

# Baja California & the Sea of Cortez

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 March – 5 April 2017



Northern Elephant Seal pup



Blue Whale



Snorkelling in the Sea of Cortez



Wood Duck

Report compiled by Lee Morgan  
Images courtesy of Rowan Hillson



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

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Lee Morgan (leader) and Rob (local naturalist) with 21 Naturetrek clients  
M/V Searcher: Captain Aaron, Kenny, Ryan, Ben, Steve, Charlie and Dan

## Day 1

Thursday 23rd March

### London (Heathrow) - San Diego

After flying from London Heathrow, the group landed in San Diego about 5.30pm and transferred to the nearby Ramada Airport Hotel. Some opted for an early night whilst others managed to stay awake long enough to explore the harbour a little and take some time to get to know their fellow group members over 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

Friday 24th March

### San Diego – Board M/V Searcher

We awoke to a pleasant morning in San Diego's Point Loma harbour. A few of us were up early and ventured out for a pre-breakfast look around the harbour, but most rested and took time for a leisurely breakfast to prepare for the day ahead.

About half 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 a few of the harbour regulars: Snowy Egret, Eared and Western Grebes and Western Gull. Moving along the waterfront we spotted a few Yellow-Rumped Warblers, some colourful House Finches, Black Phoebe and the odd Song Sparrow in the gardens along the harbour front, and had nice views of a Spotted Sandpiper feeding along the shoreline.

A short bus journey took us across the city to Lindo Lake where we saw a plethora of species including American White Pelican, Great and Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night Heron, Wood Duck, Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Duck, both Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks and lots of Great-tailed Grackles. Scanning the trees around the margins of the lakes proved to be particularly productive and we enjoyed nice views of Cassin's Kingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Western Bluebird and Phainopepla too. We also enjoyed our first mammals of the trip with nice views of California Ground Squirrel and Botta's Pocket Gopher.

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. We settled in to enjoying our lunch near the feeding stations and waited for birds to show. There was actually very little activity around the feeders at first, but as we sat and waited, slowly things began to show up and we enjoyed good views of Anna's Hummingbird, California Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, Bush-tit, Wrentit, Nuttall's and Acorn Woodpeckers, California Scrub Jay and Oak Titmouse. The reserve manager Phil was also kind enough to show us a very sweet Great Horned Owl chick that had been rescued from a local garden and was being cared for at the reserve.

We eventually returned to the bus and headed back across town to the San Diego River estuary, where we enjoyed some great views of Least and Western Sandpipers, Snowy Plover, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel and Willet. We also saw Little Blue Heron, Great Egret, Brown Pelican, Western Osprey, Royal, Elegant and Forster's 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 to M/V Searcher. Most then took the chance to explore the harbour some more, have a bite to eat and generally relax onboard the boat before we all congregated ready for our safety briefing and our introductions to the boat and the crew.

It was nearly 9.45pm 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 everyone with some lamp-lit views of plenty of California Sea Lions and a few Black-crowned Night Herons and Great Blue Herons and lots of Brandt's Cormorants, before we eventually headed out of the harbour on to rolling pacific swells.

## Day 3

Saturday 25th March

### Ensenada – Todos Santos

Just before sunrise we came in to dock in Ensenada Harbour. 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, and it wasn't long before we were heading out of the sheltered harbour into rolling swells and whitecaps, making our way out towards Todos Santos Islands

Despite the swells, the sun was shining and as we approached the lee of the Todos Santos and got out of the cold wind, it was warm and relatively calm. We cruised slowly by the island to search for wildlife and were able to catch a glimpse of Black Oystercatcher, Peregrine Falcon, Pelagic Cormorants amidst the Western Gulls, Brown Pelican and lots and lots of Brandt's Cormorants that nest on the cliffs. Scanning the island's beaches also revealed the usual collection of Harbour Seals and Northern Elephant Seals.

We eventually left the shelter of the island and continued our journey south, keeping the big pacific swells and whitecaps on our stern in order to keep the ride as smooth as possible. Despite the difficult conditions, we maintained a constant vigil for wildlife as we travelled. It wasn't long before we managed to spot a Gray Whale blow and catch sight of a Bryde's Whale, but both animals managed to give us the slip in the difficult sea conditions. We did manage to get a slightly better look at a Fin Whale that appeared to have a calf with it, and the morning's pelagic birds included lots of Black-vented Shearwaters, good numbers of Sabine's and Bonaparte's Gulls and one or two Red Phalaropes. We also enjoyed some fun action from a large, spread out group of Long-beaked Common Dolphins, a few of which briefly rode on the bow wave.

The afternoon revealed a steady stream of seabird sightings for those enthusiastic enough to maintain their vigilance. An encounter with a nice bachelor pod of Short-finned Pilot Whales provided some excellent close

encounters, whilst Black-footed Albatross circled over them. The Pilot Whales were joined by a small group of Bottlenose Dolphins too.

We continued to travel throughout the afternoon and whilst the big swells and whitecaps were making it difficult to look for cetaceans, they were certainly providing some of the best conditions for pelagic birds. As we travelled we were lucky enough to get some nice views of Cook's Petrels zooming past the boat as well as more great looks at some beautiful Black-footed Albatrosses and even a couple of Laysan Albatrosses too, all of which were attracted in to the stern of the boat by a clamour of hungry Western Gulls that we had encouraged in with the judicious use of the occasional handful of popcorn!

An afternoon of slowly diminishing seas made for a calmer evening of travel and we enjoyed a lovely evening meal just as the sun began to set. As darkness fell, tiredness began to kick in....just when Rob started his first presentation on Marine Mammals and only a select few were able to keep their eyes open (sorry Rob).

## Day 4

Sunday 26th March

### Isla San Benito

After a gentle night of travel most were up early, refreshed and ready to enjoy breakfast and prepare themselves for our day ashore on Isla San Benito. Heermann's Gulls lingered around the boat as we dropped anchor and it wasn't long before we had all boarded the skiffs and were heading to shore.

Once on the beach, we started our walk by picking our way carefully past the few Elephant Seal pups 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, many of which are endemic species of this rather unique island. The recent rains meant that many of the plants were blooming and we enjoyed good shows of flowers from Bush Sunflowers, Mammillaria Cactus, San Benito Bush Mallow, San Benito Tarweed and Cliff Spurge. We took our time and stopped to talk about the numerous seabird burrows and had a closer look at some of the artificial nestboxes before continuing our walk.

We continued around the island where a few of the group had their first close up introductions to the notorious Coast or 'jumping' Cholla. We stopped at beaches to admire more Northern Elephant Seals that lounged lazily along the surf line, snorted and occasionally flicked gravel over themselves to rid them of the irritating kelp flies and to keep themselves cool.

We carefully ascended the notorious Cholla Ravine and most managed to avoid the ravages of the prickly forest of pincushion-like cacti. We started our ascent towards the summit of the island where we encountered plenty of San Benito Sparrows and Horned Larks and took the opportunity to take a closer look at the newly opened flowers of the rare Cedros Barrel Cactus.

We stopped for lunch at the scenic outlook at the derelict lighthouse, where we scanned the oceans for whales and Tracey managed to spot our first Blue Whale of the trip. During our descent to the far side of the island we enjoyed wonderful views of Osprey at the nest, and managed to spot a few California Sea Lions. As we

continued the circumnavigation of the island we enjoyed more lovely close looks at lots more Elephant Seals and we even managed to find a few Guadalupe Fur Seals too.

By 2.30pm we were all back aboard the boat and were soon continuing our journey south to Laguna San Ignacio. The breeze that had kept us cool during our hike on the island had raised the sea state a little and we spotted numerous Black-vented Shearwaters and Cassin's Auklets as we travelled southwards into the night.

## Day 5

Monday 27th March

### San Ignacio

After a very peaceful night of travel through a very sizable fog bank, we approached the entrance to San Ignacio Lagoon. A flurry of birds indicated the presence of some Common Dolphins feeding nearby, but with the lure of the lagoons ahead, we did not linger. We waited for a small fog patch to clear before commencing with the difficult entry into the lagoon. We were able to enjoy watching numerous Gray Whales surfacing and fluking as our captain and crew carefully manoeuvred us slowly over the shallow sandbar into lagoon. Once across the sandbar, we slowly manoeuvred our way towards the heart of the observation area in the lagoon. Gray Whales surfaced and fluked close to the boat as we motored slowly to our anchorage. By 8am we were anchored in the heart of the observation zone and were able to watch Gray Whales surfacing all around the boat.

We were quickly ushered to the pangas for our first close-up introduction to the whales. The local panga drivers skilfully manoeuvred into position so we could get the best look at some of the whales, allowing for some sensational observation and close interactions for everyone in the group. During the course of our day we enjoyed four very similar 90-minute panga trips, two before lunch and two after, and by the end of the day everyone had had the opportunity to observe whale's fluking, breaching and spy-hopping, and everyone had managed to actually touch a whale. Our time on the water also provided us with some nice views of Bottlenose Dolphin, a few Elegant and Royal Terns, Common Loons (all of which were sporting their fabulous summer plumage) and Surf Scoter. We even had great views of Reddish Egret, White Ibis and Marbled Godwit, and Long-billed Curlew flying over too.

