

Whales & Dolphins of Monterey Bay

Naturetrek Tour Report

27 August - 4 September 2011



Humpback Whale by Ed Drewitt



Orcas by Ed Drewitt



Sea Otters at Moss Landing by Peter Dunn



Risso's Dolphins by Steven Rawlins

Report compiled by Ed Drewitt and Peter Dunn

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Day 1

Saturday 27th August

London to San Francisco

After leaving an overcast London Heathrow, those with a window seat had excellent views of the impressive Canadian Rockies, the mountains of Western Canada and apart from a slight 20 minute delay, it was a smooth flight, making up time with a tail wind and arriving in sunny San Francisco just behind schedule.

Peter and Ed were waiting in the arrivals lounge with both vehicles already booked and waiting in the garage. We soon loaded up and were on our route south on Highway 101. The journey was good with no holdups and we saw a few birds too, including Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, Marbled Godwits, Brewer's Blackbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, American Crow and a Raven. As we travelled along the highway out away from Silicon Valley and the suburbs of San Francisco we had excellent views of the mountains and hills of the Diablo Range to our left. In the afternoon sunshine, the dry grassy scrub known as Chaparral was golden-coloured. As we were near Monterey, the sun gave way to the coastal fog which was moving in land for the evening. In Monterey itself Western Gulls greeted us throughout the town while Steve caught sight of a Brown Pelican.

Arriving at the Anton Inn in Pacific Grove around 18.15, rooms were quickly allocated. Although it was now about 2am UK-time, some still found the energy to go for a meal, which was eaten at Coco's Bakery Restaurant before we retired to bed ready for our first whale watch on Sunday morning.

Day 2

Sunday 28th August

Monterey Bay and headland.

The morning's wildlife watching began before breakfast. In the low light we gathered outside in the hotel's car park to watch two Anna's Hummingbirds coming to feed on some flowers. The older, dominant male was most obvious – and when he hovered to feed his throat feathers shimmered a bright crimson red colour at certain angles and looked dull or black at others. When he disappeared a younger male sneaked in – he had just a small patch of red colour on his chin. At one point the dominant male dashed in, chasing off the other male – the two zipped high overhead like huge bumblebees! The dominant male was back on a favourite perch in a tree above us – he even sang – a ripple of thin, scratchy notes. Quite unlike what you may imagine from such a colourful bird!

Just as the breakfast room opened at 7am, a juvenile Cooper's Hawk dashed through some trees nearby – the local crows and Feral Pigeons exploded into the sky. The hawk then sat on the nearby telephone cable giving prolonged and obliging views - its young streaky chest and Sparrowhawk-like profile was very obvious. As we pulled ourselves away from the hawk we enjoyed a welcome breakfast of bagels, strawberries and other fruits, scrambled eggs, cereal, coffee and fruit juices. We gathered at the vehicles at 8am to drive down to Fisherman's Wharf for our first morning whale watching.

As we walked along Fisherman's Wharf we had our first good sightings of the large Western Gulls and the sooty-coloured Heermann's Gulls. The coarse barking of California Sea Lions echoed across the harbour while the smell of ripe fish from the fishing boats and the sea lions was ever present! Common (Harbour) Seals were resting in the shape of bananas in the shallow waters while Brown Pelicans stood rather ungainly on the framework of the wharf. California Sea Lions rested on whatever flat structure they could find – one was even tagged with a plastic marker on its back flippers and had numbers marked on its fur.

With all the paperwork organised prior to our arrival, we strolled over to Monterey Whale Watch, picked up our boarding passes and waited for our captain, Nancy, to invite us aboard the Sea Wolf II. Meanwhile, a Sea Otter entertained us close to the pier and proved to be one of the animals featured in a recent documentary. It was called pink-blue because of its' flipper tags and this male had a bad reputation with the ladies by biting their noses during copulation! Another Sea Otter was nearby and Barn Swallows swooped low over the boats and buildings. A Common Guillemot (Common Murre) was on the calm waters of the harbour alongside Brandt's Cormorants.

Having safely boarded we slowly headed out of the harbour passed the coastguard pier where the smell and sight of over 200 California Sea Lions was memorable. There was also a good selection of Brandt's Cormorants, Heermann's and Western Gulls and Black Turnstones. A lone Common Guillemot sat at the base of the rocks below the sea lions. Many of the sea lions were grouped in the water, twisting round and round while sticking their flippers up in various directions! As we sailed along the coast we saw more Common Guillemots and a few Pigeon Guillemots with their distinctive white shoulder patches. Soon we were heading out passed Point Pinos into the bay with a bouncy ride until we rounded the point. Despite the foggy conditions, Common Guillemots were numerous – many were males with their single offspring in tow. This late in the season, most chicks are almost as big as their fathers.

Over the next few hours we saw various Cassin's Auklets (sooty all over) and the slightly larger Rhinoceros Auklet (white belly) fluttering away from the boat and belly flopping back into the water. Red-necked Phalaropes and Grey (Red) Phalaropes were a welcome, regular sight and were often picking at the water's surface close to the boat. Sooty Shearwaters increased in numbers during the trip until we joined a huge group of 400 or more sitting on the sea, running along the surface to take flight as we approached – their distinctive straight wings and shallow wing beats became a common sight. Northern Fulmars, of the darker variety, often glided past the boat and one Pink-footed Shearwater was spotted. Further out to sea we glimpsed a few California Gulls and at two Least Storm Petrels with their short, blunt tails. As we edged out to the deeper waters we saw our first Black-footed Albatrosses. A few individuals glided past the boat. A group of five were sat on the sea and another five or more were flying past or sat nearby. Their long, elongated wings, dark bodies and white faces were very distinctive as their shape and presence became clearer in the mist.

As the fog lifted and visibility increased, all eyes were on the horizon. Finally, after looking very hard, someone at the front of the boat spotted a whale blow. As we sailed closer to more blows some people spotted the body and tail of a Humpback Whale. As its fluke rose up and then went back under water we could see it was mainly black all over with just some white markings in the corner – some Humpbacks have almost white flukes. We waited for the whale to come back to the surface. Suddenly there was a loud 'whoosh', like a steam engine, and just metres from the boat the Humpback Whale appeared providing excellent views of its two blowholes and long body. Over the next 20 minutes or so we watched the whale come up for breath before shallow diving and reappearing a few minutes later, each time leaving a calm patch on the water – its fluke print. Overrunning slightly, we had to make tracks back to shore and passing more Common Guillemots, an Elegant Tern, and two Arctic Terns (perched on a rogue canoe) we arrived back in harbour around 1pm, followed by a lunch of clam chowder, antipasti or salad on the wharf.

The afternoon was spent driving the 17 Mile Drive, a toll road around the famous Pebble Beach and Spyglass Hill golf courses but also some nice woodland and shoreline habitat where we saw 'piping' Black Oystercatchers, Grey Plovers, Black Turnstones, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Killdeer, Western Gulls, Heermann's Gulls, Red-tailed Hawks, Acorn Woodpeckers, Black Phoebe and an Oregon Junco. Brandt's Cormorants passed along the coastline in small groups while further out to sea Sooty Shearwaters flew low over the water. On the golf courses Black-tailed Deer grazed the short grass – a few males with large antlers stood out from the hinds. The large rocks along the coastline held large numbers of resting Brandt's Cormorants and one rock was even home to at least eight resting Turkey Vultures. We stopped to see the famous Lone Cypress tree which has stood on its rocky perch for over 250 years. Nearby, other Cypress trees grew along the rocky coastline. Down on the sea, thick kelp beds were sturdy enough to hold hunting Great (White) Egrets. The group were entertained by two male Sea Otters wrapped up in kelp – one was busy preening and licking its front paws while rubbing its back paws together in a scissor action. The other meanwhile was fast asleep, held tight in position by the seaweed. We arrived back at the hotel at 5.45pm to rest and prepare for our first meal at the Black Bear Diner. On the way to the restaurant we spotted a few large-size mastiff bats.

Day 3

Monday 29th August

Monterey Bay

The day started with us watching the Anna's Hummingbird coming to feed like clockwork on the blue flowers by the hotel.

