

# Whales & Dolphins of Monterey Bay

Naturetrek Tour Report

31 August - 8 September 2013

---



Blue Whale (Peter Dunn)



Humpback Whale nr Point Lobos (Peter Dunn)



Sea Otter in Kelp (Peter Dunn)



Leaving Monterey Harbour (Peter Dunn)

Report & Images compiled by Peter Dunn & Ed Drewitt



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

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

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

Tour Leaders: Peter Dunn Naturetrek Naturalist  
Ed Drewitt Naturetrek Naturalist

Participants: John Watts  
Maureen Watts  
Stuart Jackson  
Yvonne Fitzpatrick  
Mike Chester  
Joanne Watchman  
Ian Watchman  
John Swain  
Vicky Swain  
Charles Corser  
Sheila Corser  
Janet O'Brien  
Patrick O'Brien  
Dina Wright  
Hayley Pegg

## Introduction

Hundreds of Humpback Whales were travelling up the Big Sur and into Monterey Bay, and within the first few days of our holiday we had seen the blows of 40 different individuals, with 120 estimated to be in the area. We watched incredible feeding behaviour as the whales fed with sea lions, pelicans and other seabirds on Anchovies and Sardines, while some whales surfaced within metres of the boat. Following suit, Blue Whales appeared on our second day out – at one point up to 12 whales were seen blowing, and we watched up to six relatively close to the boat. Things kept getting better with hundreds of Risso's Dolphins, and small numbers of Pacific White-sided Dolphins joining in with the feeding frenzy. They were feeding alongside thousands of Sooty Shearwaters and hundreds of Pink-footed Shearwaters which we had seen a day earlier heading north in a continual stream into Monterey Bay from the coastline.

Our visit along the Big Sur coastline resulted in a record seven California Condors being spotted, including one which flew right over our heads. At a Northern Elephant Seal colony, unusually, a huge, mature male suddenly appeared out of the sea to join the younger males and females. Inland, up the Carmel Valley, we saw over ten Yellow-billed Magpies, while three Golden Eagles soared over the hillside. Our boat trips continued to find Humpback and Blue Whales on every trip, and seabirds included South Polar, Pomarine, Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, plus Cassin's Auklet, Rhinoceros Auklet, and Buller's Shearwater.

## Day 1

Saturday 31st August

### London to San Francisco

After a ten-hour flight across Greenland, Hudson Bay, and down across the north-west of Canada into California, the BA flight from London arrived at 2.35pm. Peter and Ed met everyone at the airport, and it wasn't long before we were heading south on the Highway 101 in our two vans. In glorious sunshine, everyone had wonderful scenic views on the way to Monterey. Snowy Egrets were seen on the wetlands close to the airport, while a flock of Ring-billed Gulls were drifting in low on their way to roost an hour into the journey. American Kestrel, Collared Dove, Starling, Turkey Vulture, and a Red-shouldered Hawk were seen on the journey. We arrived at the Anton Inn in Pacific Grove around 6.20pm, and after a little time to refresh we met in the reception/dining room to enjoy a delicious cold buffet left. With body clocks still adjusting, many headed off for an early night, ready for the first whale-watching trip of this tour in the morning.

## Day 2

Sunday 1st September

### Monterey Bay and 17-mile Drive

Our first main day of the tour and as we ate breakfast the fog cleared and Monterey was basking in warm, morning sunshine – something that was to stay with us for the rest of the week. Some Anna's Hummingbirds, Eastern Fox Squirrels, and Mule Deer had already been spotted before we left for Fisherman's Wharf. As we headed out of the harbour, Kate Spencer, our naturalist and commentator on the boat, pointed out the California Sea Lions and Brandt's Cormorants resting and hanging out on the sea wall. One or two Sea Otters were feeding in the calmer water of the wharf, while other sea lions rested together on a raft close to where we set off. A Belted Kingfisher was often flying around – its rattle-like call was a good giveaway to its whereabouts.

As we headed out north-west it was clear we were in for a good bird morning. Along with the usual male Guillemots with their full-grown chicks, thousands of Sooty Shearwaters were flying low over the water or resting on the sea's surface. Most surprisingly was the number of Pink-footed Shearwaters – there were at least 300 flying around, the most we have ever seen over the ten years of offering this holiday. In amongst these were small groups of Rhinoceros Auklets, a single Arctic Tern, small numbers of Elegant Terns, and in hot pursuit, at least four Arctic Skuas.

