

Baja California & the Sea of Cortez

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 March - 5 April 2015



Smooth-tailed Mobula by Dee Hughes



Long-beaked Common Dolphin by Phil Hughes



Humpback Whale by Phil Hughes



Phainopepla by Phil Hughes

Report compiled by Lee Morgan
Images courtesy of Allan Winkworth, Phil Hughes and Dee Hughes



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Tour Leaders: Lee Morgan Naturetrek Naturalist
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M/V Searcher: Captain Aaron Remy
 Kenny
 Joe
 Ryan
 Mike
 Charles
 Ed

Twenty two participants joined the cruise

Day 1

Monday 23rd March

LHR- San Diego

After a long flight, the group arrived to a sunny San Diego at a very respectable 5.55pm and, after a few minor delays, we eventually transferred to the nearby Ramada Airport hotel and were quickly checked into tour rooms. After a quick briefing from Lee, everyone spent a little time getting their bearings around the nearby harbour and some took time to grab a bite to eat in one of the nearby restaurants. However, after such a long day of travel, it wasn't too long before most people opted for an early night.

Day 2

Tuesday 24th March

San Diego – Board Searcher

It was a very foggy start, but it soon lifted to reveal a beautiful sunny morning in San Diego's Point Loma harbour. Some of the group quite naturally opted for a later start and the chance to catch up on some much needed rest, but many woke early and enjoyed a relaxed breakfast whilst readying themselves for our birding tour.

At 9am, we met in the hotel lobby before setting off on foot for some gentle birding around the picturesque harbour. The birdwatching started slowly but we kick-started our day with some lovely views of Western Grebes, Anna's Hummingbirds, Black Phoebe, and Belted Kingfisher.

A short bus journey took us across the city to the San Diego River estuary, where we scanned the mudflats for Blue-winged Teal, Marbled Godwits, Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel and Willet. Amidst all this, we also spotted four species of tern (Caspian, Royal, Elegant and Forster's Tern), Great Blue and Little Blue Herons, Snowy and Great Egrets, and had some great looks Buffleheads too.

We headed on to Lindo Lake shortly before lunch where we watched the noisy flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds and Great-tailed Grackles sitting in the bulrushes along the margins of the lake, and watched the White Pelicans feeding in the shallows. We also had a nice introduction to a variety of gulls too, including California and Ring-

billed Gull, and we sat and enjoyed our lunch by the lake watching the American Coots, Wood Ducks, Ruddy Ducks and Mallards dabbling in the margins.

Another short bus ride and we arrived at Silverwoods, a small nature reserve set amidst the oak chaparral covered hills to the north of the city. Here we sat and enjoyed a picnic lunch around a feeding station in the heart of the reserve, giving everyone time for some very relaxed birding and the chance to watch California Ground Squirrels, Spotted and California Towhees, Scrub Jays, House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches and White-crowned Sparrows as they visited the feeders. We even managed to get some wonderful views of a large Speckled Rattlesnake that sat coiled in the shade beneath one of the birdfeeders before it eventually moved off into cover (good spotting Jeff!).

We arrived back at the hotel by mid-afternoon, when we transferred our luggage to M/V Searcher. Most then took the chance to explore the harbour, purchase some last minute items, and to have a bite to eat before we all boarded M/V Searcher in the late afternoon ready to set off.

After our welcome orientation and safety briefing, and a chance to meet Captain Aaron and his crew, we cast off and headed out into the twinkling lights of San Diego Harbour. A quick detour via the bait pens at the entrance to the harbour meant we were treated to some lamp lit views (and smells) of California Sea Lions and a few Black-Crowned Night herons and Great Blue Herons, before eventually heading out of the harbour into some gentle pacific swells.

Day 3

Wednesday 25th March

Ensenada – Todos Santo

Having travelled all night with the prevailing north-westerly swells on our stern, most people were awake early and were up enjoying coffee and the sunrise as we docked briefly in Ensenada Harbour in order to clear Mexican customs. A few of us watched the Ospreys flying between the lampposts along the harbour wall and spotted the odd Surf Scoter and Pacific Loon diving in the sheltered waters of the harbour. It wasn't long though before our paper shuffle was complete and we departed Ensenada and ventured once more out into the Pacific.

It was developing into a lovely day as we drifted slowly past Isla Todos Santos in the sunshine. We were able to catch a glimpse of a few Black Oystercatchers, a few Brown Boobies and a Pelagic Cormorant amidst the rowdy colonies of Western Gulls and Brown Pelicans that stood around on the rocks. The island's beaches had a few Harbour Seals hauled out on them, as well as a few Northern Elephant Seal pups too.