After dinner we enjoyed a 'lights out' on the rear deck of the boat where, under a cloudless sky, we spent half an hour or so enjoying a spectacular view of the stars and soaking up the quiet of the lagoon, except for the sounds of whales exhaling around us.

## Day 6

Tuesday 28th March

### San Ignacio and heading south

We started our day a little late because of high winds that had whipped the lagoon into messy swells, but it soon subsided and we started our day with a late morning trip into the mangroves on the edge of the lagoon, whilst some went out to enjoy the whales once more. Once in the sheltered channels of the mangroves, we had a great time spotting birds such as Great Blue Heron, Reddish Egret, Yellow-crowned and Black-Crowned Night Herons and Great and Snowy Egrets. In addition, we enjoyed some lovely views of Marbled Godwit, Willet and

Long-billed Curlew, and more White Ibis. We also got lovely views of Mangrove Warblers, some very confident Eared Grebes and a brief glimpse of a Clapper Rail too.

After lunch we headed out on the pangas, and again we were treated to more incredible Gray Whale encounters, although the lagoon conditions were still a little rough and we did get a bit wet!

Our last session of the day provided people with the opportunity to visit one of the lagoons beautiful, pristine beaches, where some of the group spent time with Rob and Lee finding out about the wonderful array of turtle and whale bones, seashells and other fascinating strandline artefacts. Others, however, took the opportunity for one final whale watch where they spent their time in the company of some very playful, cow-calf pairs that frolicked alongside the pangas for the entire session; a truly wonderful encounter for all involved.

As always, it was with great reluctance that we eventually said farewell to our panga drivers and the whales, and by 5pm we had raised anchor and were underway, heading out of the lagoon. We enjoyed dinner amidst some fun swells that wobbled us side to side for a while until we turned south once more. With the swells behind us, the motion of the boat reduced and we settled into a quiet night of travel.

## Day 7

## Wednesday 29th March

### Magdalena Bay

It was another early start for many and we awoke within sight of the northern barrier island at the entrance to Bahia Magdalena. With a full day of travel ahead of us, we settled in for the duration and readied ourselves for our wildlife vigil. The light breeze and following swell made for reasonably comfortable conditions too and many watched from the bench in front of the pilot house or relaxed in the sun on the back deck of the boat.

The morning's viewing was dominated by sightings of Sooty Shearwater, Magnificent Frigatebird and Craveri's Murrelet as well as several brief views of unidentified baleen whales that continuously gave us the slip. The big swells and numerous whitecaps making it very difficult to keep track of the whales erratic feeding activity. We did enjoy some fantastic views of a large group of several hundred dolphins spread out around the boat, many coming in to bow ride and leap around the boat. We also managed to get some brief views of Blue Whale too but, once again, it too managed to evade our advances.

After lunch the birdlife was good and we enjoyed nice views of scattered flocks of Grey Phalaropes as well as a regular passage of Pink-footed and Black-vented Shearwaters. Scattered groups of foraging Sea Lions came in to investigate the boat and the odd Loggerhead Turtle retained our interest as we searched for more whale activity. We spotted a couple of Humpback Whales travelling north and ventured over to have a closer look, but were distracted by a very large Humpback Whale with an unusually severe lice infestation that turned its flanks orange. The large whale surfaced regularly close to the boat, affording us some excellent views, and fluked before diving, showing us all its fantastically broad tail flukes.

After watching the whale for some time and getting some fabulous views, we ventured south again in search of more wildlife. The ocean was quiet for most of the late afternoon but we managed to find a very large Blue

Whale shortly before dinner and enjoyed some excellent views as it surfaced close to the boat on several occasions and even fluked once too. A Brown Booby circled the boat as we settled down to enjoy another wonderful dinner and another day slowly drew to a close.