As we were almost an hour out into Monterey Bay we had our first sightings of whales – the first of many. We watched as two Humpback Whales surfaced and gave out watery blows. These often came our way and gave us a smelly experience – their breath smells like rotten cabbage or broccoli! Over the next few hours we saw the blows of over 40 whales, and stopped to watch many pairs. They often travel in twos or threes. Most were doing shallow dives to feed, but a few dived deeper and showed off their black and white-patterned fluke as they went under. Some have big white patches on their fluke, while others make be peppered white or be almost black. We heard later from the Monterey Bay Whale Watch that based on reports from several other boats there was an estimated to be a minimum of 120 whales spread out over ten miles. Most of these whales showed up overnight to feed on massive amounts of anchovies!! These are the most whales that have been concentrated in one area that the biologist, Nancy Black, has seen in many years. Let's hope they stay for a few more days!

We continued to have perfect conditions for whale watching. Clear visibility, sunshine, and a sea state which was still good for spotting cetaceans. We were therefore in for a further treat as we headed south to the Carmel

Canyon, a deep drop under water which brings cold water and nutrients to the surface. With it comes plenty of food including huge shoals of fish such as Anchovies. The latter is favourite food of the Humpback Whale, and as we got close to the Carmel Valley back on land we suddenly watched an amazing spectacle. Three Humpback Whales were surfacing, but rather than just moving along and diving they were turning upside down, rolling over, and showing off their flippers and heads. As they were doing this they made trumpeting noises as they blew – they were agitated by Risso's Dolphins and sea lions which were swimming in amongst them. The dolphins came very close, and we even managed to see two Pacific White-sided Dolphins, much smaller cetaceans, swimming around the boat with them. As the whales dipped under the water, they would suddenly reappear right by the boat giving incredible views of their bodies, blowholes, and flukes as they dipped back under. Further out, more Risso's Dolphins were swimming past, their white bodies clearly visible as they surfaced.

We left the whales as the hive of activity died down and headed east back along the 17-mile Drive towards Monterey. It wasn't long before we spotted more whale blows, and then suddenly saw a very small, baby Humpback Whale. It was 'Rocky', a well-known whale which shows the scars of being in a battle with predators such as Orcas, probably further south near Mexico where it was born. Now doing well, Rocky surfaced several times before we continued back. We stopped briefly to watch a big Ocean Sunfish – this is a dustbin lid-size fish which is very thin and wide, and rests on its side with a fin flapping around in the air! Egg Yolk Jellyfish and Sea Nettle Jellyfish were also floating near the sea's surface.

We arrived back at 1.30pm and headed straight to a restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf which specialises in clam chowder in a bread bowl as well as light salads and big cooked food sandwiches. After a late lunch we headed along the coastline and along part of the popular 17-Mile Drive, a toll road around the famous Pebble Beach and Spyglass Hill golf courses which also includes some nice woodland and shoreline habitat. Stopping at Bird Rock we watched a few hundred sea lions spread out across a huge area of rocks and sand just off shore. They were very noisy, but provided a contrasting view to the sea lions laid out on buoys and rafts in Fisherman's Wharf. Lots of Brandt's Cormorants were stood in between them. On closer rocks we watched a Wandering Tattler feeding along with a few Black Turnstones. A Whimbrel took off from the beach, and California Ground Squirrels gave very obliging views just a few metres away. We stopped at a few more beaches seeing a Spotted Sandpiper, Black Oystercatchers (including one feeding on a mussel), pelicans and cormorants. At a few viewing points we had good observations of Harbour (Common) Seals – lovely silver-grey individuals peppered black. At one viewpoint we watched some resting seals, plus a Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret and two Black Phoebes. Just as we were about to leave the trees suddenly became busy with activity – in just over ten minutes we saw two Townsend's Warblers, Song Sparrow, House Finch, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Red-winged Blackbirds, a juvenile Western Bluebird, a Turkey Vulture and an Oregon Junco. Not bad for a short stop!

We continued on to the Lone Cypress, a single tree which has been stood on a rock for 250 years. Now supported by metal cables locals hope it will continue to live to 300 years! A few Western Scrub Jays were feeding nearby. Out across the kelp beds, an important ecosystem in its own right along the coastline, there were hundreds of Western Gulls and cormorants, with tens of egrets (Snowy and Great). There must have been a sudden arrival and abundance of food as a week ago this area was devoid of birds. Meanwhile, beyond the kelp beds there was a constant stream of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters heading north along the coastline. Another incredible spectacle to finish our first main day at Monterey Bay!

We headed back to the Anton Inn via the supermarket to stock up on supplies – some Pygmy Nuthatches were feeding in some pines by the car park. We met for dinner at 7pm and enjoyed excellent lasagne, salad and garlic

bread with a choice of cheesecakes, washed down with wine or soda. Following the daily log call, most retired to bed early after a really exciting first day.