As we eventually drifted past the islands and headed south, we soon spotted the blows of numerous Gray Whales. These were north-bound animals leaving the lagoons and we watched a few animals as they passed us by, but we allowed them to travel in peace. As we continued our journey though, we didn't have to wait long before we spotted another blow and ventured over to get a brief encounter with a couple of Humpbacks. However, these individuals were being a little long-winded and difficult to view so we didn't linger too long before heading onwards in search of more.

For the rest of the day, we continued our journey south on a rolling Pacific swell. We were joined briefly by a passing group of Common Dolphins, that casually travelled on the bow for a while, as we motored south. It was a pleasantly quiet afternoon for wildlife, giving people a much needed chance to rest. However, those who remained vigilant were able to watch as a constant passage of Black-vented Shearwaters went wheeling by and as flocks of Grey Phalaropes and hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls fluttered past the bow. We also managed to spot a few Cassin's Auklets and both Scripps's and Guadalupe Murrelets as we travelled, too.

Our whale watching wasn't over for the day though. We spotted a tall blow, way off in the distance, and we ventured over to take a closer look. Helped by our captain's expert experience in handling the boat and his incredible skill at predicting the seemingly impossible (e.g. exactly what direction and speed a whale was travelling at, after only a brief distant glimpse at the surface) we were soon privileged to an extraordinarily close encounter with a huge Fin Whale that surfaced several times immediately alongside the boat, leaving us all breathless with excitement. It was an amazing first view of our very first truly enormous whale!

We continued our journey southwards and, with a setting sun on our starboard side and no land visible to our port, we enjoyed a wonderful meal and informative talk on pinniped biology from Rob, our local naturalist, before wearily making our way to bed.

Day 4

Thursday 26th March

Isla San Benitos

It was another very early start to the day. A more gentle night of travel meant everyone was starting to feel human again and it was good to see lots of smiling faces enjoying a good breakfast and a flotilla of Gulls, and Laysan and Black-footed Albatross following in the wake of the boat as we prepared ourselves for our day ashore on Isla San Benito.

The seas were a little choppy and Heermann's Gulls wheeled around the boat as we set anchor off Isla San Benito and readied ourselves to board the skiffs for the first time. The beautiful sunny weather and light breeze provided cool conditions for our walk and there was plenty of wildlife to enjoy. The landing beach was quiet, but the village was a mass of colourful endemic wildflowers and there were lots of San Benito Savannah Sparrows (an endemic island race) singing too.

During our circumnavigation of the island we found plenty of Northern Elephant Seals (pups, females and sub-adults) the odd California Sea Lion, had some excellent views of the rare Guadalupe Fur Seals, and even a Harbour Seal too. It was a fantastic "pinniped day" (I can use that word now because, thanks to Rob, everyone should now know what it means!) Many people also took the time to admire the flowers and, as always, the island's Ospreys proved to be a very big hit with the photographers!

Our stop at the old lighthouse for lunch provided everyone with a chance to see Horned Larks singing from the scrub patches nearby. Birding around the rest of the island was good too, with good views of Peregrine, some Costa's Hummingbirds, Osprey after Osprey, a few Black Brant and a wonderful close up look at a Cassin's Auklet too.

The wind persisted all day, but the sea flattened off nicely as we departed the island, making for some pleasant travel conditions. As we motored away from the island, we had a chance encounter with a huge Blue Whale that swam close alongside us, just below the surface, for over twenty minutes, allowing us all to see exactly why they are called “Blue” Whales and camera shutters were set whirring as the animal repeatedly surfaced next to the boat as we followed its course. Extraordinary!

The sea conditions remained favourable and we continued our journey southwards on calm seas, enjoying the occasional company of a few Long-beaked Common Dolphins and the odd flurry of tiny Cassin’s Auklets in front of the boat.

Day 5

Friday 27th March

Laguna San Ignacio

After a wonderfully peaceful night of travel, we approached San Ignacio Lagoon on a grease-calm ocean. Soon after breakfast, we motored slowly and carefully over the shallow sandbar at the entrance to the lagoon, amidst a throng of Gray Whales, both cows and calves, that hampered our progress into the lagoon. As always, all eyes were fixed on the sea, as whales surfaced all around us and we motored slowly to our anchorage.

