

Birding Ecotours



COMPLETE CALIFORNIA: MOUNTAINS, OCEAN AND DESERT

07 - 20 SEPTEMBER 2022

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The striking Acorn Woodpecker is one of our targets on this tour.

The mention of California usually conjures up visions of scenic mountain vistas, the blue Pacific, and sunbaked deserts of the south. The birds are no less spectacular, with everything from **Black-footed Albatross** to **Lawrence's Goldfinch** possible. During this two-week tour we will search for many of California's resident species as well as a number of migrating species. We will visit a vast array of habitats, including marshlands and tidal wetlands around Monterey Bay and Bodega Bay, the scenic Sierras rich with montane birds (including seven species of woodpeckers), and the sage-filled lands east of the Sierras that harbor **Sage Grouse** and **Mountain Bluebird**.

Mixed-oak woodlands will be birded intensely, as they contain several species of owls and passerines that are not easily found in other habitats. Two *Shearwater Journeys* pelagic trips are included for pelagic species such as **Long-tailed Jaeger**, **South Polar Skua**, **Buller's Shearwater**, and **Ashy Storm Petrel**. On these trips and a Santa Cruz Island boat ride there is an excellent chance to observe whales, including **Humpback Whale** and the magnificent **Blue Whale**!

If you wish to continue the adventure, there is an extension to Southern California with stops in various habitats for **California Gnatcatcher**, **Spotted Dove**, **Allen's Hummingbird**, and a trip to the Salton Sea. Please see [the separate itinerary](#) for more information.



A stunning Allen's Hummingbird seen near Los Angeles.

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. San Jose

The tour begins in San Jose, California, where we plan to arrive by about noon. The afternoon will be spent birding in and around Bodega Bay and Point Reyes. Here a wide variety of

passerines and shorebirds are possible; however, this is heavily dependent on the weather. Overcast and foggy skies can cause migrating species to temporarily delay their migration, resulting in a large build-up of birds in a small area; this is known as ‘fallout’ and is sometimes experienced at Point Reyes. Species to look for include **Tricolored Blackbird** and **American** and **Pacific Golden Plovers**. Additional shorebird possibilities include **Baird's, Western, Least, Semipalmated, Stilt**, and **Pectoral Sandpipers**, while we always remain hopeful for something Asian, such as **Ruff!**

Overnight: Petaluma



*Note the yellowish legs of **Least Sandpiper**.*

Day 2. Bodega Bay

The morning will be spent around Bodega Bay, where we will be targeting anything we may have missed the previous day. Next we head southward, with perhaps a stop at the Marin Headlands hawk watch. Here we may see a variety of raptors, including **Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, Red-tailed, and Red-shouldered Hawks, White-tailed Kite, Prairie and Peregrine Falcons**, and possibly **Golden Eagle**.

Overnight: Petaluma

Day 3. Transfer to Yosemite National Park, birding on the way

This will mostly be a travel day. The day will begin by heading toward the Central Valley, where we will target **Yellow-billed Magpie** and **Swainson's Hawk**. Moving into the Sierra foothills we are likely to come across **Western Bluebird** and the comical **Acorn Woodpecker**. In the late afternoon and evening we will bird near the entrance to Yosemite National Park for owls and montane species such as **Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-**

headed Woodpecker, and possibly **American Dipper**. A dusk search will target **Great Grey Owl**.

Overnight: Oakhurst

Day 4. Yosemite National Park

The entire day will be dedicated to birding Yosemite, looking for species including **Sooty Grouse**, **Northern Goshawk**, **Mountain Quail**, **White-headed**, **Black-backed**, **Pileated**, and **Hairy Woodpeckers**, **Red-breasted** and **Williamson's Sapsuckers**, **Nashville**, **Hermit**, and **MacGillivray's Warblers**, **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks**, and **Cassin's Finch**. Keeping our eyes on the birds may be difficult, as the scenery is truly spectacular. Evening birding will be at Mono County Park, searching for **Sora**, **Virginia Rail**, **Black-necked (Eared) Grebe**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, and **Yellow-headed Blackbird**.

Overnight: Lee Vining



Sora should be seen in Mono County Park.

Day 5. Birding the Sierras

Today will be spent birding the sage and woodlands east of the Sierras. An early morning visit to Crowley Lake should hopefully produce **Sage Grouse**, **Prairie Falcon**, **Sage Thrasher**, **American Grey Flycatcher**, **Bell's Sparrow**, and **Brewer's Sparrow**. Aspendell will be visited specifically to look for **Grey-crowned Rosy Finch**. Birding in the woodlands and other areas around Lee Vining can produce **Lewis's Woodpecker**, the beautiful **Mountain Bluebird**, **Calliope** and **Rufous Hummingbirds**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Green-tailed Towhee**, and **Pygmy Nuthatch**. The evening will be spent searching for owls and **Common Poorwill**.

Overnight: Lee Vining

Day 6. Birding Yosemite National Park, transfer to Monterey Bay

The morning will be spent birding in Yosemite, where we'll look for any species that we may have missed yesterday. From here it is a longish drive westward toward Monterey Bay, with a stop en route to look for **Spotted Dove** and any rarities that may be on the hotline.

Overnight: Watsonville



Black Turnstone is a fantastic west coast special!