## Day 3

## Monday 2nd September

Wow! What a day! We had two whale and dolphin trips out to sea today, and the whales certainly didn't disappoint. For the morning boat trip we had excellent visibility, sunshine, and a relatively calm sea once again. We had hardly got out of the harbour before we came across a school of Risso's Dolphins – we stayed with them for a while as they swam near to the boat before being joined by the more energetic and smaller Pacific White-sided Dolphins.

We headed west and soon came across a pair of Humpback Whales feeding, and during the morning we stopped or passed by many pairs or small groups of whales. We usually left them once they had begun a deep dive signalled by showing off their spectacular flukes (tail fins). As we continued west, taller spurts of whale blows were seen on the horizon and as we closed in on the spray we realised they were Blue Whales. Not just a few, but at least a dozen were surfacing all around. The Blue Whales had also appeared in Monterey Bay! Closer by we saw between four and six Blue Whales. And at one point wherever we looked there was a Blue Whale blowing! We watched as they surfaced and then dived for ten minutes or so. Occasionally they showed off their fluke as they dived, but more often they just slipped away with little trace. However, unlike the Humpback Whales which leave a large circular fluke print on the water's surface (an area of still water), the Blue Whales leave a long, elongated fluke print. We stayed with the Blues for a while – these impressive, endangered creatures are the largest animal on our planet, and 2,000 live here in Monterey Bay. There are only between 10,000 and 25,000 left in the whole world.

As we left the Blue Whales and began to head back east, we came across another spectacle – a feeding frenzy where hundreds of California Sea Lions, seven Humpback Whales, and diving pelicans were gathered. We watched as whales were blowing in all directions. Hungry sea lions moved through the water as a writhing mass, making the water look like it was boiling. At least two whales breached clear out of the water, while others were feeding close to the surface and turning over showing off their flukes and mouth. We even witnessed some feeding lunges where one or two whales opened their huge mouths at the surface of the sea before dipping back down into the water. They were feeding on Anchovies or Sardines, and huge numbers of them. Before we left, there were excited gasps as three whales surfaced right by the boat giving incredible views of their skin before they dipped back under. We also witnessed their smelly, cabbage-like breath!

Throughout the trip we continued to see big numbers of sea lions moving *en masse* as they targeted big shoals of fish. Pelicans dived all around them. Once one had a successful catch it would pull its beak against its chest to drain the water before quickly swallowing its fishy catch and flying off, usually with some Western Gulls in hot pursuit. Sooty Shearwaters were present in large numbers, and streams of them were flying in from the south. We also saw small numbers of Pink-footed Shearwaters drifting past. Guillemots and Rhinoceros Auklets often formed small groups, and closer to Monterey we spotted three or four Pigeon Guillemots in flight, their white wing patches easily visible.

We headed back in to Fisherman's Wharf after a morning of excitement and adrenalin. After a quick late sandwich lunch most of us headed back out on the 2pm boat trip, ready to do it all again! We headed straight out

to a pair of Humpback Whales which were surfacing and diving just under the surface of the sea. As we continued west we approached more pairs repeating this behaviour, usually surrounded by hundreds of sea lions, gulls, pelicans, and shearwaters. One pair included a female with her large calf. It wasn't long before we were back in Blue Whale territory and very soon we were watching two surfacing and blowing. As they dived, up to two others were also close by. We stayed with this pair for 20 minutes, patiently waiting eight to ten minutes after each dive for them to surface, shoot up a tall blow of air and water, and show off their light blue-grey skin, and very small, lightly hooked dorsal fin. Unusually, we were able to capture two or three deep dives where the whales held their fluke in the air, water quickly draining off, before this also went under the water with them. Blue Whales often just slip deep under water without revealing their fluke.

We headed back west, and found four more Humpback Whales before arriving back in port at 5.15pm. John and Vicky who had walked along the coastal path met us back at the Anton Inn – on their walk they had spotted Black Oystercatchers, a Willet, Western and Least Sandpipers, Spotted Sandpiper, and a Sora Rail. After a short rest back in our rooms we met again at 7pm to eat at the Black Bear Diner. As we ordered our food, small numbers of Big Brown Bats flew low over trees and houses on the other side of the road. Over 200 American Crows were coming in to roost nearby, and flying around in a large swirling flock against the sunset sky.

## Day 4

Tuesday 3rd September

### Big Sur

Today was another incredible day seeing everything we hoped to spot and more. After watching a group of Acorn Woodpeckers outside the Anton Inn after breakfast, we headed south on Highway 1 along the Big Sur. Our first stop was Bixby Bridge, one of the last bridges to be completed along the Big Sur. It was a great opportunity to take some photos and take in the splendid scenery. Our next stop was the Andrew Molera State Park where we went for a walk through some woodland and dry grassland. We started off by seeing a few Western Fence Lizards, and a few young California Ground Squirrels nibbling on some herbs. In the oak woodland there was a plethora of birds, particularly woodpeckers. In just a few trees we spotted Acorn Woodpeckers, a Nuttall's Woodpecker, a Downy Woodpecker and two Northern Flickers, an adult and juvenile. There were also lots of small birds including Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, two Brown Creepers, a male Wilson's Warbler, and a stunning Spotted Towhee. Out in the open grassland which is also a campsite we saw lots of ground squirrels stood up alert as Turkey Vultures and a Red-shouldered Hawk flew overhead. By the Eucalyptus trees we found four Wrentits and two California Towhees, plus two Monarch Butterflies. During our walk we also spotted Common Buckeye and Lorquin's Admiral Butterflies.

Before we picked up lunch we stopped near the Big Sur Station where Joanne spotted four California Condors above the hills – three juveniles and an adult. There are over 67 condors flying wild in this part of California, but it is rare to see so many in one go. Just as we had picked up our sandwiches, the group picked up two more adult condors outside the shop. They have huge black wings with white undercoverts, and are very distinctive even at a long distance. We stopped off at a few more potential condor sites without seeing any so we continued on to our lunch spot, a view point looking out along the Big Sur.

Just as we had sat down to eat our lunch, completely by surprise; an immature condor flew low above our heads giving incredible views of this endangered raptor. We watched as the bird flew along the coastline and disappeared. Even a chap from the Ventana Wildlife Society monitoring the condors (and at the viewpoint) was

taken by surprise. This bird was wearing a white wing tag – and out of all the condors we saw was the only one to have been reared in the wild. The others have been reared in captivity and released as part of an on-going conservation programme. Wow! We had seen seven different condors in the space of an hour! This was hard to beat. To entertain us further, plenty of Humpback Whales were blowing out at sea, their spurts of condensing air clearing visible as we cruised along at 30 to 50 miles per hour. We stopped at one point to watch the whales, and on a few occasions we saw whales breaching, landing with a huge splash of white water.

After a delicious lunch in glorious hot sunshine we continued south down passing a Coyote, Loggerhead Shrikes (3), American Kestrels, various hawks and Turkey Vultures, pelicans, Mule Deer, and even a Zebra along the way! After a brief comfort stop at Ragged Point we stopped in the car park next to a Northern Elephant Seal haul-out. The beach was covered in young male and female seals. The real highlight was a mature male elephant seal that had just come out of the sea and was undulating his way up the beach – the nearby females weren't hanging around and soon moved out his way! Such a huge male with a long proboscis (nose) is very unusual to see at this time of the year. Most big males are now on their way to Alaska to feed. The big male rose up and made his blubbery, snorting calls to announce his arrival before wobbling back down to the sand where he made himself comfortable and covered himself in sand! Up to 20,000 elephant seals come to breed or moult along the Californian coastline, and this year over 4,000 seal pups had been born. By now, the only animals left on the beach are young animals trying out their display skills, as well as fasting mature individuals sunbathing on the beaches as they grow a new coat of hair. The hot sunshine brings the blood close to the skin's surface and helps with the development of the new hairs. Western Gulls and Herrmann's Gulls rested on the beach, while a few Surfbirds and Black Turnstones were feeding on the rocks. Some Elegant Terns were also feeding just offshore.

After a day of beautiful scenery and wildlife we headed back north, stopping briefly at Ragged Point for ice cream. We also spotted some Red-winged Blackbirds, Brewer's Blackbirds, Steller's Jays, and a male Anna's Hummingbird. The two-hour journey back to Monterey was full of incredible scenery, more whales blowing out a sea, and sunshine. We stopped briefly at Bixby Bridge for more photos and arrived back at 6.10pm in time to refresh and meet again for dinner at 7pm. After a delicious pork loin meal (or cannelloni), we completed the day's checklist, and then headed for bed.

## Day 5

Wednesday 4th September

### Monterey Bay and Carmel Valley

After breakfast and entertainment by the half a dozen Acorn Woodpeckers warming themselves in the morning sunshine, we headed off to Fisherman's Wharf for our morning cruise out into Monterey Bay. With no sea fog we had clear visibility which meant seeing whales was once again going to be relatively easy. As we edged out of the harbour, a female Sea Otter was paddling on her back through the water using her left paw, while clutching hold of a very fluffy, quite big otter cub which was sat on her chest. The sea was calm and flat, and it wasn't long before we had our first whale blows close to shore, and only 15 minutes out of the harbour. There were three Humpback Whales, a big calf with its mother and her 'friend'. During the trip we passed many pairs of Humpbacks, and often saw them just as they were diving and showing off their flukes.