After a quick briefing on the lagoon, we were quickly ushered into pangas for our first close up introduction to the Gray Whales. The local panga drivers were excellent and skilfully manoeuvred into position to get the best look at some of the whales. The whales were unbelievably relaxed and it wasn’t long before the Gray Whales (mostly cows with calves) approached our boats to take a closer look at us. We then spent a wonderful 90 minutes interacting with whales on their own terms, as they excitedly surfaced close to the boats allowing everyone to stroke their heads and rub their tummies. As always, these whales provided a truly extraordinary wildlife experience, reducing some to tears of joy and others to stunned disbelief, and we all returned to the Searcher with the telltale smiles of some very happy whale watchers.

After a quick break, we boarded the pangas again and spent another exhilarating session out with the whales, providing everyone with the chance for more contact with these amazing creatures and the chance to watch some incredible behaviour including whales fluking and breaching and spy-hopping. After lunch, the friendly whale activity was a little less frenetic (a good reminder to everyone as to just how in control of the interactions these whales are) but we still enjoyed some amazing close encounters and also witnessed some extraordinary repeat breaching.

But our day did not finish there. After dinner we all made our way out to the rear deck of the boat and, with the ships generator and lights turned off, we spent the evening under a spectacular starry sky enjoying the peace and quiet and listening for the sounds of whales blowing in the lagoon around us.

Day 6

Saturday 28th March

Laguna San Ignacio

We whale-watched from the pangas from about 8am until mid-afternoon (stopping only briefly for snacks and lunch) when we were all provided with lots more, lovely whale encounters: breaching, spy-hopping, splashing around the boats and some great friendly encounters too. Some also got to see young whales practice feeding and surfacing with mouths full of silt. However, the Gray Whales were just part of the enjoyment of our stay in this beautiful lagoon. Bottlenose Dolphins, California Sea Lions, Green Turtles, Royal Terns White Ibis, Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans flying by, numerous Great Northern and Pacific Loons, Brant Geese, and Surf Scoters are all just a part of the wonderful scenery of this truly magical place.

It was with great reluctance that we all said our farewells to our panga drivers and the beautiful San Ignacio lagoon as the Searcher raised anchor and we motored out of the lagoon in the company of breaching whales and bow-riding dolphin. The weather was calm but we had to clear some excitingly large swells as we left the shallow entrance to the lagoon. However, in the expert hands of our skipper we were soon past the waves and motoring into the night on an unusually calm Pacific.

Day 7

Sunday 29th March

Magdalena Bay

It was another early start for many as we made our way south along the peninsula. Having travelled through the night on calm seas, we woke to light winds, crystal clear water and a very flat ocean; perfect for a day whale watching.

We started the day's wildlife watching early as we moved for miles through a large and spread out group of many hundreds (possibly many thousands) of Common Dolphins that entertained us with their antics as they occasionally moved in to ride on our bow and leap through our wake.

Shortly after breakfast, we spotted our first whales when a couple of Humpbacks surfaced on our bow and we watched them for a while as they surfaced and fluked. We passed a few Green Turtles that were warming themselves at the surface and afforded us some good views as we slowly passed by.

Next we encountered Blue Whales: a cow with a calf then a single, then we passed more humpbacks, then another single blue, with lots more dolphin and turtles, and then found some good birds including some distant sightings of two Cook's Petrels, while we finished with three Humpbacks in the sunset. Another amazing day!

Day 8

Monday 30th March

Gorda Banks

We rounded the southernmost tip of the peninsula in the early hours of the morning. The sea conditions remained good for whale watching as we moved along the southern end of the peninsula toward the Gorda Banks but a deceptively large ground swell from the south gave us a few concerns for our afternoon activities.

Nevertheless, the conditions were amazing for whale watching and we could see Humpback spouts rising in the distance. As we travelled towards them, we enjoyed some lovely views of Royal Terns, Frigatebirds and Bonaparte's Gulls circling close to the boat, and watched the odd group of Pink-footed Shearwaters streak by. We spent the early part of morning watching multiple groups of relaxed Humpbacks, mostly cow, calf and escort groups, as they surfaced and fluked simultaneously close to the boat.

For the rest of the morning we searched the area for more active whales and were rewarded with some amazing views of multiple breaching, fluking, pec-slapping and tail-lobbing: just about everything we could ever hope to see Humpback Whales doing. Our whale viewing continued all the way to Los Frailes with different animals encountered along the way. But the undoubted highlight of the day was watching a particularly hyperactive Humpback calf breach repeatedly around its mother for over half an hour.

By midday we managed to break free from our wonderful whale watching and we travelled closer inshore to Los Frailes to investigate the possibility of a shore visit. Unfortunately, as suspected, the prevailing southerly swells were hampering our ability to safely get ashore, so we ventured onwards into the Sea of Cortez in search of more whales.

It wasn't time lost and, within just a few miles of Frailes, John's sharp eyes spotted something, and his excited cry of 'Blue Whale!' echoed around the bridge. It was a distant view of a whale back and the telltale patch of azure blue that he had spotted but he pointed us in the right direction and Captain Aaron took us several miles to investigate the zone. We spotted no spouts on our way and it was a long wait in the zone that John had directed us to; over half an hour with no sight of a whale. Was John seeing things? Eventually a Bryde's Whale surfaced briefly in the distance. Had this been what John saw? Even he began to question it. We waited a little longer. Then, just as we were about to turn the boat around, a huge blow appeared on our bow and the endless grey back of a huge Blue Whale rolled into view. Well spotted John! It was an excellent find, and we spent a while with the whale as it surfaced close to the boat, affording us all some wonderful views, before it eventually moved off into the glare of a setting sun, and we continued our journey northwards into the Sea of Cortez.

Day 9

Tuesday 31st March

Punta Colorado

After a night motoring, we awoke to the sound of the slowing engines and clatter of the anchor chain, as we set anchor off the beautiful sandstone cliffs of Punta Colorado, at the southern end of Isla San Jose. The light cloud cover meant that we didn't see the sunrise fully illuminate the beautiful sandstone cliffs, but we watched as the Brown Pelicans and flights of Brown and Blue-footed Boobies flew past, and enjoyed breakfast at anchor before setting ashore for a morning walk through the desert arroyo.

In the cool of the morning, we were able to spend some time admiring the wonderful wind and water sculpted sandstone cliffs and take a closer look at some of the wonderful desert plants. Whilst some set off at a pace (seemingly to see how far across the island they could get), many of us lingered longer in the arroyo and had a good time looking for reptiles and birding the desert scrub. Here we got our first looks at some typical desert birds such as Ash-throated Flycatchers, Verdin, Black-throated Sparrows, Grey Thrashers and Costas

Hummingbirds as well as spotting a few reptiles like Chuckwallas, Orange-throated Whiptails and Zebra-tailed Lizards, darting between the hot granite boulders. Some of us also spent a little time looking for spiders and had some lovely views of a beautiful Black Widow. However, as is so often the case, it was the melodious song and bright red colouration of a male Northern Cardinal (a fairly common and widespread bird species across much of North America) that really stole the show.

Having heated up nicely in the desert arroyo, we returned to the Searcher to get ready for snorkelling. A change in the prevailing swell meant that we had to relocate to a more sheltered reef nearby. Nevertheless, the wonderful clear water, wide variety of colourful reef fish, sea stars and plenty of beautiful Reef Stingrays made for a great first snorkel session. For those that didn't snorkel, a skiff ride was provided, that explored the coastal cliffs, looked at Sally Lightfoot Crabs and offered the chance to photograph the coastal scenery.

We headed northwards in the afternoon in search of whales. Sightings commenced with a large herd of Long-beaked Common Dolphins that casually moved in to investigate the Searcher and lingered to ride in the wake and play on the bow. Then we spotted a big group of Pilot Whales surfacing with some Bottlenose Dolphins. The Pilots were spread out and feeding over a very large area (perhaps several hundred animals) but small groups of individuals did move in very close to investigate the boat, affording us some lovely views of females with their tiny grey calves. We watched until the early evening.

Another beautiful sunset, a hearty meal and another one of Rob's great lectures rounded the day off nicely.

Day 10

Wednesday 1st April

Catalina

It was cool and overcast as we lay at anchor off Isla Santa Catalina, perfect for our morning hike. We found perfect examples of the endemic Isla Santa Catalina 'Rattleless' Rattlesnake within a very short period of time and had plenty of time to marvel at the wonderful Giant Elephant Cacti and the Giant Wavy Barrel Cacti that fill the desert arroyo. It was a great morning's birding too, and we had some great views of Loggerhead Shrikes, Cardinals, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Verdin, Ladder-backed and Gila Woodpecker. As the sun got higher in the sky, more reptiles became active and we spotted Desert Iguana, Hunsaker's Spiny Lizard, Orange-throated Whiptails, Emerald Tails (the endemic island race of the Side-blotched Lizard), and more Chuckwallas as we made our way back to the boat. It was an excellent morning ashore.

On returning to the Searcher, people readied themselves for snorkelling, whilst some took the opportunity for another coastal cruise. Some amazing snorkelling conditions, with crystal clear water and lots of colourful reef fish, also meant that the snorkelling party had a really great time.

After a quick bite of lunch at anchor, we set out to search for whales once again and were quickly into a large herd of several hundred Common Dolphins that breached alongside the Searcher, as we travelled towards Isla Monserrat. However, larger whales were proving to be elusive. Nonetheless, the perfect sea conditions did mean we did have some amazingly good views (well as good a view as you can ever expect of these diminutive whales) of several Dwarf Sperm Whales, as we travelled. However, it was larger whales we were searching for and,

despite a huge amount of life in the area (with thousands of Phalaropes, leaping Mobulas and lots of Least and Black Storm Petrels, and more distant views of Bottlenose Dolphins and Pilot Whales) and our very best efforts, the bigger whale species remained frustratingly elusive. Despite the frustration to the crew, a huge group of leaping Mobula Rays entertained everyone on board until another beautiful sunset. As the sun dropped behind the peninsula, we opted to head to our anchorage off Agua Verde and got ourselves settled in for the night.

Day 11

Thursday 2nd April

Agua Verde

We woke to a beautiful Baja morning. An early trip ashore in the warm desert sunshine provided some good birding, with lovely views of a number of typical species including Phainopepla, Hooded Orioles, Cardinals, Blue-grey and California Gnatcatchers, Cactus Wrens and Turkey Vultures. A slight detour from our usual route also provided us with some lovely views of Brown-headed Cowbirds, Vermilion Flycatchers and White-winged, Mourning, Common Ground and Eurasian Collared Doves too. The sun was shining and the butterflies and lizards were active too, with the first of the season's Pipevine Swallowtails, Soldiers and Queens on the wing (undoubtedly some of the most beautiful butterflies of the region) and lots of lizards scuttling around, there was plenty for everyone to see. We even managed a few good mammal species too including some great views of a juvenile Woodrat climbing in a tree and a Black-tailed Jack Rabbit too.

Those that ventured off on their own also had some good sightings. A large Red Diamond Rattlesnake, a brief glimpse of a Coyote, and lots of wonderful desert plants too. It was a wonderful morning on shore.

Our midday snorkel was equally spectacular with warm conditions, good visibility, Jewel Morays, Scorpionfish and huge schools of colourful King Angels. A few of us even managed to find a Cortez Stingray too and it was with great reluctance that many of us left the water.

We cruised throughout the afternoon in the company of hundreds of Common Dolphins that cheerily jumped in our wake and jostled for position on our bow, providing lots of sport for the enthusiastic photographers. We continued to scan the horizon for the blows of large whales but we found nothing to draw our gaze. However, as the sun began to set in a blaze of colour and all the delicious smells of a Texas barbeque began to emanate from the galley, everyone's attention was eventually drawn to the cold margaritas being served on the back deck and we anchored up for the evening to enjoy a wonderful evening of alfresco dining under a beautiful moonlit sky.

Day 12

Friday 3rd April

Isla San Jose mangroves – Los Islotes

Having travelled south through the night we awoke at anchor off the southern tip of Isla San Jose. Having dressed appropriately for the potential swarms of 'no-see-um' midges that often plague the Mangroves when the conditions are still, we boarded the skiffs on a surprisingly choppy ocean ready for a pre-breakfast trip into the mangroves. Our trip provided us with a wonderful morning watching Snowy, Reddish and Great Egrets, Yellow-crowned Night-herons, White Ibis, Green and Little Blue Herons and lots and lots of great views of Mangrove Warblers. There were also a few shorebirds around and, amidst the tangled roots on the muddy shoreline, we

spotted Whimbrel, a few Willet and lots of Least Sandpipers too. It was a truly beautiful morning and the light breeze that picked up also meant that the visit was relatively midge free too. Perfect!

We raised anchor and headed south towards Los Islotes. The sea had flattened off again and the air and sea temperature were warm too. Once again, we scoured the horizon for larger whales as we headed south, but found nothing but large groups of Bottlenose and Common Dolphins.

Los Islotes was manic when we arrived. It was Easter weekend and everyone and their grandparents were out from La Paz visiting the California Sea Lions. Nevertheless, we waited for the crowds to dwindle and slipped into our anchorage without trouble. We enjoyed a slow skiff ride around the islands, that provided us all with some lovely views and opportunities to photograph the Blue-footed and Brown Boobies nesting high on the cliffs, some intimate views of adult Sea Lions cuddling their pups and a few animals playing in the water too. We then returned to the Searcher and readied ourselves for snorkelling.