Day 7. Birding Año Nuevo and Monterey Bay

Black Swift will be our target first thing in the morning, as we head up the coast north of Santa Cruz to look for their nests in shoreline caves at Año Nuevo. We then turn our attention to finding passerines, including a variety of **Warblers** such as **MacGillivray's**, **Townsend's**, **Wilson's**, and possibly **Hermit**. We'll return to the fringes of Monterey Bay and look for **Snowy Plover**, **Baird's Sandpiper**, and rock-loving shorebirds including **Black Oystercatcher**, **Surfbird**, **Wandering Tattler**, and **Black Turnstone**. Additionally migrating flocks will be investigated to see if any contain **Violet-green Swallow** or **Vaux's Swift**. For those who still have energy there will be an owling excursion in the evening.

Overnight: Watsonville

Day 8. Pelagic cruise in Monterey Bay

Today will be the first of our two scheduled pelagic trips, this time into the world-famous Monterey Bay. Huge upwellings produced by a massive submarine canyon twice the size of the

Grand Canyon allow for rich and diverse wildlife viewing within a short distance of land. Potential species include **Buller's, Pink-footed, Sooty, and Black-vented Shearwaters, Ashy and Black Storm Petrels, Pomarine, Parasitic, and Long-tailed Jaegers, South Polar Skua, Arctic Tern, Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets, and Scripps's and Marbled Murrelets.** We will hope for a rarity such as **Tufted Puffin, Fork-tailed Storm Petrel, Streaked, Wedge-tailed, and Manx Shearwaters, Laysan Albatross,** or a tropicbird. We have a good chance of finding **Blue and Humpback Whales** along with four additional species of cetaceans. In the evening we will bird the general area, looking for species not seen on the previous day.

Overnight: Watsonville



South Polar Skua may be seen on the Monterey pelagic trip.

Day 9. Monterey Seavalley pelagic

Today will be the Monterey Seavalley pelagic, also with *Shearwater Journeys*. Below are some comments from past trips: "This report covers *Shearwater Journeys'* three spectacular sea birding trips on Monterey Bay on Sep 9, 10, and 11 several years ago. This is surely one of the most productive times to search for seabirds. Birders who participated in all three of these trips recorded nearly 35 species of seabirds, including 12 species of tubenoses, and 12 species of marine mammals and enjoyed some of the best weather conditions. Highlights were many. For three days in a row we found the storm petrel flocks which included **Wilson's, Fork-tailed, Ashy, Black, and Least Storm Petrels;** one **Manx Shearwater** was found each day; **Flesh-footed Shearwater** was found on two of the three days, with a high count of 10; **South Polar Skuas** were found every day; and it was a grand slam on all of the jaeger species on two of the three days; in a single day, 201 jaegers were recorded, of these an astounding 152 were **Pomarine Jaegers;** a **Short-finned Mako Shark** made a star performance; and finally, the **Orca** show was just great." For the full species list for these and other California pelagic trips, click on the following for all of the information: <http://www.shearwaterjourneys.com/>.

Overnight: Watsonville



Marbled Godwit, one of the many waders we should encounter in the Watsonville area

Day 10. Birding the Watsonville area

We will bird the Watsonville area on the edge of Monterey Bay and look for, among others, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Wilson's Phalarope**, **Black-necked Stilt**, and **American Avocet**. A stop in the oak woodland could yield **California Quail**, **Nuttall's Woodpecker**, **Wrentit**, **Anna's Hummingbird**, **California Towhee**, **Hutton's** and **Cassin's Vireos**, and **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**.

Overnight: Watsonville

Day 11. Searching for California Condor

Today we have set aside ample time to search for **California Condor** while making our way south along Highway 1. This spectacular species was brought back from the brink of extinction, and although we are not guaranteed sightings, there are a few birds having been released in the area that we hope to see. Our afternoon drive will take us to Ventura, with additional birding stops for migrants en route.

Overnight: Taft or Ventura

Day 12. Birding Santa Cruz Island

The full day will be spent on Santa Cruz Island, where we will search for the California endemic **Island Scrub Jay** as well as the Santa Cruz Island subspecies of **Bewick's Wren** and **Pacific-**

slope Flycatcher. The boat trip to and from the island could add **Royal Tern** and **Black-vented Shearwater**, while **Blue** and **Humpback Whales** are also possible.

Overnight: Taft or Ventura



A young **Black-chinned Sparrow**, showing only hints of a black chin.

Day 13. Transfer to Los Angeles, birding on the way

Next we head east to southern Los Angeles County in search of **LeConte's Thrasher**. Depending on our previous sightings during the tour we may also look for **Calliope Hummingbird**, **Mountain Quail**, and **Black-chinned Sparrow** at Mount Pinos. If we have already seen these species, we will continue to the Los Angeles Basin to look for **Spotted Dove**, **Allen's Hummingbird** and, time permitting, **California Gnatcatcher**.

Overnight: near Long Beach or Redondo Beach

Day 14. Departure

For those participating in the Complete California Tour only, we'll arrive in Los Angeles for departing flights from the Los Angeles International Airport, where the tour ends.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 14 days
Limit: 3 - 8
Dates: 07 – 20 September 2022
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Start: San Jose
End: Los Angeles
Prices: US\$6,315 per person sharing (approximate) (2022)
US\$6,631 per person sharing (approximate) (2023)
Single supplements: US\$967 (approximate) (2022)
US\$1,015 (approximate) (2023)

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Transport
Guiding fees

Price excludes:

Flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts