

Baja California & the Sea of Cortez

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 February - 5 March 2017

Report compiled by Lee Morgan



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Lee Morgan (leader) and Pattie Nesbit (local naturalist) with 23 Naturetrek clients
M/V Searcher: Captains Art, Kenny, David, Aaron, R2, Charlie and Dan

Day 1

Tuesday 21st February

London (Heathrow) - San Diego

After a long (and slightly delayed flight), the group eventually landed in a disappointingly cool San Diego at about 5.30pm and transferred to the nearby Ramada Airport hotel. While some opted for an early night, others managed to stay awake and spent a few hours exploring the harbour. Many took some time to get to know their fellow group members and enjoy some food, a glass of wine or a local craft beer at Mitch's seafood restaurant nearby. It was a fun first evening but after a long day of travel the party finished early and many retired to their rooms for an early night.

Day 2

Wednesday 22nd February

San Diego – Board M/V Searcher

We awoke to a damp morning in San Diego's Point Loma harbour. Some were up early and ventured out for a pre-breakfast look around the harbour while others took time for a leisurely breakfast and prepared for the day of birding ahead.

Most of the group joined our guided tour of some of San Diego's nature reserves and birding hotspots with the local Audubon Society. At 9am we met in the hotel lobby, ready to set off on foot for a look around the picturesque harbour. We quickly kick-started our day with some great views of a Snowy Egret and a Black-necked (Eared) Grebe, both of which were chasing fish around in the shallow waters of the Harbour just outside Mitch's. Moving along the water front we spotted Audubon's (Yellow-rumped), Orange-crowned, and Black-throated Grey Warblers in a garden outside a nearby hotel. As we explored the rest of the harbour and the picturesque gardens of some expensive harbour-side properties we also spotted plenty of House Finches, White-crowned and Song Sparrows and we also got a nice look at a Spotted Sandpiper too.

A short bus journey took us across the city to Lindo Lake where we watched Tricolored, Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds, American White Pelican, Great Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron. We had a nice introduction to a variety of ducks and geese including Wood Duck, Ruddy Duck, Green-winged Teal and Ring-necked Duck, to name but a few. We also had some nice views of Cassin's Kingbird, and our first mammals of the trip: some obliging California Ground Squirrels and a very industrious Pocket Gopher too.

After another short bus ride, we arrived at Silverwoods Reserve, a small nature reserve set amidst the oak chaparral-covered hills to the north of the city. It quiet when we arrived so we settled into enjoying our lunch near to the feeding stations and waited for birds to show. There was actually very little active around the feeders, largely because of a hungry looking Cooper's Hawk that was mooching on a nearby telegraph pole but we did get nice views of Acorn Woodpecker, Wrentit, Bushtit, California Towhee, Lesser Goldfinch and Anna's Hummingbirds. Phil also showed us a lovely little Spadefoot Toad he had rescued from a busy road just a few

nights before. After lunch, we boarded the bus once more and headed back across town towards the San Diego river channel.

We eventually got back on board the bus and headed back across town to the San Diego River estuary, where we enjoyed some great views of Least and Western Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel and Willet. We also saw Little Blue Heron, Great Egret, Brown Pelican, Western Osprey, Royal and Caspian Terns and numerous California Gulls before we eventually had to drag ourselves away and head back to the hotel.

After our whirlwind introduction to the birding and wildlife around San Diego, we arrived back by mid-afternoon and immediately transferred our luggage from the hotel over to M/V Searcher. Most then relaxed for the remainder of the afternoon and took the chance to explore the harbour, enjoy a meal in one of the nearby restaurants and shop for any last minute items.

It was nearly 9.30pm when we cast off and headed out into the cold north-westerly wind of San Diego Harbour. Our usual detour via the bait pens at the entrance to the harbour provided those that were still awake with some lamp-lit views of plenty of California Sea Lions and a few Black-crowned Night Herons and Great Blue Herons and Brandt's Cormorants, before we eventually headed out of the harbour on to rolling Pacific swells.

Day 3

Thursday 23rd February

Ensenada – Todos Santo

It was just before sunrise as we came in to dock in Ensenada Harbour and most were just waking and enjoying their morning coffee as Mexican customs officials came aboard to issue our visas. The Harbour was quiet and our customs check was brief. We were soon motoring out of harbour onto even bigger Pacific swells.

It was a lovely day, and the sun was starting to get really warm as we approached Isla Todos Santos. In the sheltered lee of the island we held station and scanned the beaches and exposed rocky shoreline for wildlife. From the deck of the boat we were able to catch a glimpse of a few Black Oystercatchers, and get a good look at two Peregrine Falcons and Pelagic Cormorant. We also spotted several Harbour Seals and lots of Northern Elephant Seals hauled out on the island's beaches.

We continued our journey south, keeping the big Pacific swells on our stern, all the time maintaining a constant vigil for wildlife. There was plenty of life around, but the sea conditions made it a little difficult to work so we made do with whatever we could spot as we travelled. Nonetheless, we did manage to spot several smaller groups of Common Dolphins, and a spell of 'popcorn chumming' managed to attract the interest of a clamorous flock of Heermann's, Western and California Gulls that followed in our wake, providing everyone with lots of opportunities to get some wonderful flight shots. The large flock of birds following the boat even attracted in a few Black-vented and the Pink-footed Shearwaters that cruised in on our wake to investigate what might be on offer.

The sea state continued to rise for most of the day and we didn't manage to spot a single whale amidst the 10ft+ swells. However, we did enjoy an almost constant succession of Black-footed and Laysan Albatross around the boat as we travelled which more than made up for the poor conditions (well, for some of us, at least).

We continued to motor into the night and as darkness fell, the tiredness began to kick in....and some very ashen faces retired to their bunks for a rough night of travel ahead.

Day 4

Friday 24th February

Isla San Benito

After a night of travel most were up early, ready to enjoy a good breakfast, before our day ashore on Isla San Benito. The sea was still a little rough and there was a very cold north westerly blowing as we arrived at our anchorage off Isla San Benito in the early hours of the morning. For those up early enough, the sight and sound of hundreds of Auklets and Murrelets calling their chicks down to the water awaited. However, by the time most were up and about, the spectacle had dispersed, leaving just a few Western Gulls and the odd Heermann's Gull lingering around the boat. We had our introduction to boarding the skiffs for the first time, and we were all safely ashore, ready to start our walk, by 7.30am.

We started our walk by picking our way carefully past the Elephant Seals that were lounging on the beach, before moving up through the village where we could take a closer look at some of the typical plants of the Island (many of which are endemic species). The recent rains meant that many of the plants were starting to bloom too (the Bush Sunflowers were particularly spectacular). We stopped to talk about the numerous seabird burrows and had a closer look at some of the artificial nesting boxes before continuing our walk.

We continued around the island where we found more Northern Elephant Seals. Breeding activity was nearing its end but there were still plenty of large males around, eager to maintain their dwindling harems of females, many of which were still nursing young pups.

Some people took the opportunity to get up close and personal with some of the island's Cacti, particularly the Cedros (jumping) Cholla, as we ascended the notorious 'Cholla Ravine' and started our ascent towards the summit of the island. Here we encountered plenty of San Benito Sparrows, Horned Larks, and even the odd White-crowned Sparrow. A few even managed to see Costa's Hummingbird too.

We stopped for lunch at the scenic outlook at the old derelict lighthouse before making the descent down from the top of the island to explore the beaches on the eastern side of the island. We enjoyed wonderful views of Osprey at the nest, and managed to spot a few California Sea Lions and got some lovely close looks at lots more Elephant Seals as we made our way around the island's beaches and exposed rocky shores. Despite our best efforts, we didn't manage to find any Guadalupe Fur Seals.

By 2pm we were all back at the landing beach awaiting our skiffs. But there was still time to spot Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Say's Phoebe before we returned to the boat.

Once we were all safely back onboard Searcher, we raised anchor and were soon continuing our journey south towards our next stop: Laguna San Ignacio. In the dwindling hours of daylight, we continued to maintain a vigil for wildlife. The rough seas didn't make the job easy but we did manage to spot numerous Black-vented Shearwaters, a few Common Dolphins and get a brief look at a large Fin Whale as we travelled southwards into the night.

