dyson and Julie Quarrington

A Tropical Birding Custom Tour
Photos by Neil Dyson, except as noted. All photos taken on this tour.

INTRODUCTION

California has the highest bird list of any state, and this tour was designed to sample a cross-section of that incredible diversity. At the same time, we designed a relaxed itinerary to make sure we didn't miss out on other activities offered in the region. We managed to not only see lots of great birds, but we fit in a visit to Yosemite's incredible Glacier Point and some of Monterey's best tourist attractions, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Carmel Valley wineries. The scenery was nothing short of spectacular, between the vistas of Half Dome and El Capitan in Yosemite and the rugged coasts of Monterey and Santa Cruz County. The unquestionable birding highlight was an amazing adult **Great Gray Owl**, perched in the open in a large Yosemite meadow as we watched it in the fading evening light. We also had uncharacteristically excellent views of **Mountain Quail** along with most of the other California specialties, including **Wrentit**, **California Thrasher**, and **Tricolored Blackbird**. Mono Lake added many birds typical of the dry interior of the

western US (**Sage Sparrow**, **Sage Thrasher**); the Sierras allowed us access to high-elevation birds (**Sooty Grouse**, **White-headed Woodpecker**, **Evening Grosbeak**) and cooler temperatures (and **black bear**); and along the coast we saw a wide array of coastal species (**Black Oystercatcher**, **Black Turnstone**, **Elegant Tern**). We finished the trip on a high note with breaching **humpback whales** and birds like **Tufted Puffin**, **Xantus's Murrelet**, and **Black-footed Albatross** aboard a Monterey Bay pelagic trip.



After a frustratingly brief flyover, we were very pleased to see this much more cooperative Evening Grosbeak, a nomadic species that can be notoriously hard to track down. (N. Dyson)

DAILY LOG

Day 1, 27 July: San Francisco to Sonora via Mines Road.

After picking up the clients in San Francisco, we crossed the Bay Bridge and made our way to Mines Road in Alameda County. Less than a minute after turning onto the road, we found one of our major targets for the morning when we noticed a group of **Yellow-billed Magpie**, a California endemic, in a field. It was a great way to begin, but the beginning was all it was. Continuing on, we stopped to admire a comical group of **Acorn Woodpecker**, and at the same spot a **Nuttall's Woodpecker** came in to tape and perched on a roadside wire. Getting into chaparral habitat, a **California Thrasher** sprinted across the road and disappeared into the dense scrub. **Wrentit** performed better, with a bird hopping about uncharacteristically at the top of an oak. We were thrilled to find a **Greater Roadrunner** posing for us on top of a rock and a gorgeous **Red-shouldered Hawk** of the distinctive local race perched in an oak. With an excellent haul for the morning and the temperature rising, we made our way across the central valley to Sonora, in the Sierra Nevada foothills.



Western Tanagers always add a splash of color (N. Dyson)

After an afternoon rest, we headed to a higher elevation for a walk along a forest service track. We soon located **Mountain Chickadee** and **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. I noticed some baby quail flying across the track, so we rushed ahead to investigate. Sure enough, we found a stunning adult **Mountain Quail** not living up to its skulking reputation standing upon a fallen log. Not to be outdone, a soft woodpecker tapping led us to a stunning male **White-headed Woodpecker** feeding on a young pinecone. Feeling very satisfied, we returned to town for a delicious Asian dinner.

Day 2, 28 July: Sonora to Lee Vining via Sonora Pass.

After an early breakfast, we began the climb up Sonora Pass. Our first stop was very productive, yielding **Hermit Warbler**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, "**Thick-billed**" **Fox Sparrow** and several other typical montane species. Continuing upslope, we took the side road to Niagara Creek campground. Our first stop brought us the beautiful **Red-breasted Sapsucker**, while our next stop yielded the beautiful and uncommon **Williamson's Sapsucker**, a male, female, and juvenile. We were very pleasantly surprised to find a high flying group of **Black Swift** during a stop on the way back to the highway, along with **Nashville**, **Wilson's**, and **Orange-crowned Warblers** and our first empid, a **Dusky Flycatcher**. After a short walk we found the charming **Clark's Nutcracker** at the top of Sonora Pass, while slightly below the pass we found two stunning male **Cassin's Finches** feeding on the roadside.

We spent the afternoon unsuccessfully searching for Greater Sage-Grouse south of Lee Vining, but we did find our first sagebrush specialties, including **Sage** and **Brewer's Sparrows** and good numbers of **Sage Thrasher**.



Sage Thrashers were common around Mono Lake. This one is standing sentinel atop a tufa. (N. Dyson)

Day 3, 29 July: Mono Lake.

We started the morning at Mono Lake County Park, quickly finding such typical riparian birds as **Black-headed Grosbeak** and **Red-breasted Sapsucker**. We had scope views of a gorgeous singing male **Lazuli Bunting**. Down at the lakes edge we admired the wheeling and feeding flocks of **phalaropes**, made up largely of **Wilson's** with a smattering of **Red-necked**. **American Avocet**, **Western Sandpiper**, and **Semipalmated Plover** worked the lake edge, while flocks of **Eared Grebes** swam nearby. We returned to Lee Vining for breakfast, and afterwards headed to the south side of the lake.

We quickly found the sometimes tricky **Gray Flycatcher** (then another, then another) as well as great looks at *nevadensis* **Sage Sparrow**, **Rock Wren**, and **Say's Pheobe**. We continued on to a burn east of the lake, where we watched **Mountain Bluebirds** attending a nest, but the only **woodpecker** we found was **Hairy**.



Wilson's Phalaropes congregate annually at Mono Lake (N. Dyson)

We took the afternoon off, meeting up again for an early dinner. After dinner we headed for a deserted parking area on the southern side of Mono Lake. There we enjoyed a gorgeous sunset and a cold beer, as well as great looks at our first **Green-tailed Towhee**. We really came for Caprimulgids, however. **Common Nighthawks** didn't show until it was almost dark, but we enjoyed hearing them *peent* and seeing them flutter overhead. Once it was dark we began our return, and keeping our eyes on the road soon yielded our next target, **Common Poorwill**. It was both a productive and relaxing day, and we were looking forward to venturing into Yosemite tomorrow.

Day 4, 30 July: Lee Vining to Yosemite National Park.

We started the morning in Lee Vining Canyon, outside of town. Things were quiet in the cool canyon, with the only new bird being **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**. We continued on to the lakeside sage brush, where we had good views of **Sage** and **Brewer's Sparrow** and **Sage Thrasher**.

After breakfast, we embarked on one of America's most dramatic drives, up Tioga Road through Tioga Pass and into Yosemite National Park. Unusually hot weather kept bird activity to a minimum, but a short walk yielded **Lincoln's Sparrow** and the entertaining **Clark's Nutcracker**. A walk at lunchtime yielded large numbers of common species in a very small area, including untold numbers of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, along with **Brown Creeper**, **Warbling Vireo**, and **Red-breasted Nuthatch**.

We checked into our B&B along the Merced River just outside the park, and relaxed on our veranda overlooking the river, enjoying cold beer and the antics of a couple of **Common Mergansers** in the river below us. **Anna's Hummingbirds** fought for space on the lodge's feeders. Dinner was a local specialty: the El Portal taco night, where we met the locals and enjoyed delicious taco-truck fare at this Thursday community tradition.

Day 5, 31 July: Yosemite National Park.

We spent the morning working our way along Glacier Point Road. An early morning departure allowed us to beat the crowds, and we had the area virtually to ourselves for several hours. An **Evening Grosbeak** tantalized us with a flyover soon after alighting from the car at our first stop, where we took a lovely, bird-filled walk to a meadow. The forest was full of **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and other common birds. **Hammond's Flycatcher** and **Black-throated Gray Warbler** were new for the trip, and a close male **Williamson's Sapsucker** was great to see. Continuing on to Glacier Point, we stopped to photograph a few mule deer, when we noticed a family of the recently split **Sooty Grouse** by the roadside. They proved very cooperative and posed nicely for the camera. The views from Glacier Point were spectacular as usual. We returned downslope and into Yosemite Village for lunch.



Sooty Grouse is one of Yosemite's most sought-after birds. We lucked into this one right along the road. (I. Campbell/N. Dyson)

As the temperature was cooling in the afternoon, we headed to the south side of the park. We took a walk along the edge of a meadow, scouting it out for our post-dinner search for Great Gray Owl. It was fairly active, with **Chipping Sparrow** families flying up in front of us, and a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** cooperatively sharing a dead snag with a **Western Wood-Pewee**. After a delicious dinner (with a selection of tasty California cheeses for dessert) we returned to the meadow. We walked down to the meadow's edge, and before I had even finished my first scan of the surrounding trees, there it was. A **Great Gray Owl!** Sitting on bare branch above a willow on the opposite side of the meadow, we watched it for twenty minutes as it swiveled its head around searching the ground for prey. It was certainly a great end to the day, with Wilco accompanying us on the ride home and a spectacular evening view of Yosemite Valley as the icing on the cake. And as if that were not enough, as we neared our B&B, a **gray fox**--a rarely seen canid--sprinted across the road in front of the car.



The bird of the trip was this cooperative Great Gray Owl, who we had walk-away scope views of in a large meadow in Yosemite. (I. Campbell)

Day 6, 1 August: Yosemite National Park.

We spent the morning around Hetch Hetchy, the less visited area of the park. We quickly found our first **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, but the drive in was generally pretty slow. We eventually found a very birdy spot in the national park. A group of **Evening Grosbeaks** flew in calling and landed in the treetops, posing for scope views. Families of **Western Tanager** and **Black-headed Grosbeak** were very active, and a pair of **Purple Finches** put in a brief appearance. Unfortunately, no Lawrence's Goldfinches were in evidence.

We picked up sandwiches and returned to eat them at the lodge. No sooner had we sat down that Iain nearly choked on his food; we rushed to see what the commotion was--a **Black Bear** was casually sauntering down to the river's edge for a drink. The bear was thoroughly photographed before wandering back upslope into the forest.

We headed up to higher elevations in the afternoon to get out of the heat. The birding was pretty slow, but the temperature and scenery were ideal. We did add **White-throated Swift** over a roadside burn, while **Red-breasted Sapsucker** and **Hairy Woodpecker** provided temporary moments of excitement while searching unsuccessfully for Black-backed Woodpecker. We also had incredible, close-up views of a photogenic male **Evening Grosbeak** at a mountain lake. We also found our first migrant warbler of the trip, a female **Townsend's Warbler**. For dinner, we enjoyed pizza and cold beer from the lodge's balcony overlooking the Merced River.