After breakfast we boarded the vehicles for another whale watch adventure. Arriving at the Fisherman's Wharf the bay looked calm despite the fog and the water remained relatively flat as we hugged the coastline north before heading out towards deeper waters. The fog was clearing as we ventured out and there were fewer birds than yesterday – just some Cassin's Auklets, a few Rhinoceros Auklets and some Common Guillemots. Sooty Shearwaters were by far the most numerous bird with hundreds flying past the boat and small groups sitting on the sea. Occasionally a Pink-footed Shearwater glided past and Grey and Red-necked Phalaropes sat on the sea or dashed past in small flocks. One group flying low over the water were too dark to be phalaropes – they were Ashy Storm Petrels, with around 20 in total.

Egg Yolk Jellyfish were very common and early on in the journey we had excellent views of an animal which eats jellyfish, a huge Ocean Sun Fish – looking like a large white dustbin lid with fins! During the trip we saw up to six or more. Along the coastline Sea Otters were regular along with the odd Harbour Seal and California Sea Lion. After almost two hours and careful looking out to the horizon, Mike suddenly spotted the tall, distinctive dorsal fin of an Orca! And not long after we were watching six Orcas, two males, two females and two youngsters, one less than a year old. The males swam together and away from the family group. One of the adults breached, rising right of the water. We watched as the Orcas surfaced for air – one of the babies did some tail slapping and was no doubt communicating to the others. We were able to see the different markings, fin shapes and behaviour of this transient group as they passed through the area. A nearby sea lion was no doubt on the Orcas' mind and their antics suggested they were teaching the young ones to hunt. When they disappeared for a few minutes we were able to watch one or two Black-footed Albatrosses glide past. As we headed back some of the group spotted a Great Northern Diver (Common Loon), one or two Harbour Porpoises and a hummingbird species flying over the sea.

After a quick lunch in the warm sunshine entertained by a pair of Western Gulls we set out on our third whale trip of the tour. The sun was shining and the coastline was easily visible. Despite the good visibility and light the water was choppy and wind of Beaufort Scale 4/5. While other boats finished early we carried on towards the deep water, riding the troughs and watching the Sooty Shearwaters as they rose up from the waves, using the rising air currents to keep them gliding over the ocean. Some spotted one or two Harbour Porpoises briefly make an appearance. After an hour and a half a Humpback Whale breached right out of the water, landing with a huge splash. We spent the next 20 minutes or so watching the occasional blow and backs of two Humpback Whales before they disappeared under the huge waves. A few Black-footed Albatrosses joined us behind the boat alongside the odd Western Gull, Heermann's Gull and Northern Fulmar. Phalaropes and Egg Yolk Jellyfish continued to be abundant alongside at least three Ocean Sunfish and a few Moon Jellyfish.

After an exhilarating journey riding the crests of waves, we arrived back in warm sunshine which was very much welcomed. As we came back into the harbour we passed a mother Sea Otter with her cub, less than a month old. On our way back to the cars a lovely male Anna's Hummingbird fed on some flowers in the bright sunshine, a small white (Cabbage White) butterfly bathed in the heat and a California Scrub Jay was discreetly foraging around the rocks.

Three of the group had decided to walk along the coastline instead of coming out on the boat – they had lovely views of Sea Otters plus some wading birds including Surf Birds and Wandering Tattler. A large Monarch Butterfly had also put in an appearance.

We arrived back in port at 5pm and headed back to the hotel to prepare for our first meal at the Fish Wife Restaurant in Pacific Grove. As we got out of the cars two or three Acorn Woodpeckers were feeding in the trees above us. At the restaurant we glimpsed the sun just beginning to set and when we came out after eating a starry sky was twinkling away, the Plough and North Star easily visible.

Day 4

Tuesday 30th August

Big Sur

We woke to a less foggy day and watched the Anna's Hummingbirds, a dashing Cooper's Hawk and listened to some Pygmy Nuthatches. After we had eaten breakfast and fuelled the vehicles, the sun began to shine on Highway 1 as we travelled south to do the Big Sur. Our first scheduled stop was at Bixby Bridge, one of the last bridges to be completed and the great views down the Big Sur. With the clear sunny weather the scenery was excellent. A few Vaux's Swifts were overhead while Wrentits called in the undergrowth.

We continued down to Andrew Molera State Park where we had a short walk through some woodland and open grassland in hot sunshine. A few Steller's Jays were busy screeching in the trees near the vehicles. We spent an hour or so enjoying the butterflies, dragonflies and mixed flocks of birds in the woods. The mixed flocks generated an exciting energy and every other bird was a new, often very colourful species! In one part of the woodland we encountered a Brown Creeper, Townsend's Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, a preening Nuttall's Woodpecker, a Downy Woodpecker, Black-chinned Hummingbird, a flock of Wrentits and a small flock of Chestnut-backed Chickadees.

In the scrubbiest, open areas where flowering plants and large trees resided, Margaret and Geoff helped identify a variety of butterflies including the graceful Monarch, Lorquin's Admiral, Common Ringlet, Mournful Duskywing, Pale Swallowtail, Western Swallowtail, Common Buckeye, Painted Lady and a Sandhill Skipper. We saw at least six Monarchs, including a pair mating. Over the open grassland a few Blue-eyed Darner Dragonflies were hawking insects. As we wandered back we watched a female Black-tailed Deer stand motionless as a walker strided past within a metre or two of her. A few lizards were spotted including a Western Fence Lizard. A Mourning Dove was showing well in the car park.

We then travelled through the redwood forests of Big Sur Station, pausing to buy our sandwich lunches at the bakery and onto a view point where we had beautiful views of the coastline while entertained by a few local Western Scrub Jays coming to feed on lunch scraps. A Northern Flicker was rooting around in the scrub alongside a Californian Thrasher. A California Towhee made alarm calls in the bushes on the other side of the road while Violet-green Swallows and Vaux's Swifts flew overhead.

Having finished our lunch we boarded the vehicles for the 50 mile drive to San Simeon to look for Northern Elephant Seals. On our way we stopped to chat to some researchers radio tracking the California Condors – they had a spreadsheet of at least 50 birds to follow. Continuing our journey, we stopped at a lay-by to check for condors. A few Turkey Vultures were soaring at the top of the mountains – and with a little patience, Juline spotted a California Condor. It's huge silvery tinted wings and huge door-like presence were distinguishable from the vultures, although it still looked small and dwarfed by the large, rocky slopes behind it and the distance it was from us. It disappeared for ten minutes before soaring a little lower down, enabling all the group to see this remarkable bird.

We continued our journey south and stopped on a large lay-by (turnout) next to a Northern Elephant Seal haul-out. In the hot sunshine, tens of Turkey Vultures were in the air – soaring over the nearby fields and hills. American Kestrels, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks perched on pylons or telephone poles and a Cooper Hawk flew across the landscape. In the hot sunshine we watched 64 seals sleeping and basking on the sandy beach. With some careful observation we could see the huge, dominant male who was very popular with the females – he had at least six lined up in neat row next to him! He also had a mane of healed battle scars all around his neck. Some other large males nearby were not as popular and showed less scarring. Meanwhile, young males, perhaps only five or six years old remained on the periphery of the group, occasionally holding a flipper up in the air to cool off or raising their head showing off their huge proboscis or elongated nose. We also noticed a dead elephant seal – and despite having some way to decompose, the others seemed happy to lie right next to it! One male was in the sea, bobbing up from time to time calling with a deep, almost clicking bark trying to entice another male in for a fight! Nearby some Harbour Seals rested on the seaweed-clad rocks. A Snowy Egret, Western Gulls and Common Buckeye butterflies were also seen.

Heading back north we stopped briefly at Ragged Point for ice cream and a comfort stop entertained by Brewer's Blackbirds and Red-winged Blackbirds. A Band-tailed Pigeon also flew out from a tree. We then settled back in our seats for the two hour journey back to the hotel passing lots of Turkey Vultures. The landscape was breathtaking and we had incredible views of the mountains and the glistening Pacific Ocean. The colour and texture produced by the rocks and plants that grew out from them also created an amazing scene for such a large part of the journey back.

That evening we dined again at the Black Bear Diner where we enjoyed some traditional 'home cooking'.

Day 5

Wednesday 31st August

Monterey Bay and Carmel Valley

We woke to a bright morning watching the Anna's Hummingbirds and a few Eastern Fox Squirrels in the trees. After our usual breakfast at the hotel we headed down to the wharf for a morning on the Sea Wolf II. Kate was our naturalist and Nancy the captain. We headed out south passing a few Elegant Terns and an Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) before finding a school of Risso's Dolphins one of which was 'tail-slapping'. We had good views of at least six at any one time, many with very white heads and often visible before they surfaced. They gracefully emerged from the waves, their tall dorsal fins slowly moving through the water as they took in a big breath before going under again. As we left them we headed more north, encountering a small group of Dall's Porpoises – they looked like mini Orcas as their black bodies with white markings were revealed when they surfaced. They stayed with us for ten minutes or so, coming closer and appearing with a splash. Seabirds started off quiet but it wasn't long before we were seeing lots of Sooty Shearwaters and a few Black-footed Albatrosses around the boat. We encountered rafts of Sooty Shearwaters and the odd Pink-footed Shearwater. Common Guillemots and Rhinoceros Auklets were frequent on the water, while a few Cassin's Auklets were also spotted. Ashy Storm Petrel and Fork-tailed Storm Petrel also put in a brief appearance close to the boat.

We were heading north with a few other boats in sight – they were watching two Humpback Whales. We drew up close to the other boats and had wonderful views of a large female Humpback Whale with her young calf, less than a year old. We watched as they surfaced for air and frequently did shallow dives before reappearing.

We broke away from the whales after some prolonged views and headed back to shore in windier conditions for lunch. Back on land we ate our lunch on the way to the Carmel Valley which was basking in hot sunshine. As we all stripped down to summer clothing after our cooler boat trip we managed to see some very blue male Western Bluebirds plus females and juveniles. We also spotted House Finches, Acorn Woodpeckers, Lark Sparrows and California Towhee. Julie spotted a Wild Turkey in the distance while a Red-shouldered Hawk flew nearby. A Golden Eagle was circling over the trees in the distance.

While watching the birds by the roadside, a local ranch farmer called Bob stopped to say hello and chat about the birds. He invited us down the road to his ranch for a comfort stop and a chance to walk alongside some of his fields by a stream and woodland. Margaret and Geoff walked along the road looking for butterflies and found a White-breasted Nuthatch. A Black Phoebe was calling inside the huge cow shed while outside in the hot sunshine a group of California Quail hurried along the ground, stopping at the cow water trough for a drink. As we walked through the fields we spotted lots of moulted Wild Turkey feathers. A Steller's Jay showed off nicely in front of us. We watched two Rufous Hummingbirds chasing each other in the open air and diving suddenly down in a spectacular display hunting insects. Closer to the tree foliage a few Anna's Hummingbirds were also dipping and diving for insects – a good sign they may have young nearby in a nest. A smart Lorquin's Admiral butterfly was by some trees while a Large Heath (Common Ringlet) Butterfly was over the longer grass. The Golden Eagle was now much closer and its golden head stood out in the bright sunshine against its darker body and wings as it flew across the landscape. An American Kestrel flew into a large tree nearby and as we came back to the cars a group of Wild Turkeys were just disappearing behind a small hill.

As we headed back we passed a small group of Wild Turkeys including some young, smaller individuals. Our journey back continued to take in the beauty of the Carmel Valley – the hills, the grassland known as chaparral, the vineyards where good wine is made and of course the hot sunshine. An American Kestrel flew over the road and a Coyote was spotted in a dry, grassy field – the carnivore at first looked like a deer standing still and hoping it hadn't been spotted! As we passed it by, the sandy-coloured canine also known as a Prairie Wolf was easily distinguishable.

We returned back to the hotel for 6pm and after going through our checklists had another splendid meal at the Fish Wife restaurant. Just before we left some of the group glimpsed a Raccoon in the restaurant garden before it disappeared into the shadows.

Day 6

Thursday 1st September

Moss Landing area

We gathered after breakfast enjoying the sight of some Pygmy Nuthatches and Acorn Woodpeckers before heading out north for Moss Landing. Our first port of call was Zmudowski's State Park, where there is a small freshwater lagoon alongside the sand dunes. On the journey we passed a road kill Striped Skunk – its distinctive defence 'perfume' or fox-like pungent smell was a reminder of what these stripy animals are capable of and can spray at predators when alarmed. As we passed a large pool over 400 Red-necked Phalaropes and a few Grey Phalaropes were pecking furiously on the water's surface. The lagoon in the state park itself was quiet with just Pied-billed Grebes, a sleeping Black-crowned Night Heron, American Coot and Double-crested Cormorants but around the large rush stems we found a good number of Pacific Tree Frogs of all colours, shapes and sizes.