Day 5

Saturday 25th February

San Ignacio

After a relatively peaceful night of travel on a reduced sea, we approached the entrance to San Ignacio Lagoon. Flurries of birds and the occasional whale blow were spotted as we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast. It wasn't long before we were entering the lagoon amidst a myriad of whale blows and fluking whales. Once across the shallow sandbar at the entrance to the lagoon, we were joined by Bottlenose Dolphins that rode the bow and we all stood out on deck as Gray Whales spyhopped, surfaced and fluked all around the boat. By 8am we were anchored in the heart of the observation zone of Laguna San Ignacio.

After a quick briefing on the lagoon, we had to wait a little for the wind to subside before entering the pangas. Despite the choppy conditions, the local panga drivers skilfully manoeuvred us all into position so we could get the best look at some of the whales, allowing for some sensational observations, of cow-calf pairs and a particularly x-rated look at some breeding mating behaviour too. During the rest of our day we enjoyed several similar panga trips, and by the end of the day everyone had had the opportunity to observe whales fluking, breaching and spyhopping, and some of the group had even managed to touch a whale. Our time on the water also provided us with some nice views of Bottlenose Dolphin, Royal Terns, Pomarine Skua, Great Northern (Common) Loons, and Surf Scoter as well.

After dinner, we all made our way out to the rear deck of the boat where, under a cloudless sky, we spent half an hour or so enjoying the spectacularly starry skies and soaking up the quiet of the lagoon; silent except for the sounds of whales and dolphins exhaling all around us. It was a truly wonderful evening in Laguna San Ignacio.

Day 6

Sunday 26th February

San Ignacio and heading south

We started our day with a good breakfast and a morning trip into the mangroves on the edge of the lagoon. Once in the sheltered channels of the mangroves, we had a great time spotting birds such as Great and Little Blue Herons, Reddish Egret, Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Heron and both Great and Snowy Egrets. In addition, we enjoyed some lovely views of Belted Kingfisher, Marbled Godwit, Willet and Long-billed Curlew, and plenty of White Ibis too.

We returned to the boat and readied ourselves for more whale watching. Once out on the lagoon we were treated to more incredible whale encounters and everyone enjoyed lots of 'friendly' whale activity. We all enjoyed lots of great views of breaching, spy hopping and tail splashing too.

Our afternoon whale-watching sessions were filled with similar delights; lots of friendly whale activity and lots of wonderful whale behaviours. Whilst many spent their last trip of the day whale watching, some of the group took the opportunity to visit one of the lagoon's beautiful, pristine beaches where they spent an hour and a half finding out about the wonderful array of whale bones, seashells and other fascinating strandline artefacts.

We eventually had to say farewell to our panga drivers and the wonderful Laguna San Ignacio, and at 5pm we raised anchor and were heading out of the lagoon. Bow-riding Bottlenose Dolphins and fluking Gray Whales guided us out towards the breakers at the entrance to the lagoon and out to the open ocean once again.

An unfamiliarly calm Pacific Ocean awaited us beyond the lagoons entrance and we enjoyed a beautiful sunset and a very relaxed dinner as we once again motored southwards into the night.

Day 7

Monday 27th February

Magdalena Bay

It was another early start for many as we awoke about 15 miles offshore from the northern end of the entrance to Bahia Magdalena (the southernmost breeding lagoon of the Pacific Gray Whales). With a full day of pelagic travel ahead, we all got ourselves comfortable and started our constant vigil for wildlife as we travelled. The light breeze and virtually non-existent swells made for very comfortable conditions and the morning's viewing was dominated by new sightings of Magnificent Frigatebird, Craveri's Murrelet and brief views of a Humpback (that seemed determined to avoid our gaze). A few nice sightings of Loggerhead Turtles also provided much excitement for a short while.

There was a lot of life in the area and, with sharp-eyed watchers in the mast, we skipped from one sighting to the next for much of the day. We started with some nice groups of foraging California Sea Lions, then we happened upon a nice-sized Fin Whale that surfaced only once, close to the boat. We spotted even more Sea Lions (an unusual occurrence given our distance from shore), then an impressive group of approximately 800+ Long-beaked Common Dolphins distracted our attention. We travelled with the dolphins for a while before our attentions were distracted by the tall, distinctive blow of a large Blue Whale and we diverted our course to take a better look. In near perfect conditions, we spent more than an hour watching our first Blue Whale of the trip, as its huge turquoise body glowed from the depths and surfaced repeatedly close to the boat. Nobody was left in any doubt why it's called a Blue Whale!