## Day 8

Thursday 30th March

### Gorda Banks

We rounded the southernmost tip of the peninsula ('lands end') in the early hours of the morning. By the time most people were awake we had been joined by several Frigatebirds that had decided to hitch a ride on our mast. We spent the whole morning whale watching in the area around the Gorda Banks. There was little wind, save a very light breeze that served to relieve us from the searing temperatures of the tropical sun, and the sea conditions were like a mill pond. We spotted numerous Humpback Whales in the area during the course of the morning but saved our advances for the whales that looked to be doing something particularly interesting. Some we watched as they relaxed at the surface in the clear water whilst others as they fluked repeatedly close to the bow of the boat. There were very few birds on the ocean, save the odd Pink-footed or Sooty Shearwater. Occasionally large Mobula Rays or a Thresher Shark would hurl themselves clear of the water, keeping us all entertained and we enjoyed the occasional close encounter with a Green Turtle that basked in the warm sunshine at the surface. We even spotted a Striped Marlin and a nice-sized Hammerhead Shark cruising beneath the surface. It was a wonderfully tranquil morning.

By mid morning we spotted breaching whales on the horizon and ventured closer to take a look. We were treated to some spectacular passes close to the boat however, after some wonderful encounters with some very relaxed whales, 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, 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, Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Grey Thrasher, Hooded and Scott's Orioles and Northern Mockingbird as well as a handsome Red Fox, Black-tailed Jackrabbit and White-tailed Antelope Ground Squirrel (a type of Ground Squirrel similar to Golden-mantled). We also managed nice views of Cactus Wren, Phainopepla and Californian Gnatcatcher, and perhaps everyone's favourite birds; Northern Cardinal and Pyrrhuloxia.

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 their gear, the visibility was ok and the water was 24 degrees. There were certainly lots of colourful reef fish around, hard corals and plenty of other exciting marine invertebrates too. While everyone was enjoying the snorkelling, the people on the boat were watching a spectacular display of breaching by cow and calf Humpback Whales in the bay...close to the boat!

After a delicious dinner 'on the hook' we enjoyed a large school of Smooth-tailed Mobula that appeared to feed under the lights around the boat; a truly spectacular event for all those awake to witness it. Late in the evening we raised the anchor and motored northwards into the Sea of Cortez.

## Day 9

## Friday 31st March

### La Paz Bay and Los Islotes

Favourable conditions resulted in a very quiet night of travel and an early morning arrival at our temporary anchorage in La Paz Bay. It was a beautiful morning. The ocean was calm, the water looked green with plankton but certainly clear enough to see the largest fish in the world, and there was considerable excitement as we got ourselves ready and waited for our local guides to arrive and take us out to see Whale Sharks.

The morning was an amazing experience for both the enthusiastic snorkelers and the observers that preferred to stay dry. We spent time in the company of several smaller Whale Sharks (although even the 'smallest' Whale Shark we saw was about three metres in length!) and the local panga drivers carefully positioned the boats so that the snorkelers and observers both got excellent opportunities to see these incredible animals as they slowly cruised below the surface in search of their planktonic prey. For the people in the water, it wasn't easy and some needed several attempts (and a little assistance from the local guides) before they finally got the opportunity to swim alongside the huge fish. For the observers on the pangas, it was a great chance to see and photograph these enormous fish as they cruised slowly past the boat.

We returned to the Searcher excited by our success and wonderfully unique experiences with the Whale Sharks. Once back onboard we raised anchor and headed slowly out of La Paz Bay, towards Los Islotes. We paused en route to get one final look at a particularly beautiful Whale Shark that swam up alongside the Searcher and started feeding close to the surface: a spectacular final encounter with these amazing ocean giants.

After a steady cruise past the beautiful island of Isla Partida, we arrived at Los Islotes shortly after lunch. We enjoyed a skiff ride around the island, although our planned Sea Lion viewing was slightly hijacked by a group of leaping Mobulas that distracted us from our original plan. Nonetheless, it provided us with some close views of a California Sea Lion colony and the chance to watch Blue-footed Booby displaying to each other high up on their rocky perches. We also had some great views of leaping Mobulas too.

After our skiff ride we had another opportunity to snorkel. The conditions were good and there was no-one else around. We enjoyed nearly an hour in the water, searching the reef for lots and lots of colourful reef fishes, and a few of us were lucky enough to encounter some very playful Sea Lion pups too.

We eventually raised anchor about 6pm and headed northwards, whilst a beautiful sunset rose above the peninsula. We enjoyed dinner as we travelled and Rob enthralled us all with another of his fascinating lectures on marine mammals.

## Day 10

## Saturday 1st April

### Punta Colorado

A new day dawned and everyone was up to watch the sun creep over the eastern horizon and illuminate the beautiful sandstone cliffs adjacent to our anchorage at Punta Colorado. Peregrines and Frigatebirds were seen

flying high above the cliffs and the odd Pelican skulled past the boat. It was another wonderful start to another beautiful Baja day.

