

# Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours



## NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:

### Grey Whales, Condors, Bobcats & Snow Geese

Saturday 5th - Tuesday 15th February 2022

#### 7 Wise Birding Clients

**Leaders:** Chris Townend / Steve Blain & local guides

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

**Bobcats:** We enjoyed numerous sightings of this beautiful cat around the Point Reyes National Seashore. At least 5 different animals and 60+ minutes of viewing time!

**Grey Whales:** Two morning boat trips in Monterey Bay produced a minimum of 20+ animals with some fabulous encounters as they migrated through the bay.

**Risso's Dolphins:** Wonderful views during our first boat trip in Monterey Bay with a pod of 30+ animals which including a number of calves.

**Varied Thrush:** This stunning thrush was seen well in the pine forests of Point Reyes where we recorded double figure counts on two mornings.

**California Condor:** An adult swearing above us as we explored the dramatic Big Sur coast road on Highway one.

**Snow & Ross's Geese:** Thousands of birds at Colusa NWR were a hugely impressive sight and sound as we explored this important feeding area for the winter before their long migration north.



**Bobcat and Grey Whale were just two of the many highlights of the tour**

**Videos of many of the highlights from this tour can be seen here:**

<https://vimeo.com/christownend>

## **CALIFORNIA: Grey Whales, Bobcats and Snow Geese**

Northern California is more typically known as a late summer destination for its seabirds and cetaceans. However, during the less visited winter months there are some equally impressive wildlife spectacles to see. These include the Grey Whale migration, thousands of migrating Snow Geese, one of the largest mainland Elephant Seal colonies in the world as well as a great time of the year to see Bobcat! The coastline around Monterey Bay is great for waders too with specialities such as Surfbird and Black Turnstone and the nearby impressive Big Sur coastline has a good population of the mighty California Condor!

California is simply packed full of birds and other wildlife. Once again, similar to our previous tour in 2020 we were blessed with blue skies and sunshine for the entire trip! The wildlife was spectacular and full of many memorable sightings.

**We saw a total of 168 species of bird and recorded 21 mammals on this tour.**

DAY	DATE	ITINERARY
1	Sat 5th Feb	Arrival SFO. <b>Overnight San Mateo</b>
2	Sun 6th Feb	Morning visit to Bay Front Park SFO and Coyote Point. Late afternoon visit to Moss Landing. <b>Overnight Monterey</b>
3	Mon 7th Feb	Morning whale watching trip Monterey Bay. Afternoon birding around Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary and George Washington Park <b>Overnight Monterey</b>
4	Tues 8th Feb	Cannery Row, Asilomar Beach. Andrew Molera and Big Sur Coast. <b>Overnight Monterey</b>
5	Weds 9th Feb	Morning whale watching trip Monterey Bay / Salinas River NWR. Elkhorn Slough, Moonglow Dairy and Moss Landing. <b>Overnight Santa Cruz</b>
6	Thur 10th Feb	Morning visit to Año Nuevo State Park Elephant Seal Colony. Drive the Cabrillo Highway Coast and over the Golden Gate Bridge. First attempt for Bobcat Point Reyes National Seashore. <b>Overnight Point Reyes</b>
7 & 8	Fri / Sat 11th /12th Feb	Two full days exploring the Point Reyes National Seashore focused on Bobcat and Birding. <b>Overnight Point Reyes</b>
9	Sun 13th Feb	Final morning birding and searching for Bobcat around Point Reyes Drive to the Sacramento Valley via Putah Creek State Wildlife Area. <b>Overnight Williams</b>
10	Mon 14th Feb	A full day birding the Coulsa National Wildlife Refuge and wildfowl rich areas near Pennington and Gray Lodge. <b>Overnight Williams</b>
11	Tue 15th Feb	Drive south to San Francisco and a short visit to the Botanical Gardens before our early evening flight back to the UK.

## **TOUR SUMMARY: Days 1 - 2: San Francisco Bay & Moss Landing**

San Francisco Bay and Moss Landing are both part of Important Bird Areas where thousands of wintering waders and wildfowl gather to roost and feed at this time of year. It is not just the impressive numbers of birds at these sites that makes the birding so memorable, but also the close views of the birds. Highlights whilst exploring these sites included Marbled Godwits, Long-billed Curlews, American Avocets, Willets, both Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers, Greater Yellowlegs and Western Sandpipers. The duck numbers were equally impressive with American Wigeon, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead and Canvasback. Plus ridiculous views of Ridgway's Rail as it strutted up and down the muddy shore just metres away from us! Of course, we cannot forget the mammals which included "cavorting" Black-tailed Jack Rabbits at Coyote Point and our first views of delightful Sea Otters at Moss Landing.



*Killdeer at Moss Landing by Chris Townend*

## **Days 3 - 5: Monterey Bay and Big Sur Coast, Salinas River & Moonglow Dairy**

Three days exploring Monterey Bay produced some excellent birding as well as a number of high quality mammals. Two morning boat trips in Monterey Bay were a clear highlight with somewhat calmer conditions on the second trip. We enjoyed wonderful encounters with the expected, but nonetheless impressive Grey Whales as well as small groups of Risso's Dolphins including calves and a couple of Pacific White-sided Dolphins. Despite the quieter time of year for seabirds we still saw small groups of Rhinoceros Auklets, Northern "Blue" Fulmars and Pacific Divers. Back on land the rocky coastline revealed great views of the stunning Heerman's Gull, numerous Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants, Black Turnstone and Surfbirds.



*Risso's Dolphins in Monterey Bay by Chris Townend*

A trip south down the Big Sur coast along famous Highway 1 not only revealed stunning scenery but one of the key target species, a superb adult California Condor! A Wrentit posed for us by our Condor lookout and two Golden Eagles glided above us whilst Grey Whale blows were clearly visible out to sea. A visit to Andrew Molera State Park and a refreshing(!) paddle in the Big Sur River produced a good selection of commoner species such as Northern Flicker, California Quail and Audubon's Warbler. A visit to the Monarch Butterfly Reserve revealed much larger numbers of Monarchs compared to our previous tours and were great to see as they glided around in the sunshine. For those that did not join the second boat trip, a visit to the Salinas River NWR and Elkhorn Slough produced Say's Phoebe, Redhead and Virginia Rail. A visit for everyone to Moonglow Dairy allowed us to see a west coast speciality in the form of Tricoloured Blackbird, as well as Marsh Wren and a good selection of waders.



*Golden Gate Bridge by Chris Townend*

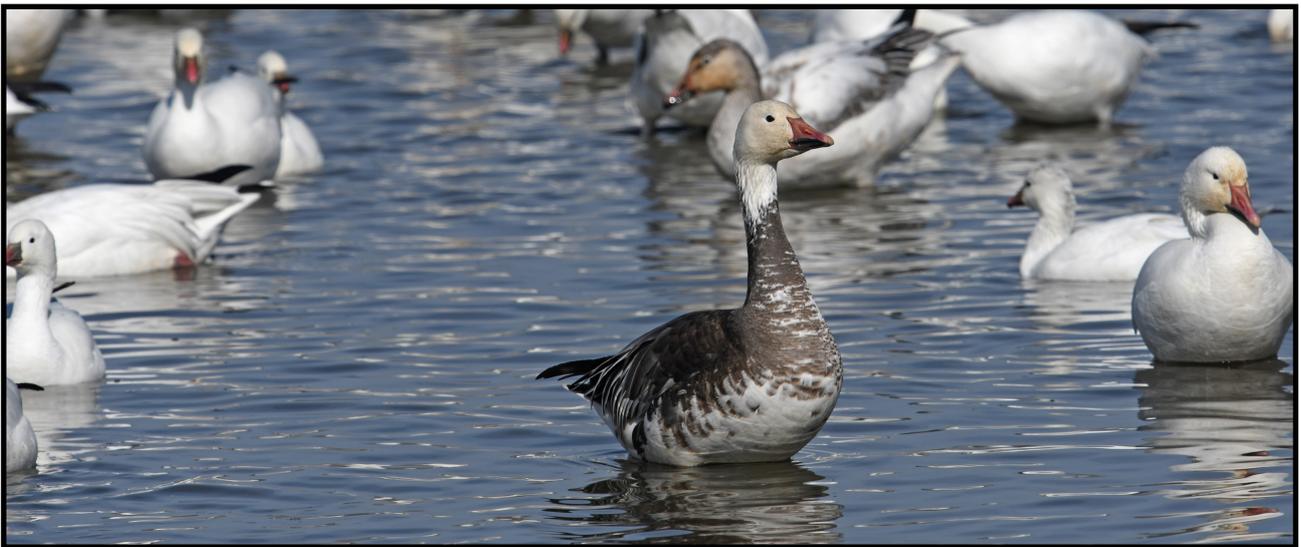
### **Days 6 - 8: Año Nuevo State Park and Point Reyes National Seashore**