The rest of the afternoon continued in much the same way as we skipped between sightings of more playful Common Dolphins, then more Blue Whales (...two or three more Blue Whales in fact), then we had a really good look at swarms of Pelagic Red Crab (the very thing that everything was obviously feeding on), and some interesting flurries of feeding gulls and shearwaters that had all congregated to feed on the swarming crustaceans. It was a truly spectacular afternoon of wildlife watching.

We enjoyed another glorious sunset and delicious meal as we travelled into the night on a calm Pacific Ocean.

Day 8

Tuesday 28th February

Gorda Banks

Rounding the southernmost tip of the peninsula in the early hours of the morning, we spent the whole morning whale watching in the area of the Gorda Banks and enjoyed sightings of numerous Humpbacks - many at a distance - but some relaxed Humpback Whales in clear water, fluking close to the bow. There were very few birds on the ocean, save a few Frigatebirds. We drifted for a while to listen for whales on the hydrophone but without success.

By mid morning we spotted several breaching Humpbacks on the horizon and ventured closer to take a look; we were treated to some spectacular repeat breaches from three very rowdy whales that passed close to the boat and continued to jostle and joust as they travelled in front of us for several miles. It was an extraordinary display of rowdy behaviour and we even watched as two of the whales rammed each other and pushed each other through the water with incredible force. This exciting encounter terminated with an exquisite breach in perfect light, immediately off the bow of the boat: a real treat for the photographers onboard!

We eventually broke free from the whale watching and headed towards Los Frailes and the Cabo Pulmo National Park. We enjoyed lunch en route and, once anchored, we put the skiffs in the water and headed ashore to explore the desert scrub for birds. We wandered around the Cactus Scrub for a while, spotting numerous Turkey Vultures, Lark Sparrows, Gila Woodpeckers, both Hooded and Scott's Orioles, Cactus Wrens and lots of the endemic Grey Thrashers too. Perhaps everyone's favourite birds were the Northern Cardinal and a very obliging California Quail that perched nicely on top of a cactus for all to see.

We returned to the Searcher where, after the heat of the desert, a lot of people opted to go for a snorkel. It was the perfect first snorkel of the trip, everyone getting on fine with all of their gear. The visibility was good and the water was warmer than expected. There were certainly lots of colourful reef fish around, hard corals and plenty of other exciting marine invertebrates too.

Once back aboard we raised anchor and began our journey into the Sea of Cortez. We all enjoyed celebrating several birthdays with a delicious meal and a glass or two of wine and, as darkness fell, we enjoyed a spectacular show of blue bioluminescence as we motored towards our anchorage at Isla San Francisco.

Day 9

Wednesday 1st March

Isla San Francisco

High winds in the gulf had raised the sea state significantly and we were now operating off our intended itinerary in hopes of avoiding the worst of the weather. So, within our sheltered anchorage, we enjoyed sunrise over the beautiful island of Isla San Francisco and had breakfast at anchor before heading ashore to explore. Some hiked up to one of the island's hills and braved the windy slopes to get some amazing photos and enjoy the views of the island's picturesque caldera. Other members of the group explored the rocky beaches and wind-pruned cactus gardens of the beautiful island. The thumping northerly wind refused to yield all the time we were ashore, but

that did not put some people off from snorkelling the island's sheltered reef where they enjoyed great visibility and views of the island's great population of Garden Eels.

Whilst the snorkelers enjoyed their time in the water, others stayed ashore and continued to bird the island's wonderful cactus gardens and beaches where we enjoyed nice views of Spotted Sandpiper, Black-throated Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher and Costa's Hummingbird.

Once sated with our time on the island, we all returned to the boat, raised anchor and headed out into the raised swells and white-caps to forge our way north in search of wildlife. Naturally, the poor sea state meant we didn't spot a lot of wildlife but we made it far enough up into the gulf to anchor in the sheltered bay at Tambobichi where we enjoyed dinner 'on the hook' and an evening of watching fish around the lights of the boat and another starry Baja sky.

Day 10

Thursday 2nd March

Tambobichi to Bahia Santa Marta

A new day dawned and everyone was up to watch the sun creep over the eastern horizon and illuminate the beautiful sandstone backdrop to Tambobichi.