After breakfast we set ashore to explore the beach and sandstone arroyo where we took the opportunity to have a closer look at fossils in the spectacular sandstone rock formations, and look for desert birds like Verdin, Black-throated Sparrow and Costas Hummingbird in the cactus scrub. A few also managed to get nice encounters with some very obliging baby Goats. The warmer weather also meant that there were some nice reptiles active and we enjoyed good views of Isla San Jose Whiptails, Isla San Jose Side-blotched Lizards, Granite Spiny Lizard and Chuckwallas too.

After our walk, we were unable to snorkel because of a large number of thread Jellies that had concentrated over the reef because of a gentle swell that had picked up so, rather than endure a swim that would feel like bathing in nettles, we made the sensible decision to go out to look for whales and dolphins instead.

The settled waters of the gulf revealed little during the first half of the morning as we continued to explore northwards. The odd scattered flock of Shearwaters or Black Storm Petrels circled the current lines and slicks that started to form on the settling water. As we broke the north end of Isla San Jose and got beyond Isla Santa Cruz, we encountered a really good sized herd of Long-beaked Common Dolphins (maybe as many as 2000+) and we followed them for over an hour as they played around the boat. Much of the remainder of the morning was quiet, save a few nice views of Red-billed Tropicbird and the occasional Shearwaters and Storm Petrel. However, once we got further north, we encountered another fabulous herd of Common Dolphins (800+) that were actively fishing and had with them a swarming entourage of Frigatebirds, Pomarine Jaegers, Royal Terns and Heermann's Gulls circling over them. We drifted with the playful Dolphins for a while, enjoying some fabulous vocalisations on the boats hydrophone. We eventually set anchor off the south-west side of Isla Monserrat and enjoyed dinner on the hook and another fabulous sunset over the peninsula.

## Day 11

Sunday 2nd April

### Isla Santa Catalina

It was a beautiful morning as we lay at anchor off Isla Monserrat and the calm conditions were perfect for our morning of whale watching, but we searched the area for hours to little avail. However, we made the decision to push further north in search of Blue Whales. We ended up finding three or four, feeding in the waters to the north of Isla Carmen and we watched two of them for several hours as they surfaced very close to the boat and one of them fluked a few times too.

Once satiated with our morning's fix of Blue Whales, we headed south-east to Isla Santa Catalina. Around midday some of the group enjoyed another great snorkelling session near Elephant Rock that resulted in wonderfully close encounters with some friendly Eared (Black-necked) Grebes and lots of colourful reef fish. Others enjoyed a lovely coastal cruise along the shore of the beautiful island.

Our afternoon hike in the arroyo on the west side of the island provided opportunity to marvel at the island's unique flora, dominated by impressive Elephant Cardon and Wavy Barrel cacti. We managed to find a nice

example of the Baja 'rattleless' Rattlesnake (thanks to Geoffrey!) and everyone patiently waited in a line to photograph it. Most enjoyed good views of Turkey Vulture, Loggerhead Shrike, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, and Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, while a few people also had some good views of White-throated Swift too.

We returned to the Searcher shortly before sunset and enjoyed a delicious back deck barbeque, complete with margaritas as the sun went down. We then had the opportunity to watch as schools of Yellowtail, Green Jacks and Gafftopsail Pompano swarmed around the boat in search of small fish and krill attracted by the lights.

## Day 12

Monday 3rd April

The Searcher raised anchor in the early hours of the morning and motored south. At 7am we dropped anchor in the idyllic, turquoise, Caldera on Isla San Francisco where we all went ashore for a few hours to explore the island's wonderful, wind-pruned cactus gardens, its incredible geology and spectacular scenery. Some of the group opted to hike up to the highest point on the island to take in the breathtaking views and get some photographs of the beautiful bay. The remainder searched for birds along the boulder beaches where we found Spotted Sandpiper and Wilson's Plover, and watched the Great Southern Whites and Wandering Skippers flit between the Iodine bushes on the islands expansive salt flats. Tracey even managed to find us a very nice example of the endemic Baja Rattlesnake (*Crotalus enjo*); a great treat for all of us and the first time anyone had ever seen this species on the Island.

The opportunity to snorkel the reef along the edge of the beautiful caldera provided a chance cool off and to enjoy views of vast schools of Spot-tailed Grunt and other colourful reef fishes. The conditions were also clear enough to get some nice views of the Cortez Garden Eels too (a very localised species within the Gulf of California).