In the nearby ditch a few juvenile Black-crowned Night Herons were residing and a juvenile Green Heron flew in with its black crest raised and croaking call. Nearby a Snowy Egret and Great White Egret sat in a bush. Two White Pelicans flew overhead and in the distance a White-tailed Kite sat in a tree. A few Western Marsh Wrens revealed themselves from within the dense thick sedge stems while in the weedy vegetation Song Sparrows showed well and a pair of Common Yellowthroat showed themselves well as we ventured back along the track. At least two Virginia Rails crept out from some vegetation in a shallow ditch – as always brief but well enough for everyone to catch a glimpse.

Next stop was Jetty Road leading to the Moss Landing State Park. As we got out of the car a few Savannah Sparrows were in nearby vegetation while on the ground a Creeping Vole was discretely creeping around as its name suggests. Pat also spotted a Jack Rabbit with its long ears. The tide was coming in and hundreds of waders were gathering including Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, Willets, and many Least Sandpipers. Amongst these we found two Short-billed Dowitchers, Semi-palmated Plovers, Grey Plover (Black-bellied Plover), Ruddy Turnstone and some Whimbrel. A Sea Otter was smashing at a shell – the loud tapping sound easily heard. A female Red-breasted Merganser was also spotted and two White Pelicans flew overhead. A little further along on the beach we spotted a group of the specially protected Snowy Plover stood on the shingle. Further along a few hundred Sanderlings were running up and down the beach, just ahead of the waves as the surf moved up the sand and back down again. A flock of Heermann's Gulls were resting with a group of Elegant Terns on the shingle while two juvenile Ring-billed Gulls were stood close to where we were viewing the beach.

In the harbour an entertaining raft of Sea Otters were lazily floating on their backs. Everyone was enjoying their antics, photographing them as they rolled round in the water and took small paddle strokes with their rear paws to move, floating along on their backs. Common (Harbour) Seals meanwhile were sleeping on the sand banks. A Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) was swimming and preening close to shore while a juvenile Pacific Diver was sat on the shore preening – a sure sign it wasn't well with hints of oil on its plumage. As it rested a Spotted Sandpiper walked past, picking at insects as it went. A Great Blue Heron sat out in the open and White-crowned Sparrows fed in the scrub, including one which had lost its tail completely! A few Northern Rough-winged Swallows flew past on migration along with some Barn Swallows. As we left, a Belted Kingfisher flew passed and hovered for a short while.

Lunch was taken at Phil's Snack Shack where we made use of his picnic tables overlooking a pool where some Black-necked Stilts were feeding. Three Greater Yellowlegs made an appearance whilst in the trees a Snowy Egret stood out in the open and a Black-crowned Night Herons remained cryptic. A Blue-eyed Darner dragonfly hunted nearby. In the sunshine we spotted various butterflies including Monarch, American Lady, West Coast Lady and Anise Swallowtail. A male American Kestrel sat on the telephone wires by the roadside.

The last birding stop of the afternoon was to Moonglow Dairy near to the Moss Landing power station where we managed to see the locally scarce Tricolored Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbirds with the dairy herd. These were numerous and part of large flocks of Common Starlings, Brewer's Blackbirds and Red-winged Blackbirds feeding below the feet of the cows in the open, dusty fields. As the birds took off, the scarlet red of the Red-winged and Tricoloured Blackbirds flashed out from their wings. A few late, young Great Egrets were still in their nest.

The nearby pools were busy with Red-necked Phalaropes, Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers and a few Western Sandpipers. Mallards and Cinnamon Teal dabbled on the water – the latter showing off the powder blue-grey wings when they flew. Out on Elkhorn Slough a pair of Clark's Grebes provided minutes of entertainment as we tried to decide whether they were Western or Clark's. While some of the group were sussing out the grebes, the majority were enjoying the delights of a mother Sea Otter with her young cub on her chest. The young cub was calling rather like a lamb and was being tended carefully by its mum. It certainly topped the 'Aww' factor for everyone! A Wandering Tattler flew close to the path and two large Caspian Tern flew in land. In the water a few Egg-yolk Jellyfish had floated this far in land but didn't look well. Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds fed in the reeds and a few American Coots lurked at the back of a freshwater pool. On the dusty walkways we could see the footprints of Racoons that had been here previously. A flock of swallows included a Cliff Swallow and Northern Rough-winged Swallow.