Brown Pelicans lazily mooched around the boat and Magnificent Frigatebirds circled overhead as we enjoyed another great breakfast onboard the boat. We could see Reddish Egrets and Great Blue Herons foraging along the nearby beach as we readied ourselves for a morning trip ashore to explore the extensive cactus scrub habitats and mangrove lagoon of the isolated part of the Baja peninsula.

Once on shore we enjoyed some great views of Northern Caracara, and we watched as Ospreys fished for Reef Cornetfish in the shallow Lagoon. The persistent wind didn't help the desert birding (many of the smaller species remaining hidden and inactive in the dense thickets of spiny shrubs) but our efforts around the lagoon were rewarded with some lovely views of Wilson's Plovers, Least and Solitary Sandpiper, Reddish, Snowy and Great Egret, Tricolored and Great Blue Herons, Red-tailed Hawk and lots and lots of Turkey Vultures.

After a couple of hours on shore, some opted to try out the snorkelling whilst a few remained onshore to continue their search for birds. Once again, the snorkelers enjoyed good conditions and found a few new reef fishes whilst the shore party enjoyed nice views of Blue-grey and California Gnatcatchers as well as finding an American Oystercatcher amidst a large flock of Royal Terns that were roosting on the beach.

After lunch at anchor in the shelter of the bay, we forged our way north through big swells, making our way up towards the sheltered lee of Marcial. We enjoyed the company of a nice group of Long-beaked Common Dolphins (maybe 300+) for a while, before our attentions were drawn to the blow of a large whale and we ventured over to take a closer look. It was a Blue Whale and we tracked it for a while as we headed northwards with it in the company of a scattered group of Bottlenose Dolphins.

Once fully in the lee of the Marcial the sea state settled, allowing us to work properly. It wasn't long before we spotted another Blue Whale and we watched it for over an hour as the light faded and a beautiful sunset began to develop over the peninsula.

We dropped anchor in Bahia Santa Marta where we enjoyed another delicious meal before eventually drawing a close to our day.

Day 11

Friday 3rd March

Isla Santa Catalina

It was a beautiful morning as we lay at anchor in Bahia Santa Marta in the lee of Marcial. We watched the sun rise and illuminate the peninsula as we enjoyed a good breakfast. The weather that had been vexing us to this point had subsided completely. The wind had finally abated and the swells had diminished, perfect for whale watching, so we raised anchor and headed out in search of whales. We didn't have to search long before finding our first Blue Whale. The perfect conditions meant that its tall blows held in the air for several minutes and the low angle of sun illuminated each droplet of water with golden light. We watched in awe as the animal surfaced repeatedly, and we timed its dive intervals and planned our approach to get a closer look at the somewhat erratic individual. Our attention was soon drawn to several more blows erupting from the sea around the boat and, within minutes, we found ourselves surrounded by Blue Whales. We were spoilt for choice but, as we watched, we noticed that several of the whales were raising their flukes high into the air as they dived, so the choice of which animals to watch soon became very easy. After more than an hour of watching one particularly obliging Blue Whale (that fluked close to the boat on several occasions), we continued on in search of more whales. As we travelled, we enjoyed a particularly exceptional look at a very large raft of Black and Least Storm Petrels which provided about as good a look at these birds that you can ever get without physically having them in your hand. We finished the morning off nicely with two very large blues surfacing close to the bow of the boat as we headed towards Isla Santa Catalina.

After lunch, we anchored off Isla Santa Catalina. The group then opted either to go for a skiff cruise with Captain Kenny or enjoy another great snorkel session, exploring the rocky reef below the iconic landmark of Elephant Rock. The snorkelling conditions were excellent with great visibility and plenty of larger reef fish to see, including large Barred Pargo, Leopard Groupers and lots of other colourful reef species. The coastal cruisers enjoyed some very nice views of American Oystercatcher, lots of Sally Lightfoot Crabs, Spotted Sandpipers and other, coastal fauna.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon ashore for a hike in the arroyo on the west side of the island: a chance to marvel at the island's unique flora, dominated by impressive Elephant Cardon and Wavy Barrel cacti. We didn't manage to find any of the Baja 'rattleless rattlesnakes' and the birding was a little slow, but we managed to spot White-throated Swifts and get some very nice views of Loggerhead Shrike, Grey Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Black-throated Sparrow and Hooded Oriole. A few people also had some good views of American Kestrel too.

We returned to the boat as a blazing sunset illuminated the sky behind Elephant Rock and we enjoyed a fabulous barbeque (along with one or two margaritas) on the back deck of the boat. The evening was warm and we

watched as the sun disappeared over the peninsula. Many, exhausted from our busy day of activities, retired early but some stayed up and were treated to a fantastic tropical lightening storm that passed over the Sea of Cortez.

Day 12

Saturday 4th March

Los Islotes and La Paz bay

Having raised anchor during the night and motored through the early hours of the morning (amidst one of the most spectacular lightening storms any of us had ever seen), we arrived early at Los Islotes: an isolated rocky island just to the north of Isla La Partida. We dropped anchor and enjoyed breakfast on the hook before preparing for our morning snorkel around the Sea Lion colony. We entered the water at around 7.30am and enjoyed over an hour of exploring the reef, enjoying its myriad of colourful reef fish and lots and lots of wonderful interactions with some very playful Sea Lion pups. It was a truly magical experience for all that entered the water and a fantastic way to start any day.

Having returned to the boat, it was soon time go a skiff ride around the beautiful islets to allow everyone to get a closer look at the roosting Sea Lions, look for Wandering Tattlers and look at the Blue-footed Boobies nesting high up on the rocks.

Buoyed up by our wonderful morning, we returned to the boat where we promptly raised anchor and travelled directly to La Paz Bay where local guides awaited our arrival. It was a beautiful sunny day and many sat out on deck enjoying the sunshine as we travelled, scanning the skies for passing Frigatebirds and enjoying the wonderful desert scenery. We enjoyed lunch as we travelled and arrived in the bay shortly after midday.

Our local guides arrived promptly and we were all ushered safely onto our panagas to go out to look for Whale Sharks. The warm, sunny afternoon and calm waters provided perfect conditions for our search and it wasn't long before we were all enjoying some spectacular views of individual Whale Sharks up to six metres long. Both snorkelers and observers where afforded some wonderful views of the sharks (although it took some of the snorkelers several energetic attempts, before they eventually managed to get good views of the spectacular fish) and we all returned to the boat elated with our encounters.

We left La Paz Bay in the early afternoon to start making our way down through the Cerralvo channel. We got a little distracted by a school of wonderful Smooth-tailed Mobulas that jumped repeatedly in front of the boat for a while (always a fun distraction) so we lingered with them, allowing everyone the chance to hone their photographic skills. Eventually the Mobulas tired and we ventured on.

As we explored the deeper waters of the Cerralvo channel, slowly making our way southwards, we maintained a lookout for wildlife and, as the sun began to lower in the sky, we spotted a mass of small spouts on the horizon and ventured over to investigate. We spent the rest of the day surrounded by a large, scattered group of Short-finned Pilot Whales and we watched as they surfaced after each feeding dive then hurriedly regrouped before diving again. It was a spectacular grand finale to our last day on the water.

We enjoyed another great sunset, more great food and a relaxed evening in each other's company, recounting all of our favourite wildlife encounters from what had been an exceptional tour for us all.

Day 13

Sunday 5th March

The Searcher pulled into harbour at Cabo San Lucas in the early hours of the morning and we enjoyed a continental breakfast and watched as the crew busily set about refuelling for their long journey back to San Diego. Brown Pelicans sat around on the dockside, mooching for baitfish escaping from the nearby bait receivers and a Belted Kingfisher patrolled every available perch in search of an easy meal. We relaxed, readied our things and waited to disembark.

We said our final farewells to the crew and boarded our minibuses that transported us to the estuary in San Jose del Cabo where we had plenty of time for some last-minute birding. It was a beautiful day and the estuary was buzzing with birds. The estuary held its usual collection of Ruddy Ducks and American Coots, as well as Western Osprey, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe and Solitary Sandpiper, to name but a few. The reedy margin of the estuary had lots of Great Blue Herons and everyone got some great views of a very confident Green Heron and a Snowy Egret as well. A good number of White-faced Ibis were spotted as we watched a stunning Vermilion Flycatcher flit between fence posts. We also managed to spot a few unusual species amidst the melee of Audobon's (Yellow-rumped) Warblers: a Bell's Vireo, a lovely male Lazuli Bunting and an Orchard Oriole too. It was certainly preferable to sitting in an airport for hours on end!

We eventually walked up into the town where everyone took the chance to have a cool drink, something to eat and do a little last minute souvenir shopping before we headed to the airport.

By midday we boarded our taxis once again and set off to the airport for our return flights back to San Diego and our connecting flights back to the UK.

Day 14

Monday 6th March

Today we completed our journey back to the UK where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March												
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5
1	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>									✓				
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓											
3	Brant Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓			✓	✓							
4	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>		✓											
5	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓											
6	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>		✓											
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓											✓
8	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>		✓											✓
9	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		✓											
10	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>		✓											
11	Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>		✓											
12	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>		✓											
13	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>							✓						
14	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓							
15	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>		✓											
16	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓					✓						
17	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>													✓
18	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>							✓						
19	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>				✓									
20	Great Northern Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓							
21	Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>			✓										
22	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>			✓	✓									
23	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓										
24	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus creatopus</i>			✓					✓					
25	Black-vented Shearwater	<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>			✓	✓				✓					
26	Least Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma microsoma</i>											✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March												
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5
27	Black Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma melania</i>											✓	✓	
28	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		✓											✓
29	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>		✓					✓						
31	American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>						✓	✓						
32	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>													✓
33	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓				✓	✓			✓			
34	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>				✓			✓			✓			
35	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>													✓
36	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓			✓			✓
37	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓				✓	✓			✓			✓
38	Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>						✓	✓			✓	✓		
39	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>							✓			✓			✓
40	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		✓					✓						
41	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓
42	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>		✓											
43	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>									✓		✓	✓	✓
45	Blue-footed Booby	<i>Sula nebouxii</i>											✓	✓	
46	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>												✓	
47	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>			✓									✓	
48	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>			✓										
49	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
50	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>		✓											
53	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>		✓							✓	✓	✓		
54	Red shouldered hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>		✓											
55	Northern Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>										✓			
56	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>				✓					✓	✓		✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March												
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5
57	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	✓	✓								
58	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>		✓											✓
59	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		✓											✓
60	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>			✓										
61	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>										✓	✓		
62	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	✓								
63	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>				✓	✓								
64	Wilson's Plover	<i>Charadrius wilsonia</i>										✓			
65	Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>						✓			✓				
66	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>						✓							
67	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>		✓			✓	✓							
68	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓											
69	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>		✓			✓	✓							
70	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>										✓			
71	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>										✓			✓
72	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>												✓	
73	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>		✓											
74	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		✓							✓	✓	✓		
75	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓			✓	✓							
76	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>		✓				✓							
77	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		✓				✓				✓			
78	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>				✓				✓					
79	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>			✓										
80	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>			✓					✓					
81	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>		✓				✓							
83	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
84	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
85	Yellow-footed Gull	<i>Larus livens</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		✓			✓	✓							

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March												
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5
87	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
88	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>					✓	✓							
89	Craveri's Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i>								✓				✓	
90	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>			✓	✓									
91	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓											
92	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓									
93	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		✓											✓
94	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>									✓			✓	✓
95	Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>									✓				✓
96	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>											✓		
97	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		✓											
98	Costa's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte costae</i>				✓					✓				✓
99	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>							✓			✓			✓
100	Red-naped Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>		✓											
101	Gila Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>									✓		✓		✓
102	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides scalaris</i>									✓		✓		
103	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>		✓											
104	Nuttall's Woodpecker	<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>		✓											
105	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		✓											✓
106	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>		✓											
107	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>				✓							✓		
108	American Grey Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax wrightii</i>												✓	
109	Vermilion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>													✓
110	Cassin's Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>		✓											
111	Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>									✓			✓	
112	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>												✓	
113	Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>													✓
114	California Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>											✓		
115	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>		✓											✓
116	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓							✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March													
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	
117	Phainopepla	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>		✓												✓
118	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>									✓		✓	✓		
119	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>				✓										
120	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>		✓												
121	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>		✓												
122	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓												
123	American Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>		✓												
124	Wrentit	<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>		✓												
125	Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>									✓		✓			✓
126	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>				✓										
127	Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>														✓
128	Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>										✓	✓			
129	California Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila californica</i>									✓		✓			
130	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>		✓		✓					✓					✓
131	Grey Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma cinereum</i>									✓					
132	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓												✓
133	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓					✓					✓
134	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>		✓												✓
135	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>		✓												
136	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>		✓							✓		✓			✓
137	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>		✓												
138	Mangrove Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>							✓							
139	Audubon's Warbler (Yellow-rumped W.)	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>		✓												✓
140	Black-throated Grey Warbler	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>		✓												
141	Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>									✓			✓		✓
142	Scott's Oriole	<i>Icterus parisorum</i>									✓					
143	Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>														✓
144	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>		✓												
145	Tricolored Blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>		✓												
146	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>		✓												