By midday it was time to leave our beautiful anchorage, so we raised anchor and headed out for the last time in search of marine mammals as we slowly made our way southwards, back towards Cabo. It wasn't long before we were distracted by a very large group of leaping Mobulas and we slowed to watch them for a while. Their comical antics kept us all amused for over an hour as they flipped and splashed, seemingly without reason or direction, all around the boat. It was a great treat for everyone. We eventually continued on and were once again distracted by a large herd of probably more than 300 Bottlenose Dolphins that rushed in to ride on the bow of the Searcher and leap repeatedly in our wake, and we were treated to a spectacular display of just how agile these amazing dolphins can be as some of them leapt nearly 30 feet into the air!

We lingered as long as possible with the dolphins until the sun began to set and we were forced to continue on our journey back towards Cabo. Nonetheless, it had been a spectacular end to a wonderful trip. We enjoyed our final meal on the boat together as another beautiful sunset decorated the Baja skyline, and we shared memories and highlights from our tour together.

## Day 13

Tuesday 4th April

Searcher finally pulled into harbour at Cabo San Lucas in the early hours of the morning and we watched as the hustle and bustle of fishing boats started their day. As the crew busily set about refuelling for their long journey back to San Diego, we relaxed, readied our things and watched the comical looking Pelicans around the docks as we waited to disembark.

We said our final farewells to the crew and boarded our taxis that transported us to the estuary in San Jose del Cabo where, under an ominous looking sky, we had plenty of time for some last-minute birding. Fortunately it was another beautiful sunny day and the estuary held its usual collection of Ruddy Duck, American Coot and Pied-billed Grebe, as well as Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teals. The reedy margins of the estuary played host to a few Great Blue Herons and both Great and Snowy Egrets, as well as the odd small flock of Long-billed Dowitcher and the occasional Spotted Sandpiper. A few even had a good look at Least Grebe too. Scanning the surrounding trees and fence posts, we also found American Kestrel and had some stunning views of Lark Sparrow, White-collared Seedeater, Brewer's Blackbird, House Finch, and both Hooded and Orchard Orioles, to name but a few. Perhaps the highlight bird was a very obliging Greater Roadrunner, a bird that everyone wanted to see, that popped out of the scrub near the end of the walk and treated everyone to some wonderful views. It was certainly a great end to our tour and definitely 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 11am we boarded our taxis once again and set off to the airport for our return flight back to San Diego and our connecting flight back to the UK.

## Day 14

Wednesday 5th April

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

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## Species Lists

Birds (✓= recorded but not counted; H=heard)

	Common name	Scientific name	March/April													
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	
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	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>		✓												
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓												
7	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>													✓	
8	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</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	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>				✓			✓							
14	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓												
15	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>		✓											✓	
16	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>			✓											
17	Common Loon (Great Northern Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>			✓		✓	✓								
18	Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>			✓											
19	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>			✓											
20	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓					✓						
21	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓			
22	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus creatopus</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓			
23	Black-vented Shearwater	<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>			✓	✓				✓		✓				
24	Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>			3											
25	Black Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma melania</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
26	Leach's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>				✓										

	Common name	Scientific name	March/April														
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4		
27	Least Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus dominicus</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	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>										✓	✓	✓	✓		
32	American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>						✓	✓								
33	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>			✓												
34	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓					✓								
35	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</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	Masked Booby	<i>Sula dactylatra</i>								✓							
47	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>								✓		✓	✓				
48	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>			✓			✓	✓							✓	
49	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>			✓												
50	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>		✓	✓				✓			✓					
51	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		✓					✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		
53	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>		✓													
54	Red-shouldered hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>		✓													
55	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>		✓		✓								✓			
56	Northern Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>									✓						