This was the second black bear we saw. We watched it rip apart logs in search of grubs as we left Yosemite. (I. Campbell/N. Dyson)

Day 7, 2 August: Yosemite to Monterey.

We had a late wake-up this morning, but had time to search for dipper along the river. We thoroughly checked every viewpoint, but came away empty-handed. As we made our way out of the park, we encountered yet another **black bear**, this one searching for grubs in fallen logs by the side of the road. We then drove back across the Central Valley (stopping en route for a beautiful dark morph **Swainson's Hawk**) to the cool, scenic coast of Central California. After dropping our bags off we still had time to do some coastal birding, quickly finding many Pacific species. Our first stop yielded a gorgeous **Pelagic Cormorant** showing off its glossy plumage in the evening light, along with a flock of **Brandt's**

Cormorants. Shorebirds included the Pacific denizens **Black Oystercatcher**, **Wandering Tattler**, and **Black Turnstone**. We also saw our first **sea otter** and **harbor seal**. We finished the day with a delicious curry and local Monterey wine.



Heerman's Gulls are common along the central California coast in late summer as they disperse northward after breeding. (N. Dyson)

Day 8, 3 August: Moss Landing and Elkhorn Slough.

Today was dedicated to birding coastal areas and wetlands. This area is incredibly rich in coastal birds and we had a successful day along the eastern shore of Monterey Bay. We did a pre-breakfast jaunt to the Monterey Peninsula, finding many of the same birds as the previous afternoon. Additionally, we added **Pacific Loon** just past the kelp line, and our first **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** hanging out with **Hutton's Vireo** in a local woodland patch.

After breakfast, we headed up the coast. Our first stop was at a pond in Marina. Waterbirds were lacking, but a **Common Yellowthroat** worked the pondside reeds and a mixed flock in the willows included migrant **Wilson's** and **Orange-crowned Warblers**. We continued north along the coast, spending a good deal of time working **Moss Landing**. Shorebirds were present in abundance, including the fantastic **Long-billed Curlew** catching and eating small crabs. Other shorebirds included **Snowy Plover**, **American Avocet** and **Marbled Godwit**. A breeding plumage **Red-throated Loon** was resting on the beach, while three species of grebes, including a pair of lovely **Western Grebes** worked the deeper water. A molting male **Bufflehead** was a bit of a surprise. A fantastic group of **sea otters** was relaxing in the harbor, while a small pod of **bottlenose dolphins** worked the waters just offshore.

We then headed inland, to search for one of our few remaining California specialties, and it took no time at all to locate a flock of **Tri-colored Blackbirds** in a cattle pen. A **White-tailed Kite** hovered in the background, while a **Northern Harrier** quartered over a wetlands nearby. All in all, it was a very birdy day and it certainly substantially increased our trip list.



This was just a small group of playful sea otters that hung out in Moss Landing harbor. (N. Dyson)

Day 9, 4 August: Monterey coast south to Big Sur.

This was a day that combined great birding with the stunning coastal scenery for which this part of California is famous.

We started the birding after breakfast, heading south to the Carmel River mouth. We were pleased to quickly find our main target for the site, the range-restricted **Elegant Tern**, given how few seemed to be around. We were pleasantly surprised to find a gorgeous breeding plumaged **Pacific Loon** in the river, while **Common Murre** and **Pigeon Guillemot** fed offshore. Continuing south, we stopped in at Garrapata State Park, where a female **Costa's Hummingbird** perched cooperatively for great scope views. A trip up the beautiful redwood-lined Palo Colorado Road produced our first nice views of **Band-tailed Pigeon**. A short walk around Andrew Molera State Park gave us good views of our first **Vaux's Swift** flying around with a large group of **Violet-green Swallow**, as well as two **western yellow-bellied racers** slithering away in the leaf litter. We enjoyed the antics of the **Steller's Jays** while eating our picnic lunch under the huge redwoods of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, before retuning back to Monterey for a relaxing afternoon.



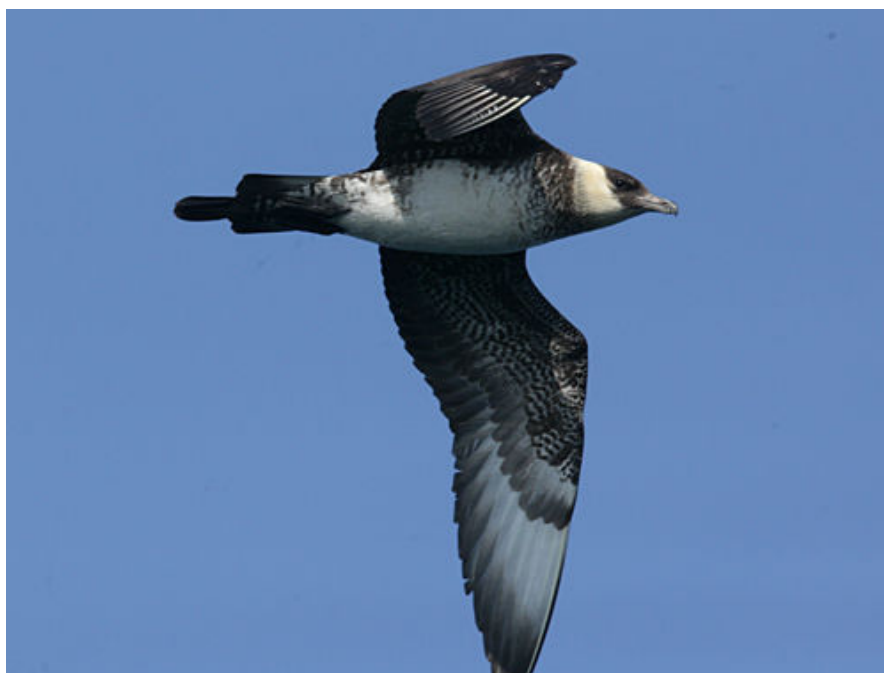
A hulking Western Gull shares a rock in Monterey Bay with a petite Pelagic Cormorant. (N. Dyson)

Day 10, 5 August: Monterey.

We spent the day, as the Brits say, being dudes. We started at the world-famous Monterey Bay Aquarium, where we all agreed that the jellyfish exhibit was mind-blowing. After checking out Cannery Row, we embarked on another Monterey area tradition: wine tasting. We headed up the Carmel Valley to sample some of the area's world-class wines, and Julie and Neil did not come out empty handed. The Parsonage 2006 Syrah was the hands down favorite, which we enjoyed with a dinner of meats and cheeses. On the way back to Monterey we drove the incredibly scenic 17 Mile Drive, stopping for photo-ops and our first good views of **Pygmy Nuthatch**.

Day 11, 6 August: Santa Cruz coast.

Our first target this morning was **Clark's Grebe**, which we found very easily just south of Santa Cruz. **Bottle-nosed dolphins** and various other seabirds fed offshore at the same spot. Our next target fell equally easily, when we found an adult and juvenile **Marbled Murrelet** swimming close to shore north of Santa Cruz coastal from there inland breeding grounds. Another stop revealed **Snowy Plover**. On the return to Monterey, we stopped in at Harkins Slough, where we found our first **Downy Woodpecker**, **Belted Kingfisher**, and **Common Moorhen** of the trip, but even better was our first **Hooded Oriole**. We ate a harbor-side picnic lunch while watching **sea lions** and **sea otters** cavorting nearby. A bit of post-dinner owling revealed a **Northern Pygmy-Owl** singing under a full moon.



Pomarine Jaeger showing off its spatulate-shaped tail feathers and its double crescent of white on the primaries. (N. Dyson)

Day 12, 7 August: Monterey Bay pelagic.

With great anticipation, we boarded a Shearwater Journeys boat to head out into the productive waters of Monterey Bay for a day of pelagic birding. After the safety and information talk, we headed out to see. On our way along the coast we had nice looks at a couple of **Black Turnstones** before hitting our first pelagic species--**Pigeon Guillemot**, **Common Murre**, **Sooty Shearwater**, and great looks at our first **Rhinoceros Auklet**. We soon were into our first of many **Black-footed Albatross** (a near-constant and welcome presence throughout the day) and **Pink-footed Shearwater**, while small flocks of **Red-necked Phalarope** (and the occasional **Red**), gorgeous breeding plumages **Sabine's Gulls**, and variably plumaged **Pomarine Jaegers** flew past the boat. A small group of **Pacific white-sided dolphins**, but even better was a friendly

humpback whale that wowed all aboard by surfacing repeatedly close enough that we could smell its fishy breath. We also saw the long flipper of a **northern fur seal** and the huge head of a **northern elephant seal** while pottering about the bay. We had moments of increased excitement when **South Polar Skua** floated on by, while a couple stunning **Buller's Shearwaters** streamed past showing off their gleaming white underparts.



This friendly humpback whale toyed with the boat - we never new quite where it would come up. (J. Engel)

Alcids continued to provide highlights throughout the day. We had good looks a couple of times at the diminutive (and flighty) **Cassin's Auklet**, but it was its larger cousin that awed the boat when cries of "**puffin!**" when up. A second-year **Tufted Puffin** cooperatively flew in circles around the boat, allowing all on board great views. The rarest bird of the day was also an alcid, undoubtedly present in the bay due to the abnormally warm-water conditions. It is was also unusually cooperative, even if tough to spot, a tiny black-and-white **Xantus' Murrelet** bobbing in the waves. Better yet, it was of the seldom-seen Mexican-breeding nominate **hypoleucus** subspecies (a lifer subspecies for the guide).



Black-footed Albatross accompanied the boat for much of our day on Monterey Bay. (N. Dyson)

The ride back into the harbor provided yet more excitement, including breaching **humpback whales**, one of nature's great spectacles. We also added two more species of cetaceans, **Dall's porpoise** and **Risso's dolphin**, as well as our last two skuas, **Parasitic** and **Long-tailed Jaegers**.

We then made the drive back to San Francisco, where we dropped off the clients at their hotel that they appeared (judging by the red-and-blue crowd gathered outside) to be sharing with the Barcelona soccer team, in town for a pre-season match.



This immature Tufted Puffin was a great surprise on the pelagic trip. It cooperatively flew around the boat several times. (N. Dyson)



Another view of Mono Lake, with the Sierra Nevada mountains in the background. (J. Engel)

BIRD AND MAMMAL LIST

This is the complete, annotated list of birds and mammals seen on the tour. It is split up taxonomically, with headings in the form of ORDER: Family. We saw 201 species of birds, and heard two more. We also saw 21 species of mammals, and heard one.

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Gadwall

Anas strepera

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Surf Scoter

Melanitta perspicillata

Seen on the pelagic trip.

Bufflehead

Bucephala albeola

A molting male was seen at Moss Landing.

Common Merganser

Mergus merganser

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae**Sooty Grouse**

A wonderfully cooperative family group was seen at the roadside near Glacier Point in Yosemite. This species was recently split from Dusky Grouse of the Rocky Mountains.

Dendragapus fuliginosus

Wild Turkey

A family group was seen along Mines Rd.

Meleagris gallopavo

GALLIFORMES: Odontophoridae**Mountain Quail**

Fantastic looks at a family group of this skulking species was seen on our first afternoon near Sonora.

Oreortyx pictus

California Quail

These comical birds were seen many times throughout the tour, often in large family groups.

Callipepla californica

GAVIIFORMES: Gaviidae**Red-throated Loon**

A couple of overwintering birds, including a breeding plumaged bird, were at Moss Landing.

Gavia stellata

Pacific Loon

Seen a couple of times along the coast, including a breeding plumaged bird at the Carmel River Mouth.

Gavia pacifica

Common Loon

One seen, in breeding plumage, on Monterey Bay

Gavia immer

PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae**Pied-billed Grebe****Eared Grebe**

There were large flocks on Mono Lake, plus a beautiful breeding-plumaged bird in Moss Landing harbor.

Podilymbus podiceps

Podiceps nigricollis

Western Grebe

Aechmophorus occidentalis

Clark's Grebe

The less common cousin of Western Grebe, it was seen very well close to shore near Santa Cruz.

Aechmophorus clarkii

PROCELLARIIFORMES: Diomedidae**Black-footed Albatross**

Many outstanding views on the pelagic.

Phoebastria nigripes

PROCELLARIIFORMES: Procellariidae**Northern Fulmar**

Several on the pelagic.

Fulmarus glacialis

Pink-footed Shearwater

One of the more common tubenoses on the pelagic.

Puffinus creatopus

Buller's Shearwater

Two seen on the pelagic.

Puffinus bulleri

Sooty Shearwater

Puffinus griseus

PELECANIFORMES: Pelecanidae**American White Pelican**

We enjoyed watching a group of them feeding near Monterey.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

PELECANIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae**Brandt's Cormorant**

Very common along the coast.

Phalacrocorax penicillatus

Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus

Pelagic Cormorant

Our first was in perfect light, showing off its iridescent purple and green sheen.

Phalacrocorax pelagicus

CICONIIFORMES: Ardeidae

Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron

Ardea herodias
Ardea alba
Egretta thula
Nycticorax nycticorax

FALCONIFORMES: Cathartidae

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura

FALCONIFORMES: Accipitridae

Osprey
White-tailed Kite
Northern Harrier
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk

Pandion haliaetus
Elanus leucurus
Circus cyaneus
Accipiter cooperii
Buteo lineatus

We had several great looks at the colorful California elegans subspecies of this Buteo.

Swainson's Hawk

Buteo swainsoni

Best of several was a beautiful dark morph bird as we crossed the Central Valley.

Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

Seen a couple of times, including one standing in a field along Highway 1.

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

American Kestrel

Falco sparverius

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

One was cruising its coastal haunts in Santa Cruz County.

GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

Virginia Rail

Rallus limicola

Fantastic looks at one sitting on a low branch along the edge of Mono Lake.

Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

American Coot

Fulica americana

CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae

Black-bellied Plover

Pluvialis squatarola

Snowy Plover

Charadrius alexandrinus

Seen a couple of times along the coast.

Semipalmated Plover

Charadrius semipalmatus

Killdeer

Charadrius vociferus

CHARADRIIFORMES: Haematopodidae

Black Oystercatcher

Haematopus bachmani

This charismatic bird was common along the rocky coast.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus

American Avocet

Recurvirostra americana

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae

Spotted Sandpiper

Actitis macularius

Wandering Tattler

Tringa incana

A typical shorebird of the rocky Pacific coast, we saw them right near Monterey.

Greater Yellowlegs

Tringa melanoleuca

Willet

Tringa semipalmata

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

Long-billed Curlew

Numenius americanus

A number of these remarkable-looking birds were at Moss Landing.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Black Turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala*

This typical Pacific shorebird was seen in small numbers on the rocky coast.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*
Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*
Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*
Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*
Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

Large flocks were seen well at their traditional staging area on Mono Lake.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
First seen at Mono Lake, we saw many more in a completely different environment on the pelagic.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A few seen well in flight on the pelagic.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*
A good number of breeding-plumaged birds were seen well on the pelagic.

Heermann's Gull *Larus heermanni*
Very common along the coast as part of their annual northward post-breeding dispersal.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Western Gull *Larus occidentalis*

California Gull *Larus californicus*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*

Just one, a molting adult at Moss Landing.

Elegant Tern *Thalasseus elegans*
Smaller numbers than expected for this time of year, we encountered them first and best at the Carmel River Mouth.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Stercorariidae

We saw all four possible skuas on the pelagic trip, including some impressive adult Pomarines.

South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Alcidae

Common Murre *Uria aalge*

First seen from land at the Carmel River Mouth.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba*

Seen commonly from shore, perhaps best while standing on the balcony of the Monterey Bay Aquarium as they visited their nests underneath us, showing off their orange legs and feet.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*

Great views of an adult and chick of this declining species were seen close to shore north of Santa Cruz, coastal from their inland breeding sites. In fact, we saw them close to where the first nest of the species was discovered in 1974.

Xantus's Murrelet *Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*

One seen well on the pelagic was of the less often encountered hypoleucus subspecies, which nests on a few islands off of Baja California, Mexico.

Cassin's Auklet *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*

This flighty little alcid was seen well on the pelagic in small numbers.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*

Seen well on the pelagic in small groups.

Tufted Puffin

Fratercula cirrhata

A solitary second-year bird showed off by making repeated passes of the boat on the pelagic trip.

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon

Columba livia

Band-tailed Pigeon

Patagioenas fasciata

Finally encountered in a canyon off Highway 1.

Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Greater Roadrunner

Geococcyx californianus

Excellent views on our first morning along Mines Road in Alameda County.

STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae

Northern Pygmy-Owl

Glaucidium gnoma

Heard just after dark near Monterey.

Great Gray Owl

Strix nebulosa

The bird of the trip, an adult of this rare owl was seen very well in a large meadow in Yosemite.

CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

Heard and seen at dusk along the shores of Mono Lake.

Common Poorwill

Phalaenoptilus nuttallii

Seen well in the car's headlights on the dirt roads along the south shore of Mono Lake.

APODIFORMES: Apodidae

Black Swift

Cypseloides niger

We were pleasantly surprised to see a small group of this uncommon swift along the road up to Sonora Pass.

Vaux's Swift

Chaetura vauxi

One was seen well with a flock of swallows over Andrew Molera State Park, south of Monterey.

White-throated Swift

Aeronautes saxatalis

Only seen once, over a large burned area at Yosemite.

APODIFORMES: Trochilidae

Black-chinned Hummingbird

Archilochus alexandri

A male was seen sharing a branch with a wood-pewee in Yosemite.

Anna's Hummingbird

Calypte anna

This is the common California hummingbird, and we saw it many times.

Costa's Hummingbird

Calypte costae

A female posed in the scope at Garrapata State Park south of Monterey.

Rufous Hummingbird

Selasphorus rufus

*First seen in the Sierra, many unidentified young and female *Selasphorus* hummingbirds were seen in and around Monterey.*

CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae

Belted Kingfisher

Megaceryle alcyon

PICIFORMES: Picidae

Acorn Woodpecker

Melanerpes formicivorus

We saw this comical, common woodpecker many times.

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus

Seen surprisingly many times, first in a family group along the Sonora Pass Rd.

Red-breasted Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus ruber

This beautiful west coast woodpecker was seen a number of times.

Nuttall's Woodpecker *Picoides nuttallii*

This California specialty was seen several times, first along Mines Rd.

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*

White-headed Woodpecker *Picoides albolarvatus*

A highlight of our first afternoon was watching a male feeding a huge young sugar pine cone.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*

PASSERIFORMES: Tyrannidae

Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus*

Hammond's Flycatcher *Empidonax hammondi*

Numerous along one trail in Yosemite.

Gray Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii*

Several seen one morning along the south shore of Mono Lake.

Dusky Flycatcher *Empidonax oberholseri*

First seen along the Sonora Pass Rd.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis*

Seen both in the Sierra and on the coast, we first encountered it in Lee Vining Canyon.

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*

Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya*

Seen only once, at Mono Lake.

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens*

One popped up onto the top of a dead oak along Mines Road.

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*

PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*

PASSERIFORMES: Vireonidae

Cassin's Vireo *Vireo cassinii*

Heard only, along the Sonora Pass Rd.

Hutton's Vireo *Vireo huttoni*

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*

PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae

Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*

Western Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma californica*

Clark's Nutcracker *Nucifraga columbiana*

After a bit of searching, we found an adult and young at Sonora Pass; we saw it again later on Tioga Rd.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*

Seen several times near Mono Lake.

Yellow-billed Magpie *Pica nuttalli*

We found this California endemic easily along Mines Rd.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

PASSERIFORMES: Paridae

Mountain Chickadee*Poecile gambeli***Chestnut-backed Chickadee***Poecile rufescens**Encountered several times along the coast.***Oak Titmouse***Baeolophus inornatus**First seen along Mines Rd.***PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae****Bushtit***Psaltriparus minimus***PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae****Red-breasted Nuthatch***Sitta canadensis***White-breasted Nuthatch***Sitta carolinensis***Pygmy Nuthatch***Sitta pygmaea**After a couple of brief encounters, we finally had great looks along 17 Mile Dr.***PASSERIFORMES: Certhiidae****Brown Creeper***Certhia americana***PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae****Rock Wren***Salpinctes obsoletus**Seen very well hopping among the tufa along the south shore of Mono Lake.***Bewick's Wren***Thryomanes bewickii***House Wren***Troglodytes aedon***Winter Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes***PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae****Golden-crowned Kinglet***Regulus satrapa***PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae****Blue-gray Gnatcatcher***Polioptila caerulea***PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae****Western Bluebird***Sialia mexicana***Mountain Bluebird***Sialia currucoides**We enjoyed watching a pair attend a nest in a burn near Mono Lake.***Townsend's Solitaire***Myadestes townsendi**Great looks at a fresh juvenile along the Sonora Pass Rd.***Hermit Thrush***Catharus guttatus***American Robin***Turdus migratorius***PASSERIFORMES: Timaliidae****Wrentit***Chamaea fasciata**We saw this California specialty several times, first was along Mines Rd as it flitted about the top of an oak.***PASSERIFORMES: Mimidae****Northern Mockingbird***Mimus polyglottos***Sage Thrasher***Oreoscoptes montanus**Common in the sagebrush around Mono Lake.***California Thrasher***Toxostoma redivivum**We saw one the first morning of the trip as it sprinted across Mines Road in front of the car.***PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae****European Starling***Sturnus vulgaris***PASSERIFORMES: Ptilonotidae**

Phainopepla

A beautiful adult male posed nicely for us along Mines Rd.

Phainopepla nitens**PASSERIFORMES: Parulidae****Orange-crowned Warbler*****Vermivora celata*****Nashville Warbler*****Vermivora ruficapilla*****Yellow Warbler*****Dendroica petechia*****Yellow-rumped Warbler*****Dendroica coronata*****Black-throated Gray Warbler*****Dendroica nigrescens***

We saw this western warbler well several times, best along the Hetch Hetchy Rd in Yosemite.

Townsend's Warbler***Dendroica townsendi***

We got lucky with an early migrant at Yosemite.

Hermit Warbler***Dendroica occidentalis***

A good number of this dapper warbler were seen in Yosemite.

MacGillivray's Warbler***Oporornis tolmiei***

We saw this often skulking warbler very well several times.

Common Yellowthroat***Geothlypis trichas*****Wilson's Warbler*****Wilsonia pusilla*****PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae****Green-tailed Towhee*****Pipilo chlorurus***

We got very nice looks at one as we enjoyed a sundowner along the shore of Mono Lake.

Spotted Towhee***Pipilo maculatus*****California Towhee*****Pipilo crissalis*****Rufous-crowned Sparrow*****Aimophila ruficeps***

An adult and juvenile were together along Mines Rd.

Chipping Sparrow***Spizella passerina*****Brewer's Sparrow*****Spizella breweri***

Numerous in the sagebrush east of the Sierra.

Lark Sparrow***Chondestes grammacus***

A small group was seen along Mines Rd.

Sage Sparrow***Amphispiza belli***

We had nice looks at the interior nevadensis subspecies near Mono Lake.

Savannah Sparrow***Passerculus sandwichensis*****Fox Sparrow*****Passerella iliaca***

We had nice looks at one of the California megarhyncha group along the Sonora Pass Rd.

Song Sparrow***Melospiza melodia*****Lincoln's Sparrow*****Melospiza lincolni***

Seen only once, along the Tioga Rd.

White-crowned Sparrow***Zonotrichia leucophrys***

The coastal nuttallii subspecies was seen near Monterey.

Dark-eyed Junco***Junco hyemalis*****PASSERIFORMES: Cardinalidae****Western Tanager*****Piranga ludoviciana*****Black-headed Grosbeak*****Pheucticus melanocephalus*****Lazuli Bunting*****Passerina amoena***

We watched a beautiful male singing in the scope at Mono Lake County Park.

PASSERIFORMES: Icteridae**Red-winged Blackbird*****Agelaius phoeniceus*****Tricolored Blackbird*****Agelaius tricolor***

A good sized flock was keeping the cows company at Moonglow Dairy, near Monterey.

Western Meadowlark***Sturnella neglecta*****Yellow-headed Blackbird*****Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus***

We saw one in a wetlands on the east side of Sonora Pass.

Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>
Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>

We had nice looks at a female in southern Santa Cruz County.

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

Purple Finch	<i>Carpodacus purpureus</i>
---------------------	-----------------------------

Seen both in the Sierra and on the coast, but in small numbers.

Cassin's Finch	<i>Carpodacus cassinii</i>
-----------------------	----------------------------

Seen very well several times in the Sierra, including on our hotel grounds in Lee Vining.

House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>
--------------------	-----------------------------

Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus (Carduelis) pinus</i>
--------------------	---------------------------------

Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus (Carduelis) psaltria</i>
-------------------------	------------------------------------

American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus (Carduelis) tristis</i>
---------------------------	-----------------------------------

Evening Grosbeak	<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>
-------------------------	-----------------------------------

After an initial frustrating flyover, we ended up getting point-blank looks at a male in Yosemite.

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
----------------------	--------------------------

MAMMAL LIST

LAGOMORPHA: Ochotonidae

American Pika	<i>Ochotona princeps</i>
----------------------	--------------------------

This vociferous mammals was heard only along Tioga Rd.