The glassy waters meant others animals were also easier to spot including a Blue Shark and a huge Ocean Sunfish close to the water's surface. We headed out west where we soon got to see some Blue Whale blows. We saw up to four whales, and had good views of two as they surfaced for breathe before disappearing down. We waited ten

minutes for them to reappear, and watched them again before they went down, one showing off its fluke in a spectacular manner before it disappeared down.

Back in Monterey Bay we found some more Humpback Whales, and came across a very active group of Risso's Dolphins. There were mothers with their grey calves, while other individuals were splashing and chasing each other – some were swimming together and mating. Sooty Shearwaters and a few Pink-footed Shearwaters were also flying around, though in vastly smaller numbers than what we had seen earlier in the week. Rafts of Rhinoceros Auklets were floating on the sea, plus small numbers of Guillemots. A South Polar Skua was chasing a tern and scanning the sea. Later on we also spotted two juvenile Arctic Skuas, and as we came into port a juvenile Long-tailed Skua flew past. Lots of Red-necked Phalaropes were feeding on the sea, and a few flocks of small sandpipers flew low over the water.

After another successful trip we enjoyed our sandwiches by the harbour side and headed in land to the Carmel Valley. The scenery was stunning with rolling, rocky hills, and crisp, dry grasslands dotted with bright green vineyards. The area is renowned for its wines, many of which make it into our supermarkets in the UK. As we passed the oak woodland, many trees were full of balls of mistletoe. In the hot sunshine, we stopped by the roadside to search for eagles and it wasn't long before we were watching an immature Golden Eagle soaring high above the hillside. Down on the scorched fields in front of us we watched over half a dozen Yellow-billed Magpies – a bird unique to this part of California. They were drinking water and then foraging across the dry, grassy field. Meanwhile, a female Lesser Goldfinch, and one of her offspring were feeding on thistles. Nearby a Pacific Slope Flycatcher was feeding a young bird some insects. Joanne suddenly found a Coyote, and we watched as the sand-coloured canid walked across a far field. The eagle had drifted off and been replaced by an adult Golden Eagle, and just before we headed back to the vehicles, a second adult had joined it.

We carried along the road and stopped at a junction where Joanne found two more Yellow-billed Magpies resting in an oak tree. Over a dozen Lark Sparrows were feeding and flying around, while Western Bluebirds were nipping down from fence wires to feed. A California Thrasher was quietly singing from the bushes, and a stunning Red-tailed Hawk flew low overhead. We headed down to a nearby ranch where two more magpies were feeding below the feet of horses, and a small group of Wild Turkeys were scratching around. As we got out of the vehicles Ian suddenly spotted a Bobcat disappear into the bushes. We were unable to relocate it, but a female Western Tanager, an oriole-like bird was quickly found in a nearby tree. Back out across the fields we saw a Black Phoebe, more bluebirds, a Nuttall's Woodpecker, and a flyover White-breasted Nuthatch.

On our way back we stopped at an open site where California Quail were calling. One suddenly flew low across the ground and disappeared. With a little patience a whole group of ten or more quails walked out of the scrub in line and slipped away into a field. Two Spotted Towhees were feeding close by and just as we were leaving John found a California Thrasher perched in a small, dead tree giving unusually good views.

## Day 6

Thursday 5th September

### Moss Landing area

We gathered after breakfast and headed 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. There was thick sea mist but despite this there were plenty of birds around. A small number of White-crowned Sparrow was at the car park. A

small flock of Western Gulls were sitting on the water, later joined by a single immature Ring-billed Gull. Later, they moved on, and three California Gulls were sat on the water instead. Meanwhile, a few American Coots and a Pied-billed Grebe fed close to the reeds. It wasn't long before we found a few brown and bright green, stripy Pacific Tree Frogs sitting on the large rush stems. In the weedy vegetation American Goldfinches showed well, and a male Common Yellowthroat was showing and flashing about in the sedges. We were stood right by a few singing Western Marsh Wrens but they were difficult to see. A few people managed to spot one. Barn Swallows, Cliff Swallows and a few Northern Rough-winged Swallows were passing through on migration along with big flocks of Brown Pelicans. A female Northern Harrier quartered the back of the pool by the sand dunes, with a White-tailed Kite in hot pursuit. Later the striking grey-white kite was hovering over the reed bed and impressed everyone. As we left a small group of Ring-billed Gulls were sat on a field of plastic-covered food crops.

Next stop was Jetty Road leading to the Moss Landing State Park. The tide was on its way in and we had excellent views of hundreds of Marbled Godwits and Willets, many washing and preening. Some Long-billed Curlews were feeding in the saltmarsh while Short-billed Dowitchers, Least Sandpipers, and Western Sandpipers were probing and pecking on the mud further back. Nearby a summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebe was on the water, while a winter-plumage individual was on the other side of the road. A stunning Snowy Egret was fishing from the rocks, picking out fish as the water flowed past it into the lagoon. A White-tailed Kite was sat in a tree at the back of the pool. Two or three Harbour (Common) Seals were fishing on the nearby pool, and they were slapping the water with their flippers. Out on the sand banks lots of Harbour Seals were hauled out along with Western Gulls and Brown Pelicans. Across the road, a huge flock of Brown Pelicans were wheeling in the air after just arriving from further north. On the beach a large flock of Herrmann's Gulls were resting with some Western Gulls, and a tatty-looking Glaucous-winged Gull. Along the tideline Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlews, and Marbled Godwits were feeding, while out at sea Elegant Terns were passing over with their distinctive Sandwich Tern-like grating calls. An adult Arctic Skua was also scanning the sea.

Not far out we could see the blows of at least 12 Humpback Whales, and watched as some took a deep dive showing off their flukes. Everyone was delighted to see a raft of male Sea Otters, lazily floating on their backs. Some had colour tags on their flippers and were being monitored by researchers. The tags give off a signal which can be detected and allow their movements and survival to be checked and compared with other otters living further down the coastline. The group of male otters slowly floated closer to where we were stood giving splendid views as many slept with their paws held in the air or over the chest. Others were preening their fur and twisting round in the water. A quick look out from the harbour wall revealed the blows of a female and a calf Humpback Whale very close to shore – here the water is deep and ideal for the whales. Before we left, White-crowned Sparrows and House Finches were spotted by the car park.

Lunch was taken at Phil's Snack Shack where we made use of his picnic tables overlooking a pool where some Mallards were resting. In the trees were up to seven adult and juvenile Black-crowned Night Herons, plus a Great Egret. Sandhill Skipper Butterflies were flying around and resting on the grass. A little further down the road we visited a tame Pied-billed Grebe which was sitting on the water only metres away.

The last birding stop of the afternoon was to Moonglow Dairy near to the Moss Landing power station which had been our landmark for the week from the whale watching boat. As we got closer to the cows, we starting spotting Red-winged Blackbirds, Brewer's Blackbirds, Common Starlings, and a few Tricoloured Blackbirds. There was also a few Brown-headed Cowbirds feeding around the cows' feet, and some Northern Rough-winged

Swallows flying around. There were hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds, Brewer's Blackbirds, and small numbers of the locally scarce Tricolored Blackbird which has a patch of red and yellow on its wing. Down by the slurry pools we spotted over 100 Red-necked Phalaropes, while Mallards, a Gadwall, and some Cinnamon Teal resting on the mud bank. The nearby Eucalyptus trees were full of Double-crested Cormorant nests, some with young. A young Peregrine rushed across the pool lifting up all the phalaropes. On the adjacent saltmarsh Marbled Godwits, Long-billed Curlew, Least Sandpipers, Western Sandpipers, Great Egrets and a few Willets were making the most of the shallow, algae rich pools at high tide. In the sunshine we were really able to appreciate their different plumages. Small numbers of Semipalmated Plovers were feeding near the phalaropes along with a single Dunlin. Along the footpath and in the vegetation near the waders, three or four Savannah Sparrows were feeding and chasing each other.

Out on Elkhorn Slough a single Clark's Grebe was on the water along with a few Harbour Seals poking their heads out of the water, and a Sea Otter was busily smashing a big seashell on its chest. Down at foot level we watched the minute Western Pygmy-blue Butterflies dancing around, while large Blue-eyed Darner dragonflies quartered the embankments. A single American White Pelican flew up the slough – another migrant for the day. As we left the dairy we watched more blackbirds, and spotted a few Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures flying amongst the pylons. As we got back on to Highway 1, a Red-shouldered Hawk gave close views as it perched on a street lamp.

As we headed back to Monterey we picked up some fresh fruit and then finished our trip with a visit to the local Wild Bird Centre where a few souvenirs were bought along with ice cream in the nearby store. When we got back we walked down the road to explore the cemetery. On the way down we saw a small group of Acorn Woodpeckers being very social in their favourite pine trees. Some flowering trees were attracting lots of Anna's hummingbirds and we spent some time spent watching their antics. It was quite breezy so we walked back up the road to Washington Park, a small park near the Anton Inn where a few California Towhees, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Steller's Jays, and Anna's Hummingbirds were residing. In the winter, thousands of Monarch Butterflies swarm together and winter in the Eucalyptus trees. Some of the group ventured down to the seaside where the sea was being whipped up in the wind. In the evening we enjoyed steak for dinner at the Anton Inn before completing the log and heading for bed.