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
57	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>				✓									✓
58	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	✓			✓				✓		✓
59	Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus longirostris</i>							✓						
60	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>													✓
61	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		✓											✓
62	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓							
63	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</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	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>		✓					✓						
71	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		✓									✓		✓
72	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>			✓										
73	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>							✓						
74	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>						✓							
75	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		✓				✓	✓						
76	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓											
77	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>			✓	✓				✓		✓			
78	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>			✓										
79	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>			✓	✓			✓						
80	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>				✓						✓			
81	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>		✓											
82	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		✓				✓	✓		✓				✓
83	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>		✓											
84	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
85	Yellow-footed Gull	<i>Larus livens</i>										✓			
86	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
87	Elegant Tern	<i>Thalasseus elegans</i>		✓	✓		✓								
88	Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>		✓	✓										
89	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>							✓			✓			
90	Craveri's Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i>							✓	✓			✓	✓	
91	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>			✓	✓	✓								
92	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓											
93	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓		✓		✓							✓
94	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		✓											✓
95	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>									✓				✓
96	Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>									✓				✓
97	Ruddy Ground Dove	<i>Columbina talpacoti</i>									✓				✓
98	Greater Roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>													✓
99	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>											✓		
100	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		✓											
101	Costa's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte costae</i>				✓						✓		✓	
102	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>						✓							
103	Gila Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>									✓		✓		✓
104	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides scalaris</i>									✓		✓		
105	Nuttall's Woodpecker	<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>		✓											
106	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>		✓											
107	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>		✓											
108	American Grey Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax wrightii</i>									✓				
109	Cassin's Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>		✓											✓
110	Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>									✓	✓	✓		
111	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>											✓		
112	California Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>		✓											
113	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>		✓											✓
114	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓					✓		✓	✓	
115	Phainopepla	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>		✓							✓				
116	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		✓											

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117	Oak Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus inornatus</i>		✓												
118	Verdin	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>									✓		✓	✓	✓	
119	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>				✓										
120	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>		✓												
121	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>														✓
122	American Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>		✓												
123	Wrentit	<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>		✓												
124	Cactus Wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>									✓					✓
125	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>				✓										
126	Canyon Wren	<i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>		H												
127	Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>		H												
128	California Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila californica</i>									✓		✓	✓		
129	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>		✓							✓		✓	✓		✓
130	Grey Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma cinereum</i>									✓					✓
131	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓												✓
132	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>		✓												
133	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓							✓					✓
134	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>		✓												
135	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>		✓							✓		✓	✓		✓
136	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>		✓												
137	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>									✓					✓
138	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>		✓												✓
139	Gray-crowned Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis poliocephala</i>														✓
140	Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>							✓							
141	Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warbler	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>		✓												✓
142	Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>		✓							✓					✓
143	Scott's Oriole	<i>Icterus parisorum</i>									✓					
144	Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>														✓
145	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>		✓												✓
146	Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>		✓												

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4		
147	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>															✓
148	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		✓													
149	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>															✓
150	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>		✓													
151	Belding's Sparrow	<i>Passerculus s. beldingi</i>		✓													
152	San Benito Sparrow	<i>Passerculus s. sanctorum</i>				✓											
153	Clay-colored Sparrow	<i>Spizella pallida</i>															✓
154	Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>															✓
155	Black-throated Sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>										✓	✓	✓			
156	Green-tailed Towhee	<i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>									✓						
157	California Towhee	<i>Melospiza crissalis</i>									✓						
158	White-collared Seedeater	<i>Sporophila torqueola</i>															✓
159	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>									✓						
160	Pyrrhuloxia	<i>Cardinalis sinuatus</i>									✓						

## Mammals

1	Gray Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>			✓		✓	✓									
2	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>				✓			✓		✓		✓				
3	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>			✓												
4	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>			✓												
5	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓					
6	Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>			✓												
7	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			✓		✓	✓			✓					✓	
8	Long-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>			✓	✓			✓				2000+		✓		
9	Short-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>				✓											
10	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>				✓											
11	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓												
12	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
13	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>			✓	✓											
14	Guadalupe Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus townsendi</i>				✓			✓								

	Common name	Scientific name	March/April													
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	
15	California Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>		✓												
16	White-tailed Antelope Ground Squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i>									✓					
17	Botta's Pocket Gopher	<i>Thomomys bottae</i>		✓												
18	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>									✓					
19	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>						✓								
20	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>									✓					

## Reptiles

1	Baja California 'rattleless' Rattlesnake	<i>Crotalus catalinensis</i>												✓		
2	Baja Rattlesnake	<i>Crotalus enyo</i>													✓	
3	Green Seaturtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>									✓	✓		✓	✓	
4	Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>								✓						
5	Common side-blotched Lizard	<i>Uta stansburiana</i>			✓							✓	✓	✓		
6	Western Fence Lizard	<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	✓													
7	Orange Throated Whiptail	<i>Cnemidophorus hyperythrus</i>										✓				✓
8	Reddish Whiptail	<i>Cnemidophorus tigris rubidus</i>											✓	✓		
9	Santa Catalina Spiny Lizard	<i>Sceloporus lineatulus</i>											✓			
10	Granite Spiny Lizard	<i>Sceloporius orcutti</i>										✓				
11	Common Chuckwalla	<i>Sauromalus ater</i>										✓				
12	Desert Iguana	<i>Dipsosaurus dorsalis</i>											✓			