We dropped into the snorkelling zone amidst great shoals of colourful reef fish. The water was crystal clear and the sea temperature was good. We had a few encounters with curious Sea Lion pups and caught a few glimpses of females coming and going but many of the animals were hauled out and enjoying each other's company rather than venturing out into the water to play with the clambering hoards (I can't say I blamed them at all). Nevertheless, we had the viewing area to ourselves for most of the snorkel and we were all able to spread out and enjoy the wonderful reef and the myriad of fish and invertebrates it sustains. It was a truly gorgeous snorkel.

We boarded the Searcher once more, raised anchor and started heading southwards. But our journey was not over yet. We continued to scan for larger whales as we moved slowly through the rich waters of the Cerralvo Channel, and it seemed like an eternity before something caught our eye. It was a tall spout, not what we were hoping for, but we moved in to investigate it and were rewarded with another exceptional look at a Bryde's Whale. We continued to scan. Then, at an incredible distance, a large fluke was spotted. It was the tail of a Sperm Whale raised high in the air (exactly what we had all been searching for) and we hurried over in hope that another animal might still be at the surface. We waited patiently in the area for over half an hour. The light was fading fast and we hadn't seen a thing, but we knew it was worth one final try to get everyone a glimpse of just one more whale species. It was worth the wait. Sure enough, an animal surfaced again (unfortunately at a distance) but this time we could all clearly see the distinctive low, angled blow, and the dark line of the whale's lumpy back lying at the surface. We approached the whale in an attempt to get a better view, counting every blow as we gained more ground on it, but after ten blows at the surface we could see the whale rocking (all the signs that it was about to dive again) and, sure enough, after one final breath it raised its huge fluke high in the air for all to see and disappeared into the depths. It was a wonderfully exciting way to end our whale watching, an exciting view of yet another mysterious and magnificent marine mammal; a true 'sea monster' of the deep and a real favourite with many of the crew. It felt like a just reward for all our efforts!

As always, our final meal together on the boat provided us with the perfect opportunity to share our excitement from the day, look at photos, recount our stories and describe our highlights from the tour. All agreed...this had been an amazing tour.

Day 13

Saturday 4th April

We watched as the Searcher finally pulled into the early morning bustle of Cabo San Lucas' busy harbour. We watched the boats and Pelicans and enjoyed a leisurely continental breakfast as the Searcher crew set to work, refuelling the boat for their long journey back to San Diego.

We said our final farewells to the crew before they set off for their own intrepid journey back up the peninsula and back to San Diego. Then we boarded our taxis for the journey into San Jose del Cabo.

By mid-morning we were stopped in the picturesque colonial town square of San Jose del Cabo. Most followed Lee and Rob down to the estuary for some gentle, last minute birding along the parts of the estuary that hadn't been made inaccessible by September's terrible hurricane, and there were plenty of nice views of Tricolored and Green Herons, Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Hooded Oriole, Cattle Egret and numerous other birds to make it worth the short walk in the hot sunshine.

By late morning we boarded our taxis once again and set off to the airport for our return flights back to San Diego, where we all said our final farewells and prepared for our long flights home.

Day 14

Sunday 5h April

Arrival back into the UK after an overnight flight.

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Friendly Grey Whales by Allan Winkworth

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	March/April											
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
1	Great Northern Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>		✓		✓	✓							
2	Red-throated Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓											
3	Pacific Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>		✓										
4	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	✓							✓				
5	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	✓								✓	✓	✓	
6	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓			✓							
7	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>				✓								
8	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>		✓	5									
9	Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>		✓	3									
10	Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>						2						
11	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus creatopus</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓				
12	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>		✓	✓									
13	Black-vented Shearwater	<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Black Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma melania</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Least Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma microsoma</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓		
18	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	✓											
19	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		
21	Blue-footed Booby	<i>Sula nebouxii</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
23	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
24	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>		✓										
25	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓										✓	
26	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓										✓	
27	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓										✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	March/April											
			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
28	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	✓				✓						✓	✓
29	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	✓										✓	
30	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>					✓							✓
31	Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>					✓						✓	
32	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓											
33	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax violacea</i>											✓	
34	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>					✓						✓	✓
35	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>												✓
36	White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>											✓	
37	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	✓											
38	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓											
39	Black Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓							
40	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	✓											
41	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓											✓
42	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓											
43	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓											
44	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>												✓
45	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>	✓											✓
46	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	✓											✓
47	Redhead	<i>Aythya Americana</i>												
48	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	✓										✓	
49	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓										
50	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	✓											
51	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>		✓		✓	✓							
52	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>	h											
53	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	✓											
55	Coopers Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>										✓		
56	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓
57	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓	✓					✓				
58	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓											✓