We finished off the afternoon with a visit to the local Wild Bird Centre where souvenirs and presents were bought before an early finish at the hotel for some to check the gardens and beach before dinner. Some Surfbirds were spotted with the Black Turnstones on the shore while Black-tailed Deer were feeding in the cemetery. The log was completed before we dined for the last time at the Black Bear Diner.

Day 7

Friday 2nd September

Monterey Bay area

Our last full day in Monterey started with the overnight sea fog still present and we headed down to Fisherman's Wharf after breakfast for our final morning on the Sea Wolf II. It was a foggy morning but the sea was relatively calm and we began searching to the north. The sea was generally very quiet. We saw many Rhinoceros Auklets, often in small groups plus a few Cassin's Auklets and a Pigeon Guillemot. There were plenty of Sooty Shearwaters, Common Guillemots, a few Northern Fulmars and another close encounter with a few Black-footed Albatrosses. The odd Pink-footed Shearwater drifted past and a single Ashy Storm Petrel fluttered past in the distance. A Pomarine Skua (Jaeger) and an Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) flew past giving brief views.

Despite our best efforts the whales remained elusive. However, we did have some glimpses of a small group of Dall's Porpoises before they carried on their way. Even in the very deep sea we saw various California Sea Lions and had some excellent views of a few Ocean Sunfish. Some visible migration was a gentle reminder autumn was here with small numbers of Northern Rough-winged Swallows and a hummingbird flying over the sea far from land. A few small flocks of Whimbrel also went over on passage while a group of Brown Pelicans flew in a 'v' shape low over the sea. We arrived back to Barn Swallows flying around the harbour and a large California Sea Lion sat on our jetty!

Having got lunch ordered some of the group opted to walk around the seafront whilst others were dropped at Monterey Aquarium. We spent the afternoon enjoying the seahorses, jellyfishes and shorebirds. A young (Great) White Shark had recently arrived and we were able to see this remarkable predator at such close quarters. We were also able to see what an Ocean Sunfish looked like under water – its odd shape and form making this huge fish even more fascinating. The group were also able to enjoy a very young Sea Otter which has been adopted by a captive female.

After enjoying the aquarium we walked along Cannery Row passing some House Sparrows, Heermann's Gulls and a Ring-billed Gull to meet Pete and the vehicles. Out on the sea at least eight Great White Egrets were foraging in the thick, seaweedy areas of the shore.

We returned to the hotel to sort our bookings for our return flight and pack before our last log and final instructions on the flight home. We finished the evening with another splendid meal at the Fish Wife restaurant.

Day 8

Saturday 3rd September

Leave from San Francisco Airport

As the flight home was not until 5pm, we decided to take a quick trip north of the airport to the Golden Gate Bridge and a view over San Francisco. After breakfast we packed and set off saying goodbye to Gloria who had served us breakfast most days in our delightfully comfortable small hotel. Our first port of call was the domestic terminal at San Francisco airport as Margaret and Geof were continuing their holiday with a visit to Phoenix and both Janice and Jennie were staying on to visit San Francisco itself.

Saying goodbye to four of the group we continued on into the city on Highway 101, passing the undulating streets we knew from movies and TV programs until we arrived at the south gate visitors park. The whole span of the bridge could be seen but the distinctive towers were shrouded by low cloud. However it was a pleasant stop to witness this immense structure and take advantage of the rest rooms and coffee shops. Other land marks such as Alcatraz and Golden Gate Park could be seen in the distance before we made the return through San Francisco to the airport.

We said our goodbyes to Pam who was extending her holiday with a few days in San Francisco and Peter and Ed bid farewell to the group as they went for their BA flight, their United flight left a little later. The camaraderie within the group made this trip memorable and we saw a good selection of the areas wildlife to boot. Hopefully we will all meet up again on another tour...