## Fish

1	Amarillo Snapper	<i>Lutjanus argentiventris</i>									✓		✓			
2	Achilles Tang	<i>Acanthurus achilles</i>									✓	✓				
3	Ballonfish	<i>Diodon holocanthus</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Barber Fish	<i>Johnrandallia nigriristris</i>										✓	✓	✓		
5	Beaubrummel	<i>Eupomacentrus flavilatus</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓		
6	Bicolor Parrotfish	<i>Cetoscarus bicolor</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓		
7	Blue and Gold Snapper	<i>Lutjanus viridus</i>													✓	

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
8	Bluechin Parrotfish	<i>Scarus ghobban</i>									✓				
9	Blue and Yellow Chromis	<i>Chromis viridis</i>								✓			✓		
10	Bullseye Pufferfish	<i>Sphoeroides annulatus</i>					✓								
11	Bumphead Damselfish	<i>Microspathodon bairdi</i>									✓			✓	
12	Bumphead Parrotfish	<i>Bolbometopon muricatum</i>									✓				
13	California Flying Fish	<i>Cypselurus californicus</i>									✓				
14	Coral Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhichthys oxycephalus</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
15	Cortez Angelfish	<i>Pomocanthus zonipectus</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
16	Cortez Chub	<i>Kyphosuselegans</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
17	Cortez Damselfish	<i>Eupomacentrus rectifraenum</i>								✓	✓				
18	Cortez Rainbow Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma lucasanum</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
19	Creole Fish	<i>Paranthias furcifer</i>								✓	✓		✓		
20	Finescaled Triggerfish	<i>Balistes polylepis</i>									✓		✓	✓	
21	Giant Damselfish	<i>Microspathodon dorsalis</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
22	Giant Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhitidae cirrhitus</i>									✓			✓	
23	Golden Grouper	<i>Ephinephelus alexandrinus</i>									✓		✓	✓	
24	Gold-rimmed Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus nigricans</i>								✓	✓				
25	Grey-barred Grunt	<i>Conodon nobilis</i>									✓		✓		
26	Hammerhead Shark	<i>Sphyrna mokarran</i>								✓					
27	Hogfish	<i>Bodianus diplotaenia</i>									✓		✓	✓	
28	King Angelfish	<i>Holocanthus passer</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
29	Leopard Grouper	<i>Mycteroperca rosacea</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
30	Mexican Goatfish	<i>Mulloidichthys dentatus</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
31	Moorish Idol	<i>Zanclus canescens</i>								✓	✓		✓		
32	Needlefish	<i>Strongylura exilis</i>								✓	✓				
33	Guineafowl Puffer	<i>Arothron meleagris</i>								✓	✓		✓	✓	
34	Orange-sided Triggerfish	<i>Sufflamen verres</i>								✓	✓		✓		
35	Panamic Fanged Blenny	<i>Ophioblennius steindachneri</i>								✓	✓		✓		
36	Panamic Sergeant Major	<i>Abudefduf troschelii</i>								✓			✓	✓	
37	Pink Cardinal	<i>Apogon pacificus</i>								✓					

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	
38	Reef Cornetfish	<i>Fistularia commersonii</i>									✓	✓		✓	✓	
39	Remora (Suckerfish)	<i>Remora remora</i>								✓				✓	✓	
40	Sabre-toothed Blenny	<i>Aspidontus taeniatus</i>														
41	Scalloped Hammerhead Shark	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>									✓					
42	Scissortail Damsel	<i>Chromis atrilobata</i>									✓	✓		✓	✓	
43	Silverstripe Chromis	<i>Chromis alta</i>										✓				
44	Smooth-tailed Mopbula	<i>Mobula thurstoni</i>										✓		✓	✓	
45	Spotted Sharp-nosed Puffer	<i>Canthigaster solandri</i>									✓			✓	✓	
46	Stoplight Parrotfish	<i>Sparisoma viride</i>										✓				
47	Striped Marlin	<i>Tetrapturus audax</i>									✓					
48	Sunset Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma grammaticum</i>										✓				
49	Three-banded Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon robustus</i>												✓		
50	Top-sail Pompano	<i>Trachinotus goodei</i>												✓		
51	Yellowtail Surgeonfish	<i>Prionurus punctatus</i>									✓	✓		✓	✓	
52	Yellowtail	<i>Chrysiptera parasema</i>												✓		



Jumping Mobula Ray