

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRDING FIELD TOUR

## LA and Beyond!

January 14-21, 2023

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center & Birding Los Angeles and Beyond*

### Trip Report and Sightings Notes



"Seems it never rains in southern California  
Seems I've often heard that kind of talk before  
It never rains in California  
But girl, don't they warn ya?  
It pours, man, it pours"

*--It Never Rains in Southern California (Albert Hammond)*

**DAY 1 (January 14) Pasadena, California.** Rain, rain, rain! With everybody arriving today by mid-afternoon, our plan was to visit a nearby parrot roost before dinner. Alas, when it rains in southern California, it pours. So we passed up our parrot quest today in favor of later in the week and headed straight for dinner after introductions in the hotel lobby. At Mijares Mexican Restaurant we met our guide, Luke Tiller, of *Birding Los Angeles and Beyond*, and then settled back into our rooms in anticipation of an early wake-up, new birds, and hopefully a break in the rain.

**DAY 2 (January 15) Coastal/Urban Birding Day.** We planned our coastal/urban day today (Sunday) to avoid traffic congestion on the LA freeways as we headed from Pasadena through Los Angeles to the coast. As we arrived, it looked like the rain would once again be a challenge, but while we were getting out of the vans the rain subsided and we didn't deal with any more rain the rest of the day until dinner time! At Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve we searched unsuccessfully for Ridgway's Rail – although we did hear several of these secretive birds in the marsh. We did tally over 40 species of birds at the marsh, including our first of many looks at several west-coast birds, including Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, Black Phoebe, Cassin's Kingbird, and California Towhee. At the UC-Irvine Ecological Preserve, our main target was California Gnatcatcher, which eluded us for much of our time there. We did score a distant Greater Roadrunner, then had an encounter with another roadrunner nearly at arm's length. We also had our first look at **Wrentit**, **Cactus Wren**, Western Bluebird, and eventually our target bird: an accommodating pair of **California Gnatcatchers**! Among 20+ species at Huntington Central Park was our first Townsend's Warbler of the trip. After lunch we stopped by John Baca Park where we were able to catch glimpses of the tiny Swinhoe's White-eye, with at least four of them working the foliage of one of the park's trees. A quick stop at Harriet M. Wiedner Regional Park produced Black-necked Stilts and an Eared Grebe. Our final stop of the day was at Bolsa Chica, where we searched the inner bay via the walkbridge. This location provided fantastic looks at more than 45 species, including Brant, Western Grebe, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Least and Western sandpipers, as



well as Sanderlings, a distant Reddish Egret, a large flock of White-faced Ibis, and an up-close-and-personal, very accommodating **Ridgway's Rail**! A total of 95 species on the day and a great start to our tour!

**DAY 3 (January 16) Clean-up Day.** The schedule called for today to be our Desert Birding Day, but weather conditions in the desert (very windy, cold, and rainy) forced us to adjust our plans. We decided to burn our "clean-up day" early in the tour, as weather





in the mountains also looked formidable. So, we stayed in the LA basin and managed to mostly avoid the rain, making the best of our opportunities. We started our day at the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, where some morning showers persisted but eventually subsided. We enjoyed a close encounter with a group of adorable **Ross's Geese**, plus saw several other waterfowl species including Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Goose, and our only Common Merganser of the trip. We also spotted distant White-throated Swifts as they worked high in the gray sky, plus close views of striking **Vermilion Flycatchers**, both **Black Phoebe** and Say's Phoebe, multiple Cassin's Kingbirds, the first of numerous California Scrub-Jays we would see on the trip, California Thrashers, **Rock Wrens**, and Western Meadowlarks among nearly 50 species. At the Peck Road Water Conservation Park, we saw numerous birds including the striking Lark Sparrows and a flock of ten or more Bushtits. A stop at the Livingston-Graham Quarry provided distant views of Clark's Grebes and a very distant soaring Zone-tailed Hawk. At our lunch stop we encountered our first parrots of the trip with a flock of 35 Mitred Parakeets. Vina Vieja Park gave us another parrot with a lone Red-masked Parakeet and our only sighting of Pintailed Whydahs. Next, we took a pleasant stroll through Luke's neighborhood, where we found many birds, including Band-tailed Pigeon, Acorn Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, Mountain Chickadee, Lesser Goldfinch, and a nice flock of Red-whiskered Bulbuls. Our birding concluded for the day with a late afternoon spectacle as the parrots and





parakeets came to roost in Temple City. We saw 1,000+ Red-crowned Parrots, 250+ Mitred Parakeets, 100+ Red-masked Parakeets, plus **Red-lored Parrots**, Lilac-crowned Parrots, Yellow-headed Parrots, and hundreds more left unidentified to species. Plus, we had a very close encounter with a striking male Townsend's Warbler at eye level that seemed oblivious to our admiration. We made the most of our rescheduled "Clean-up Day" by tallying 87 species, including numerous new birds for the trip.



**DAY 4 (January 17) Desert Birding Day.** Birding first thing in the Antelope Valley, we sighted our two top target birds of the morning with distant looks at LeConte's Thrasher and close-up views of **Bell's Sparrow**. We also enjoyed Loggerhead Shrike, Mountain Bluebird, Ferruginous Hawk, and Brewer's Blackbird. Along the trails at the wonderful Prime Desert Woodland Preserve we spotted a covey of **California Quail**, Cactus Wren, and **California Towhee** but were unable to track down a Ladder-backed Woodpecker. We took the mountain route back to Pasadena, stopping for a wonderful walk in the Angeles National Forest, where we had more looks at some birds we had seen previously.





**DAY 5 (January 18) California Condor Day.** Condors are late risers, so en route to their domain we first stopped by an arid area on Petroleum Club Road to try for a closer view of LeConte's Thrasher, but were unsuccessful, though we did see more Bell's Sparrows. Climbing high into the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, we parked near the sign overlook and began scanning the skies and distant slopes. Within minutes Luke spotted two California Condors resting on the far slope face, awaiting the warmth of the sun and rising thermals to provide the lift they needed to get airborne for the day. Everybody had distant but definitive scope views, and suddenly we had a third condor soaring, passing in front of the first two, then disappearing behind another slope before eventually reappearing and then settling to the left of the original two, which remained. Then we found a fourth condor slowly walking up the slope toward the first two. Satisfied that we had good long looks, we left the mountains to search for Yellow-billed Magpie, one of two California endemic species we hoped to see on the tour. Along the way we found a large flock of blackbirds along Wasioja Road, and stopping to scan we found that many of them were **Tricolored Blackbirds**. Down the road a bit further we gave a concerted effort to find the magpies, and eventually we saw at least three individuals, but they proved elusive, staying quite distant and moving between trees and shrubs and often out of site. Here we also picked up a **Prairie Falcon** soaring overhead and many other birds. After lunch we headed back up to the condor area in hopes of finding closer birds soaring, but were not successful. We did see another Prairie Falcon as well as an adult Golden Eagle, observed soaring and then landing on the far cliff face.





**DAY 6 (January 19) Mountain Birding Day.** Back uphill today, this time for some dedicated mountain birding. Climbing the winding mountain roads just a few miles north of Pasadena, we quickly found ourselves well above 6,000 feet in elevation in Angeles National Forest. At our first stop at Clear Creek Station, Luke spread some birdseed out and in less than a minute we had activity, including Acorn Woodpecker, California Scrub-Jay, “Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco, California Towhee, and Golden-crowned Sparrow – along with a sizeable flock of Lawrence’s Goldfinches that perched overhead. Moving on, our next stop was Barley Flats Road, where we hiked up and back slowly in hopes of catching a glimpse of a Mountain Quail. But of Mountain Quail, there were none to be glimpsed on this day – though we did get nice looks at a pair of Wrentits and a brief look at a pair of



Cassin’s Finches. A short time later we were at the Chilao Visitor Center, where Luke stocked the feeders in hopes of attracting attention in the conifer neighborhood. At first nothing happened, then a few birds started taking advantage of our offerings: more juncos, **Oak Titmice**, California Scrub-Jays, then **Mountain Chickadees**, a **Nuttall’s Woodpecker**, and beautiful **Steller’s Jays**! While a few birders remained near the feeders, the rest of the group took a short stroll around the visitor center roads, where we spotted three **White-headed Woodpeckers** (yay!), but no Pygmy Nuthatches (heard but not seen). At the Monte Cristo Campground we were treated to beautiful views of a **Red-breasted Sapsucker** as well as a Phainopepla. Leaving the mountains, we had lunch and then went on the hunt for a few birds that had eluded us during our other two days searching the LA basin. At the parking lot of Huntington Botanical Gardens we quickly tracked down Yellow-chevroned Parakeets. We struck out on Scaly-breasted Munia at Sawpit Wash Trail, but finally scored them at San Gabriel River Channel—Encanto Park bridge. And searching Luke’s neighborhood once again, we found two gaudy Indian Peafowl – a great ending to a wonderful day of birding.





**DAY 7 (January 20) Santa Cruz Island Birding Day.** An early morning drive found us standing on the beach at Ventura Harbor. Scanning the harbor and breakwalls we found several new birds for our trip, including Surf Scoter, Black Oystercatcher, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Wandering Tattler, Heerman's Gull, and both Brandt's and Pelagic cormorants. We then queued up for our ride to Santa Cruz Island aboard the Island Packers Cruise boat. Crossing the Santa Barbara Channel, we managed to spot a few birds, including Pacific Loon, Rhinoceros Auklet, and Black-vented Shearwater. After settling in on Santa Cruz Island at Scorpion Anchorage, we hiked out through the Scorpion Campground where we encountered our first of several adorable Island Foxes. Seemingly unwary of humans, they allowed us to pass very closely without showing any concern whatsoever. The main target bird of the island – and in fact the primary reason we included the island on our itinerary – was the **Island Scrub-Jay**. They didn't disappoint, as we were soon looking at the first of many we saw during our short time on the island. We saw several other unique birds as well, including Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, "Sooty" Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and a rare-for-southern California **Harris's Sparrow**. After a wonderful picnic lunch, the group enjoyed some time on their own on the island before our boat departed at 3:30. Some walked down to the ocean, others climbed up to the highlands, and a few stayed near the picnic area, resting and enjoying the sunny blue skies of Santa Cruz Island. As we pulled away from the island, heading to the mainland, we were treated to close views of 3-5 Gray Whales, which repeatedly produced spouts as they surfaced, and occasionally showed us their flukes, to the enjoyment of everybody watching. We also saw Red Phalarope and Cassin's Auklet on the return run, as well as a jaegers species that was later determined to be a Pomarine Jaeger (thanks to Carl getting a couple photos). Arriving back at Ventura Harbor we had our final new bird of the trip: Short-billed Gull.





**DAY 8 (July 9) California to home.** All tours come to an end, of course, and most folks flew out today, heading for home – most to Michigan, Mark to Ontario, Gavin to sunny Florida. Everybody arrived home safely, with photos and memories and a Life List bolstered by the amazing birds of Southern California.

#### **LEADER, GUIDE, and DRIVERS**

- **Daryl Bernard** – Executive Director – *Seven Ponds Nature Center*
- **Luke Tiller** – Professional Birding Guide & Biologist – *Birding Los Angeles and Beyond*
- **Carrie Spencer** – Director of Environmental Education – *Seven Ponds Nature Center*
- **Carl Bendorf** – Professional Birding Guide – *Colorado Birding Adventures*

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

- **Gavin Awerbuch** – Hypoluxo, Florida
- **Jan Giesken** – Lapeer, Michigan
- **Sue Keener** – Rochester, Michigan
- **Suzy Daly** – Oxford, Michigan
- **Mark Cranford** – Warton, Ontario
- **Katrina Moilanen** – Howell, Michigan
- **Briana Fisher** – Linden, Michigan
- **Sigrid Grace** – Rochester Hills, Michigan
- **Pat Klos** – Rochester Hills, Michigan
- **Lynne Holmberg** – Traverse City, Michigan
- **Eric Gustafson** – Holland, Michigan
- **Nancy Tazzia** – Dryden, Michigan
- **George Vogel** – Midland, Michigan
- **Judy Vogel** – Midland, Michigan



**LODGING** @ Best Western Pasadena Royale – Pasadena, California

#### **RESTAURANTS**

**Mijares Mexican Restaurant** – January 14, *dinner*

**TOGOS** – January 15, *lunch*

**StoneFire Grill** – January 15, *dinner*

**Jersey Mike's** – January 16, *lunch*

**Hook Burger** – January 16, *dinner*

**Panda Express** – January 17, *lunch*

**Lucky Baldwin's Trappiste Pub** – January 17, *dinner*

**Cuyama Grill** – January 18, *lunch*

**Dog Haus** – January 18, *dinner*

**Jersey Mike's** – January 19, *lunch*

**StoneFire Grill** – January 19, *dinner*

**Trader Joe's (lunch on Santa Cruz Island)** – January 20, *lunch*

**Plate 38** – January 20, *dinner*



## **BIRDING LOCATIONS**

### **Sunday, January 15 – Coastal/Urban Day**

- Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve
- UC-Irvine Ecological Preserve
- Huntington Central Park
- John Baca Park
- Harriett M. Wiedner Regional Park
- Bolsa Chica—walkbridge/inner bay

### **Monday, January 16 – Clean-up Day (rescheduled)**

- Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area
- Peck Road Water Conservation Park
- Livingston-Graham Quarry
- Vina Vieja Park
- Luke's neighborhood
- Temple City Parrot Roost

### **Tuesday, January 17 – Desert Day**

- Antelope Valley rural roads
- Antelope Valley Roosevelt Church
- Antelope Valley Cattle Yard
- Prime Desert Woodland Preserve
- Angeles National Forest—Los Pinetos fire suppression camp

### **Wednesday, January 18 – California Condor Day**

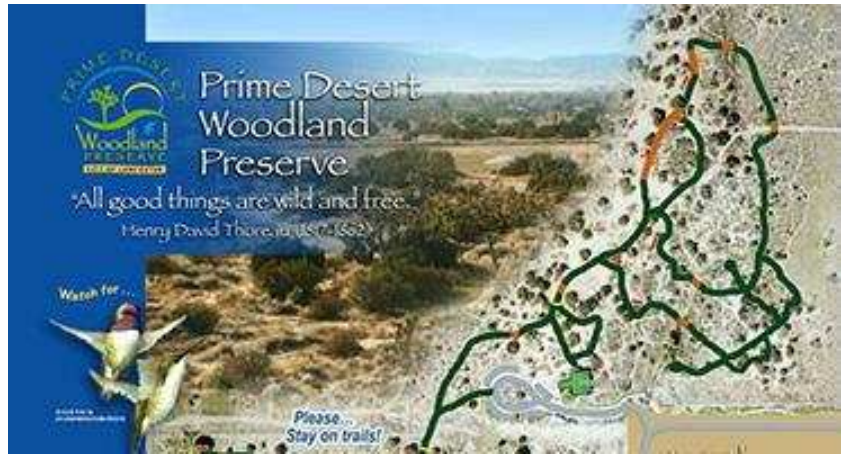
- Copus Road
- Cadet Road
- Petroleum Club Road
- Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge—sign overlook
- Wasioja Road—New Cuyoma
- Caliente Ranch Wetland
- Hudson Ranch Road—Los Padres National Forest

### **Thursday, January 19 – Mountain Day**

- Angeles National Forest—Clear Creek Station
- Angeles Crest Highway—Barley Flats Road
- Angeles National Forest—Charlton Flat
- Chilao Visitor Center
- San Gabriel Mountains—Colby Picnic Area
- Angeles National Forest—Monte Cristo Campground
- Huntington Botanical Gardens—parking lot
- Sawpit Wash Trail
- San Gabriel River Channel—Encanto Park Bridge
- Luke's neighborhood

### **Friday, January 20 – Santa Cruz Island Day**

- Ventura Harbor
- Santa Barbara Channel
- Channel Islands National Park—Santa Cruz Island—Scorpion Anchorage





## **TRIP BIRDS - 186** (your personal total may differ)

Snow Goose

Ross's Goose

**Greater White-fronted Goose**

**Brant**

Canada Goose

Cinnamon Teal

Northern Shoveler

Gadwall

American Wigeon

Mallard

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

Canvasback

Redhead

Ring-necked Duck

Lesser Scaup

**Surf Scoter**

Bufflehead

Hooded Merganser

Common Merganser

Red-breasted Merganser

Ruddy Duck

California Quail

**Indian Peafowl**

Pied-billed Grebe

Horned Grebe

Eared Grebe

Western Grebe

Clark's Grebe

Rock Pigeon



**Band-tailed Pigeon**

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Mourning Dove

**Greater Roadrunner**

White-throated Swift

Anna's Hummingbird

**Allen's Hummingbird**

Ridgway's Rail

American Coot

Black-necked Stilt

**American Avocet**

American Oystercatcher

Black Oystercatcher

Black-bellied Plover

Killdeer

Long-billed Curlew

**Marbled Godwit**

Ruddy Turnstone

Black Turnstone

Surfbird

Sanderling

Least Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper

Red Phalarope

Spotted Sandpiper

Greater Yellowlegs

Willet

Pomarine Jaeger

Cassin's Auklet

Rhinoceros Auklet

Bonaparte's Gull

**Heerman's Gull**





**Short-billed Gull** *(formerly Mew Gull)*

Ring-billed Gull

Western Gull

California Gull

Herring Gull

Caspian Tern

Pacific Loon

Common Loon

Black-vented Shearwater

Brandt's Cormorant

Pelagic Cormorant

Double-crested Cormorant

American White Pelican

**Brown Pelican**

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret

Snowy Egret

Reddish Egret

Green Heron

Black-crowned Night-Heron

**White-faced Ibis**

California Condor

Turkey Vulture

Osprey

Golden Eagle

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Bald Eagle

Red-shouldered Hawk



Zone-tailed Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Ferruginous Hawk

Belted Kingfisher

Red-breasted Sapsucker

**Acorn Woodpecker**

Nuttall's Woodpecker

White-headed Woodpecker

Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)

American Kestrel

Merlin

Peregrine Falcon

Prairie Falcon

**Yellow-chevroned Parakeet**

Red-crowned Parrot

Lilac-crowned Parrot

Red-lored Parrot

**Yellow-headed Parrot**

Mitred Parakeet

Red-masked Parakeet

Black Phoebe

Say's Phoebe

Vermilion Flycatcher

Cassin's Kingbird

Hutton's Vireo

Loggerhead Shrike

Steller's Jay

Island Scrub-Jay

California Scrub-Jay

Yellow-billed Magpie

American Crow





Common Raven

Mountain Chickadee

Oak Titmouse

Horned Lark

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Bushtit

Wrentit

Swinhoe's White-eye

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

White-breasted Nuthatch

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

California Gnatcatcher

Rock Wren

House Wren

Bewick's Wren

Cactus Wren

European Starling

**California Thrasher**

LeConte's Thrasher

Northern Mockingbird

**Western Bluebird**

Mountain Bluebird

Townsend's Solitaire

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

Cedar Waxwing

Phainopepla

Scaly-breasted Munia

**Pin-tailed Whydah**

House Sparrow

American Pipit

House Finch

Cassin's Finch



Lesser Goldfinch

Lawrence's Goldfinch

American Goldfinch

Chipping Sparrow

**Lark Sparrow**

**Fox Sparrow (Sooty)**

Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Harris's Sparrow

Bell's Sparrow

Vesper Sparrow

Savannah Sparrow

Song Sparrow

California Towhee

**Spotted Towhee**

Yellow-headed Blackbird

Western Meadowlark

Red-winged Blackbird

Tricolored Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Brewer's Blackbird

Great-tailed Grackle

Orange-crowned Warbler

Nashville Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

Yellow-rumped Warbler

**Townsend's Warbler**

Wilson's Warbler

Common Yellowthroat





## **MAMMALS**

Pocket Gopher

Eastern Fox Squirrel

**Western Gray Squirrel**

California Ground Squirrel

Merriam's Ground Squirrel

**Desert Cottontail**

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

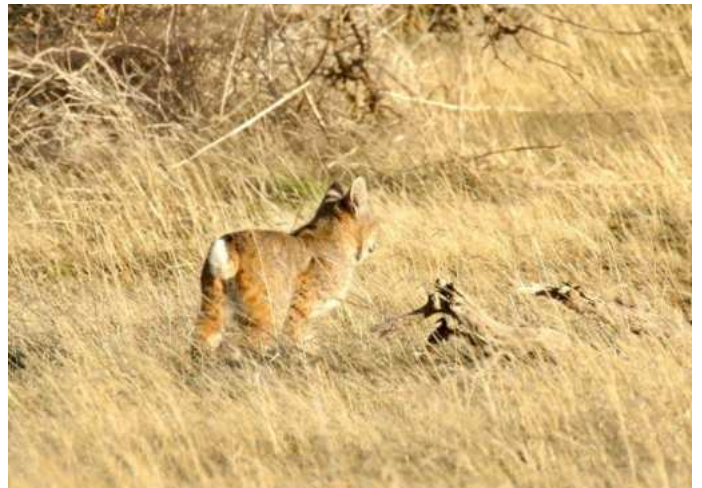
**Island Fox**

Coyote

**Bobcat**

Mule Deer

**Gray Whale**









## Our trusty drivers!



**Carl Bendorf**



**Carrie Spencer**

## Photo Credits – thanks to all!

**Carl Bendorf** – *Wrentit · Ridgway's Rail · Black Phoebe · California Quail · Tricolored Blackbird · Prairie Falcon · Surf Scoter · Indian Peafowl · Greater Roadrunner · Allen's Hummingbird · Marbled Godwit · Townsend's Warbler · CB selfie*

**Daryl Bernard** – *Vermilion Flycatcher · Red-lore Parrot · Bell's Sparrow · Bitter Creek NWR panorama · Scanning for Mountain Quail · White-headed Woodpecker · Santa Cruz Island panorama · Bitter Creek NWR sign · Channel Islands NP sign · American Avocet · Heerman's Gull · Acorn Woodpecker · Yellow-headed Parrot · California Thrasher · Spotted Towhee · Western Gray Squirrel · Mark Cranford loitering · Common Raven · Carrie Spencer at Santa Cruz Island*

**Briana Fisher** – *Pin-tailed Whydah · Suzy & Daryl*

**Eric Gustafson** – *California Gnatcatcher · Cactus Wren · Ross's Goose · Oak Titmouse · Mountain Chickadee · Steller's Jay · Nuttall's Woodpecker · Short-billed Gull · Brown Pelican · Fox Sparrow*

**Lynne Holmberg** – *Group walking down the road · Luke & The Law*

**Katrina Moilanen** – *Rock Wren · California Towhee · Greater White-fronted Goose · Band-tailed Pigeon · White-faced Ibis · Yellow-chevrons Parakeet · Western Bluebird · Lark Sparrow · Desert Cottontail · Island Fox · Bobcat*

**Carrie Spencer** – *Urban Birding at Temple City · On the trail at UC-Irvine Ecological Preserve*

**Nancy Tazzia** – *Red-breasted Sapsucker · Gray Whale fluke*

**Stock Photo** – *Prime Desert Woodland Preserve*