## Day 7

Friday 6th September

### Monterey Bay

Despite some sea fog to begin with (which quickly cleared), we managed a fifth day in the row with beautiful sunshine. Our final trip at sea was a little rocky with the swell after a windy night, but it didn't take long before we were watching Humpback Whales close to the coastline, half way towards Moss Landing. These were probably the same group we were watching yesterday from land. We passed and stopped by many pairs – there were 12+ in the immediate area. We watched as they surfaced and dived. Seabirds were a little thin on the ground, but here closer to shore the most common bird was California Gull. We also spotted a Cassin's Auklet in flight.

As we headed out west to look for Blue Whales we passed Red-necked Phalaropes, groups of Rhinoceros Auklets, and a few pairs of Guillemots. Sooty Shearwater numbers began to pick up and we watched many wheeling across the sea. They were joined by a few Pink-footed Shearwaters, and after some searching, Ed found

a single Buller's Shearwater which arrives here from New Zealand. It is smaller and paler than the other shearwaters with distinctive thick dark and light markings on its wings which form an 'M' shape. A light-phase juvenile Pomarine Skua was also heading away from the boat out to sea.

As we edged out further we finally got our first Blue Whale blow. It was busy feeding and didn't stay up long before diving and showing off its fluke. We waited ten minutes for it to surface. It was moving quickly through the water and didn't stay up long before it dived again! We got a third sighting of it before we left, while a second Blue Whale was blowing in the distance. We headed back in to land with no further whale sightings but glorious views of the coastline in hot sunshine. After taking a group photo we headed back to the car park. John and Vicky had decided to take a walk around a local lake in the morning instead and had a lovely time spotting up to half a dozen Black-crowned Night Herons, Pied-billed Grebes, Northern Mockingbird, and a Ruddy Duck.

After picking up our lunches (courtesy of John and Vicky) we dropped most of the group off at Monterey Bay Aquarium for the afternoon while others looked around town or took a walk along the coastline. Down by Crespi Pond at the golf course Sora Rails, Virginia Rails, Least Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalaropes, Black Phoebe, and Spotted Sandpiper were all putting in an appearance. A White-faced Ibis, a very unusual bird here had also dropped in and was feeding. John also photographed a Hairy Woodpecker in Washington Park.

We met again later afternoon to check people in on their flights, do the checklist, before setting off to the Fishwife Restaurant just down the road for some a delicious fish-related menu (vegetarian alternative included).

## Day 8

## Saturday 7th September

Our final morning and once again we were treated to a bright, sunny morning and the usual gang of Acorn Woodpeckers were sunbathing on their tree outside. After breakfast and saying a big thank you to our host Melinda, we headed off at 9am to San Francisco stopping just short of the airport for coffee. Red-necked Phalaropes and a Great Blue Heron were on one of the lakes in Monterey, while a few American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, and Turkey Vultures were spotted along the freeway. With the weather and traffic on our side we decided to drive through the mean streets of San Francisco and across the Golden Gate Bridge which looks out across the bay and city. We stopped at a viewpoint on the north side with incredible views in hot sunshine – a few Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks were soaring below us. After taking in the sights of the city, many of which can be recognised from well-known movies, we carried on to the airport. As we took off, the estuary by the runway was providing lots of food at low tide for Snowy Egrets, American Avocets, Willets and a variety of other wading birds.

## 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](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) to sign up.

## Species List

Mammals (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	August/September							
			31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Big Brown Bat	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>			✓					
2	Bobcat	<i>Lynx rufus</i>					1			
3	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>				1	1			
4	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalaopus californianus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>				✓				
6	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
7	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>	1	8	10		4	45	7	
8	Western Spotted Skunk	<i>Spilogale gracilis</i>	1							
9	Common Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>		1						
10	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	
11	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>			6		4		2	
12	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		20	20	20		12	15	
13	Grey Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>					15			
14	Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>		50	30		40			
15	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>		2	10					
16	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			1					
17	Western Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus griseus</i>		1		1				
18	Eastern Fox Squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger</i>	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	
19	California Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		