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			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
59	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	✓											✓
60	American Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>		✓	✓		✓							
61	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>			✓		✓							
62	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓										
63	Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>					✓							
64	Willet	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>	✓				✓						✓	✓
65	Wandering Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus incanus</i>											✓	
66	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	✓									✓		✓
67	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>										✓		
68	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus</i>	✓	✓									✓	
69	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	✓				✓							
70	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	✓				✓						✓	
71	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>						✓						
72	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				✓	✓							
73	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	✓			✓	✓							
74	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	✓			✓							✓	✓
75	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	✓											✓
76	Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓					
77	South Polar Skua	<i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i>		✓				✓						
78	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>		✓			✓						✓	
79	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Larus philadelphia</i>	✓	✓						✓				✓
80	Sabines Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>						✓					✓	
81	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Laughing Gull	<i>Larus aticilla</i>								✓				
83	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓			✓								
84	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
85	Yellow-footed Gull	<i>Larus livens</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓					
87	Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
88	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	✓											
89	Elegant Tern	<i>Sterna elegans</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	

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90	Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	✓													
91	Scripps's Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus scrippsii</i>		✓												
92	Guadalupe Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus hypoleucus</i>			✓				✓							
93	Craveri's Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i>		✓						✓						
94	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>		✓	✓				✓							
95	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>											✓			
96	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓		
97	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	✓									✓				✓
98	Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>										✓				✓
99	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓												✓
100	Lilac-crowned Parrot	<i>Amazona finschi</i>	✓													
101	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>									✓	✓				
102	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>	✓													
103	Costa's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte costae</i>			✓						✓					
104	Xantus' Hummingbird	<i>Hylocharis xantusii</i>											✓			✓
105	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>	✓												✓	✓
106	Gila Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>									✓	✓				✓
107	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides scalaris</i>										✓				
108	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>														
109	Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>									✓	✓	✓			
110	Grey Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax wrightii</i>														
111	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>											✓			
112	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	✓													
113	Cassin's Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	✓		✓											
114	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>			✓											
115	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>										✓				
116	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>											✓			
117	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	✓													✓
118	Western Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>	✓										✓			
119	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓									✓	✓			
120	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓									✓				✓

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121	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>									✓	✓	✓		✓
122	Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>											✓		✓
123	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>			✓						✓				
124	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	✓												
125	Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>											✓		
126	California Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila californica</i>									✓		✓		
127	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	✓								✓				
128	Grey Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma cinereum</i>									✓		✓		
129	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓												✓
130	Phainopepla	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>											✓		✓
131	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>											✓		✓
132	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	✓												✓
133	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	✓												
134	Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler	<i>Dendroica bryanti</i>												✓	
135	Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>													✓
136	Audubon's Warbler	<i>Dendroica auduboni</i>	✓											✓	
137	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>									✓	✓	✓		✓
138	California Towhee	<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	✓												
139	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	✓												
140	Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>									✓	✓	✓		
141	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	✓												
142	San Benito Savannah Sparrow	<i>P. sandwichensis sanctorum</i>			✓										
143	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	✓												
144	Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>												✓	
145	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	✓		✓									✓	
146	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		✓										✓
147	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	✓												
148	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	✓												
149	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>											✓		
150	Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	✓												
151	Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	✓											✓	✓

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152	House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	✓									✓	✓		✓
153	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	✓												

Mammals

1	Gray Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>		✓		✓	✓								
2	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>			1			3	1						
3	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>		✓											
4	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>						1	1					✓	
5	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		✓				20	30					✓	
6	Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>												1	
7	Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia simus</i>										30+			
8	Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>									✓	✓			
9	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
10	Long-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	1000's	✓	✓		
11	Short-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>		✓				✓							
12	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓										
13	California Sealion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	
14	Guadalupe Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus townsendi</i>			50+			1							
15	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>		✓	✓										
16	Botta's Pocket Gopher	<i>Thomomys bottae</i>	✓												
17	California Ground Squirrel	<i>Otospermophilus beecheyi</i>	✓												
18	Desert Cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>									✓				
19	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>											✓		
20	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>											✓		
21	Desert Woodrat	<i>Neotoma lepida</i>											✓		

Butterflies

1	Soldier	<i>Danaus eresinus</i>											✓		
2	Gulf Fritillary	<i>Agraulis vanillae</i>											✓		
3	Anise Swallowtail	<i>Papilio zelicaon</i>	✓												
4	Pipevine Swallowtail	<i>Battus philenor</i>											✓		
5	Cloudless Sulphur	<i>Phoebis sennae</i>	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
6	Large White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓									
7	Queen	<i>Danaus gilippus</i>										✓		
8	White Striped Longtail	<i>Choiodes albofasciatus</i>									✓			
9	Western Pygmy Blue	<i>Brephidium exilis</i>			✓						✓			
10	Longtail Esmeralda	<i>Urbanus esmeraldus</i>								✓				
11	White-lined Sphinx Moth	<i>Hyles lineta</i>				✓	✓							

Fish

1	Striped Marlin	<i>Tetrapturus audax</i>						✓	✓					
2	Swordfish	<i>Xiphias gladius</i>					✓							
3	Yellowtail Surgeonfish	<i>Prionurus punctatus</i>									✓	✓	✓	
4	King Angelfish	<i>Holacanthus passer</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Barberfish	<i>Johnrandallia nigrirostris</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Moorish Idol	<i>Zanclus canescens</i>									✓	✓	✓	
7	Green Jack	<i>Caranx caballus</i>								✓	✓			
8	Cortez Sea Chub	<i>Kyphosus elegans</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Pacific Porgy	<i>Calamus brachysomus</i>								✓				
10	Yellowfin Mojarra	<i>Gerres cinereus</i>								✓	✓		✓	
11	Striped Mullet	<i>Mugil cephalus</i>										✓		
12	Longfin Halfbeak	<i>Hemiramphus saltator</i>									✓	✓		
13	Needlefish	<i>Belonidae</i>								✓			✓	
14	Burrito Grunt	<i>Anisotremus interruptus</i>									✓			
15	Graybar Grunt	<i>Haemulon sexfasciatum</i>									✓	✓	✓	
16	Blue and Gold Snapper	<i>Lutjanus viridis</i>										✓	✓	
17	Giant Damselfish	<i>Micropathodon dorsalis</i>									✓	✓	✓	
18	Bumphead Damselfish	<i>Micropathodon bairdii</i>									✓	✓	✓	
19	Beaubrummel	<i>Segastes flavilatus</i>								✓	✓		✓	
20	Panamic Sergeant Major	<i>Abuldefduf troschelli</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Blue and Yellow Chromis	<i>Chromis limbaughi</i>									✓	✓	✓	
22	Scissortail Chromis	<i>Chromis atrilobata</i>									✓	✓	✓	
23	Flag Cabrilla	<i>Epinephelus labriformis</i>											✓	

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24	Leopard Grouper	<i>Mycteroperca rosacea</i>										✓		
25	Spotted Sand Bass	<i>Paralabrax maculatofasciatus</i>									✓	✓		
26	Bluechin Parrotfish	<i>Scarus ghobban</i>									✓	✓	✓	
27	Azure Parrotfish	<i>Scarus compressus</i>											✓	
28	Chameleon Wrasse	<i>Halichoeres dispilus</i>									✓		✓	
29	Cortez Rainbow Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma lucasanum</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Mexican Hogfish	<i>Bodianus diplotaenia</i>									✓	✓	✓	
31	Tinsel Squirrelfish	<i>Sargocentron suborbitalis</i>									✓		✓	
32	Redhead Goby	<i>Elacatinus puncticulatus</i>									✓	✓	✓	
33	Panamic Fanged Blenny	<i>Ophioblennius steindachneri</i>									✓	✓	✓	
34	Mexican Barnacle Blenny	<i>Acanthemblemaria macrospilus</i>									✓			
35	Giant Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhitus rivulatus</i>									✓		✓	
36	Coral Hawkfish	<i>Cirritichthys oxycephalus</i>									✓		✓	
37	Stone Scorpionfish	<i>Scorpaena mystes</i>										✓		
38	Orangeside Triggerfish	<i>Sufflamen verres</i>									✓	✓	✓	
39	Remora	<i>Remora remora</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Guineafowl Puffer	<i>Arothron meleagris</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Spotted Sharpnosed Puffer	<i>Canthigaster punctatissima</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Porcupine Puffer	<i>Diodon hystrix</i>										✓		✓
43	Ballonfish	<i>Diodon holocanthus</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Mexican Goatfish	<i>Mulloidichthys dentatus</i>									✓	✓	✓	
45	Reef Cornetfish	<i>Fistularia commersonii</i>									✓	✓	✓	
46	Zebra Moray	<i>Gymnomuraena zebra</i>									✓			
47	Thresher Shark	<i>Alopias macrourus</i>									✓	✓		
48	Scalloped Hammerhead	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>							✓	✓				
49	Cortez Stingray	<i>Urobatis maculatus</i>										✓		
50	Reef Stingray	<i>Urobatis concentricus</i>									✓			
51	Smoothtail Mobula	<i>Mobula thurstoni</i>									✓	✓	✓	