LAGOMORPHA: Leporidae

Brush Cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus bachmani</i>
-------------------------	----------------------------

RODENTIA: Scuriudae

Western Gray Squirrel	<i>Sciurus griseus</i>
------------------------------	------------------------

Douglas' Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus douglasii</i>
--------------------------	-------------------------------

Belding's Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beldingi</i>
----------------------------------	------------------------------

California Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>
-----------------------------------	------------------------------

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus lateralis</i>
---------------------------------------	-------------------------------

Least Chipmunk	<i>Tamias minimus</i>
-----------------------	-----------------------

Many of these chipmunks, with tails straight up, were seen scurrying across the road.

Miriam's Chipmunk	<i>Tamias merriami</i>
--------------------------	------------------------

Chipmunk sp.	<i>Tamias sp.</i>
---------------------	-------------------

Many chipmunks in the Sierra, where several similar species co-occur, were left unidentified.

CETACEA: Balaenopteridae

Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>
-----------------------	-------------------------------

We had some remarkable encounters with these giants, including a local friendly that, as times, swam directly under our boat. We also saw full breaches a number of times as well as lots of flipper slapping.

CETACEA: Delphinidae

(Pacific) White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>
--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>
------------------------	------------------------

Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
---------------------------	---------------------------

We saw a couple of small groups of these inshore dolphins from shore in Monterey Bay.

CETACEA: Phocoenidae

Dall's Porpoise*Phocoenoides dalli***CARNIVORA: Canidae****Gray Fox***Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

We had one of these rarely-seen dogs run across the road in front of us just after dark in Yosemite.

CARNIVORA: Ursidae**Black Bear***Ursus americanus*

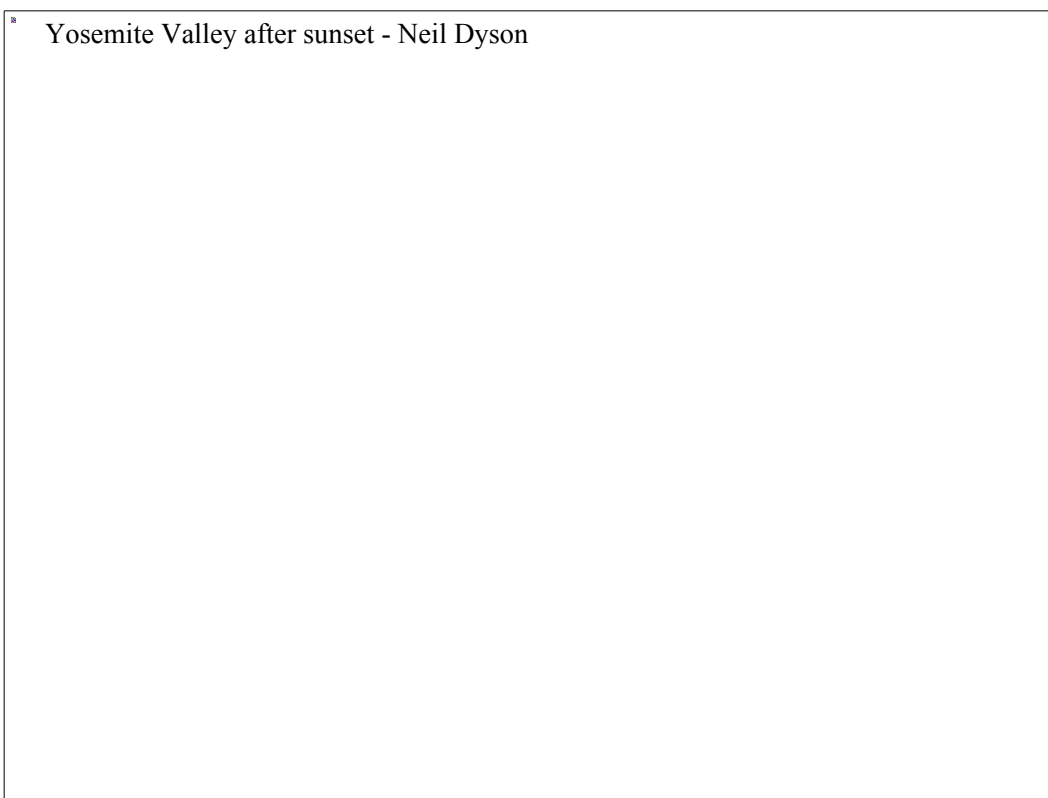
We had two awesome encounters with black bears in Yosemite. First, Iain nearly choked on his food after spotting one while we ate lunch at our b&b. The second one we watched rip apart logs in search of grubs on our way out of the park.

CARNIVORA: Mustelidae**Sea Otter***Enhydra lutris*

There were lots of these adorable critters in Monterey Bay. Particularly impressive was the concentration in Moss Landing harbor.

CARNIVORA: Otariidae**Northern Fur Seal***Callorhinus ursinus***California Sea Lion***Zalophus californianus***CARNIVORA: Phocidae****Northern Elephant Seal***Mirounga angustirostris*

One of these behemoths was seen on the pelagic trip.

Harbor Seal*Phoca vitulina***ARTIODACTYLA: Cervidae****Mule Deer***Odocoileus hemionus hemionus***Black-tailed Deer***Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*

Yosemite Valley after sunset - Neil Dyson

A parting shot: Yosemite Valley after sunset. (N. Dyson)