Day 9

Sunday 4th September

Arrive in the UK

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Species Lists

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	August/September							
			27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>						2		
2	Creeping Vole	<i>Microtus oregoni</i>						1		
3	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>					1			
4	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalaopus californianus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>				64				
6	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>		10+	3	1	7	39	5	
8	Common Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>					1			
9	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>		6	1	✓	4	✓	✓	✓
10	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		1	2		2			
11	Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>					12+			
12	Dall's Porpoise	<i>Lissodelphis borealis</i>					2		2	
13	Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>			6					
14	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			6+		1			
15	Western Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus griseus</i>							1	
16	Eastern Fox Squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	California Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Mastiff bat species	<i>Molossidae sp</i>			✓		✓		✓	

Birds (H = heard only, ✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	August September							
			27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
1	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>				2	30			
2	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>					25			
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>					✓	2	4	2
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						2		
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						✓		✓
6	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>						12		
7	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>								
8	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>						1		
9	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>			1			1		
10	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>		12	6		3-4		2	
11	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		6	✓		5		✓	
12	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
13	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus creatopus</i>		1	6		3		1	
14	Least Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma microsoma</i>		2						
15	Ashy Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma homochroa</i>			20		1		1	
16	Fork-tailed Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma furcata</i>					1			
17	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>						4		
18	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>						2		
19	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>						6	2	
20	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>						1		
21	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>			1			4	1	1
22	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		6	✓	1	1	✓	2	
23	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>				1		3	3	
24	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>						3		2
25	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	August September							
			27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
26	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>		2	4					6
28	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>						13	1	1
29	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	3	✓		✓	✓	✓	2	3
30	California Condor	<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>				1				
31	White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>						2		
32	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>		1		1				
33	Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	1	2		4				
34	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	2	2		✓	6	7		2
35	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					1			
36	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>				6	2	1		
37	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				1				
38	Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>						2		
39	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>						2		
40	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>		6						
41	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>						8+		
42	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		1			6	12+		
43	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>						✓		
44	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		2						
45	Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>						6		
46	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>						2		
47	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	✓					✓		
48	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>						3	20	
49	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>						✓		2
50	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>						3		
51	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>			1			1	1	
52	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>		2	1			✓		
53	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>						1		
54	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		1	1			4		
55	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
56	Surfbird	<i>Aphriza virgata</i>			1			2		
57	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>						150		
58	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>						12		
59	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>						✓		
60	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>		✓	200			✓	✓	
61	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>		✓	80					20
62	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>						5	1	
64	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>						2		
67	Elegant Tern	<i>Thalasseus elegans</i>		1	6		3	15	4	
68	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		2			2			
69	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>							1	
70	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>					1		2	
71	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
72	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>		3					1	
73	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
74	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
75	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>				1				

	Common name	Scientific name	August September								
			27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	
77	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>								1	
78	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		✓					6		
79	Vaux's Swift	<i>Chaetura vauxi</i>				6					
80	Black-chinned Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>				5					
81	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		2	4	3	5	9	6	1	
82	Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>					2				
83	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>						1			
84	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>		1	2	1	4		2		
85	Nuttall's Woodpecker	<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>				1	H				
86	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>				1					
87	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>				3					
88	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>		1		2	3	5+			
89	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>				2	1				
90	California Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1			1					
93	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>				✓		4			
94	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>				6					
95	Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>						3	4		
96	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Wrentit	<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>				10	25				
98	Marsh-Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>						6			
99	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>				1					
100	Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>				H		15	6		
101	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>					1				
102	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>				1					
103	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>					1				
104	California Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>				2					
105	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>					10	2			
107	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓		✓		✓		
108	House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>					12	✓			
109	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Oreothlypis celata</i>				1					
110	American Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica aestiva</i>				8					
111	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Dendroica townsendi</i>				2					
112	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>						2			
113	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Wilsonia pusilla</i>				2					
114	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>						20			
115	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	1			8		✓	2		
116	Tricolored Blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>						✓			
117	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
118	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>						12			
119	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>				✓		4		1	
120	Oregon Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis oregonus</i>	1	1			6		6		
121	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>						2			
122	Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>					6				
123	California Towhee	<i>Melospiza crissalis</i>				H	6			2	

Other fauna

Painted Lady; American Lady, West Coast Lady, Red Admiral, Mylitta Crescent, Lorquin's Admiral, Cabbage White; Woodland Skipper; Western Tailed Blue, Monarch, Common Ringlet, Mournful Duskywing, Pale Swallowtail, Western Swallowtail, Anise Swallowtail, Common Buckeye and a Sandhill Skipper

Blue-eyed Darner, Black Saddlebags. Praying Mantis sp.

Pacific Tree Frog; Western Fence Lizard, Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*); Egg-yolk Jelly; Moon Jelly, Blue-backed Crabs, various starfish species.

Map of whale watching tracks