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March												
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5
14	Botta's Pocket Gopher	<i>Thomomys bottae</i>		✓											
15	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>								✓		✓			

Reptiles

1	Green Seaturtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>				✓				✓					
2	Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>							✓						
3	Side-blotched Lizard	<i>Uta squamata</i>								✓		✓		✓	
4	Western Fence Lizard	<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>		✓											

Butterflies

1	Great Western White	<i>Pontia occidentalis</i>									✓	✓	✓		
2	Wandering Skipper	<i>Panoquina errans</i>									✓				
3	Western Pygmy Blue	<i>Brephidium exilis</i>									✓				
4	Sonoran Hairstreak	<i>Hypostrymon critola</i>										✓			

Fish

1	Balloonfish	<i>Diodon holocanthus</i>											✓		
2	Barber Fish	<i>Johnrandallia nigriristris</i>											✓		
3	Beaubrummel	<i>Eupomacentrus flavilatus</i>											✓	✓	
4	Bicolor Parrotfish	<i>Cetoscarus bicolor</i>											✓	✓	
5	Blue and Gold Snapper	<i>Lutjanus viridus</i>											✓		
6	Bumphead Parrotfish	<i>Bolbometopon muricatum</i>												✓	
7	California Flying Fish	<i>Cypselurus californicus</i>										✓			
8	Coral Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhichthys oxycephalus</i>											✓	✓	
9	Cortez Angelfish	<i>Pomocanthus zonipectus</i>												✓	
10	Cortez Chub	<i>Kyphosuselegans</i>											✓	✓	
11	Cortez Damsel fish	<i>Eupomacentrus rectifraenum</i>											✓	✓	
12	Cortez Rainbow Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma lucasanum</i>											✓	✓	
13	Creole Fish	<i>Paranthias furcifer</i>											✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	February - March													
			21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	
14	Giant Damselfish	<i>Microspathadon dorsalis</i>												✓	✓	
15	Giant Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhitidae cirrhitus</i>												✓	✓	
16	Golden Grouper	<i>Ephinephelus alexandrinus</i>													✓	
17	Grey-barred Grunt	<i>Conodon nobilis</i>												✓	✓	
18	King Angelfish	<i>Holocanthus passer</i>												✓	✓	
19	Leopard Grouper	<i>Mycteroperca rosacea</i>												✓		
20	Mexican Goatfish	<i>Mulloidichthys dentatus</i>												✓	✓	
21	Moorish Idol	<i>Zanclus canescens</i>												✓	✓	
22	Needlefish	<i>Strongylura exilis</i>											✓	✓		
23	New Guinea fowl Puffer	<i>Arothron meleagris</i>												✓		
24	Orange-sided Triggerfish	<i>Sufflamen verres</i>										✓				
25	Panamic Fanged Blenny	<i>Ophioblennius steindachneri</i>												✓	✓	
26	Panamic Sergeant Major	<i>Abuldefduf troschelii</i>												✓	✓	
27	Reef Cornetfish	<i>Fistularia commersonii</i>												✓		
28	Scissortail Damselfish	<i>Chromis atrilobata</i>												✓	✓	
29	Smooth-tailed Mopbula	<i>Mobula thurstoni</i>													✓	
30	Spotted Boxfish	<i>Ostracion meleagris</i>													✓	
31	Spotted Sharp-nosed Puffer	<i>Canthigaster solandri</i>													✓	
32	Yellowtail Surgeonfish	<i>Prionurus punctatus</i>												✓		
33	Pelagic electric ray													✓		
34	Whale Shark	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>													✓	