## Birds

1	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>					10			
2	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>					10			
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						1		
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
6	Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>						3		
7	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>							1	
8	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		1						
9	Buller's Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bulleri</i>							1	
10	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>		4000	✓		✓	✓	✓	
11	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus creatopus</i>		300	✓		12		✓	
12	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>						2	6	
13	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>						6		
14	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>						1		
15	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>							1	
16	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>						8	✓	
17	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		1				4	✓	1
18	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	3	✓	2	✓	✓	
19	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	1	2	✓			✓	✓	
20	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>						1		
21	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
23	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
24	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>						✓	✓	
25	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	✓	5	1	✓	✓	✓	1	12
26	California Condor	<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>				7				

	Common name	Scientific name	August/September							
			31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				1				
28	White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>				1		3		
29	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					3			
30	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>						1		
31	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>				1		1		
32	Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	1	1		1		2		2
33	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	6			2	3	3		9
34	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	1			1		1		2
35	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						1		
36	Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>							2	
37	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>			1				1	
38	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>						5	✓	
39	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>		5	✓				1	
40	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>						12		
41	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		1				1	1	
42	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>		1				20		
43	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>		7				✓		
44	American Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus</i>		1				15		
45	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>			7			✓		
46	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>		1	1					
47	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>		1						
48	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>			✓			✓		
49	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		1	1				4	
50	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		5	
51	Surfbird	<i>Aphriza virgata</i>		4	6	2	6		7	
52	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>						5		
53	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>			1			✓	2	
54	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		7				✓	4	
55	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>						1		
56	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Grey (Red) Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>		2			2	1	1	
58	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓					20	✓	✓
60	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	10	✓	✓
61	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>						1		
62	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Elegant Tern	<i>Thalasseus elegans</i>		✓	8	6	8	✓	✓	
64	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		1						
65	South Polar Skua	<i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i>					1			
66	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>							1	
67	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		4			2	1		
68	Long-tailed Skua	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>					1			
69	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
70	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>		2	9		2		2	
71	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>							1	
72	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
73	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>		✓		18				
75	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	1			1	2	1		✓
77	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		1	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	August/September							
			31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
78	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>		1	1	1	2	1	1	
79	Acorn Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>			1	8	10	✓	✓	✓
80	Nuttall's Woodpecker	<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>		1		1	2		H	
81	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>		1	1	1	1			
82	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>					H	H	1	
83	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>				2				
84	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>		2	✓	2	2	✓	✓	
85	Pacific-slope Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax difficilis</i>				1	2			
86	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>				3				
87	Hutton's Vireo	<i>Vireo huttoni</i>				2				
88	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>		1		✓	1	2	2	
89	California Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Yellow-billed Magpie	<i>Pica nuttalli</i>					10			
91	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				1				
93	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>		H		✓		✓	✓	
94	Oak Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus inornatus</i>					4		✓	
95	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>						10		
96	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
97	American Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>						5		
98	American Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>						6	✓	
99	Wrentit	<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>				4	2			
100	Western Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>						2		
101	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>				2				2
102	Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>		3						
103	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>					1			
104	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>				2				
105	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>							1	
106	California Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>					1			
107	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>		1			12			
109	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
110	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>		1				✓		
111	American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>						✓		
112	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>					2			
113	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>						2		
114	American Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>						1	1	
115	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>		2	1		1	1		
116	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>				1				
117	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>						✓		
118	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
119	Tricolored Blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>						✓		
120	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
121	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		1	2	✓	1	✓		
122	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>				1		4		
123	Oregon Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis oregonus</i>		3	2	2	4		1	
124	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>						6		
125	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>				1	1			
126	California Towhee	<i>Melospiza crissalis</i>				2	2	2		
127	Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>					1			

## Butterflies

Anise Swallowtail, *Papilio zelicaon*

Western Pygmy-Blue, *Brephidium exile*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Lorquin's Admiral, *Limenitis lorquini*

Mournful Duskywing, *Erynnis tristis*

Great Southern White, *Ascia monuste*

Silvery Blue, *Glaucopsyche lygdamus*

Common Buckeye, *Junonia coenia*

Monarch, *Danaus plexippus*

Sandhill Skipper, *Polites sabuleti*

## Other taxa

Blue-eyed Darter, *Rhionaeschna multicolour*

Blue Shark, *Prionace glauca*

Compass Jelly, *Chrysaora hysoscella*

Sea Nettle Jelly, *Chrysaora fuscescens*

Giant Sea Star, *Pisaster giganteus*

Western Fence Lizard, *Sceloporus occidentalis*

Ocean Sunfish, *Mola mola*

Egg-yolk Jelly, *Phacellophora camtschatica*

Moon Jelly, *Aurelia aurita*

Purple Shore Crab, *Hemigrapsus nudus*

Pacific Tree Frog, *Pseudacris regilla*

## 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](http://www.facebook.com) is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

## GPS Tracks of Boat Days