After a night at Santa Cruz, we headed north to Año Nuevo State Park along the beautiful coastal Cabrillo Highway. Año Nuevo is home to one of the largest mainland Northern Elephant Seal breeding colonies in the world. Our visit was timed specifically for the best activity, when bull seals engage in battles and females nurse their pups before mating and returning to the sea. We were entertained for a good hour or two with the sight and amusing sounds of these huge mammals. The birding was impressive too with the highlight being a posing California Thrasher. We continued our journey north along the coast, over the iconic Golden Gate Bridge and into Bobcat country and Point Reyes National Seashore where we spent three nights. We enjoyed Bobcat sightings every day with a minimum of five different animals seen, amounting to over 60 minutes of viewing time!



*Hunting Bobcat by Chris Townend*

Of course, Bobcats were not the only mammal highlight of this very scenic area. During our three days we had some wonderful encounters with Coyotes, Northern Raccoon, no less than 3 North American River Otters and small groups of the distinctive Wapiti, also known as Tule Elk. The diverse habitats of estuaries, salt marsh, beaches, coastal scrub, grasslands and coniferous forests produced top notch birding too. Surf Scoters surfing the waves, incredibly approachable Least Sandpipers and Western Sandpipers side by side on the beach as well as the near threatened Snowy Plover and Varied Thrush and Northern Saw-whet Owl in the forest were just some of the highlights. Birding from our very comfortable accommodation near Point Reyes was also memorable as Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, Band-tailed Pigeons, House Finches, Red-winged Blackbirds and Anna's Hummingbird were a daily distraction from the breakfast table!



*Dark morph Snow Goose with the commoner white form and Ross's Goose by Chris Townend*

### **Days 9 - 11: Sacramento Valley & San Francisco Botanical Gardens**

Our final two days were spent in the Sacramento Valley famous for its citrus fruit and nut orchards, but also as a hugely important wildfowl refuge area for thousands of wintering wildfowl, particularly Snow and Ross's Geese. We had an evening and a full day to explore this impressive area and its numerous National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) areas. On our journey north we stopped at Putah Creek State Wildlife Area where we enjoyed views of two drakes and a female Barrow's Goldeneye before continuing to the town of Williams where we spent two nights. A day exploring the Colusa NWR and surrounding area was highly memorable as we watched the incredible spectacle of thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese gathering in one small corner of the refuge.



*Adult Bald Eagle by Chris Townend*

The sight of an immature Bald Eagle causing havoc amongst the flock was simply spectacular, literally like a snow storm, but the noise from the calling birds was equally impressive! Blue phase Snow Geese were regularly picked out from the flocks of geese and Greater White-fronted Geese were common too. Equally impressive were the numbers of the tiny Aleutian Cackling Geese with a day count in excess of 150 birds! Aside from the geese other highlights here included Western Meadowlarks, Buff-bellied Pipits, Cinnamon Teal, hunting Northern Harriers, showy American Bushtits, Tree Swallows and Marsh Wrens! We spent afternoon exploring the agricultural areas near Pennington where enjoyed views of Nuttall's Woodpecker, Wild Turkeys, Western Bluebirds, Lark Sparrow and Sandhill Cranes.

It was then time to head back south and we soon crossed the Oakland Bay Bridge and neared San Francisco. A final birding stop at San Francisco Botanical Gardens allowed time to relax for some of the group before our flight home. Others were still keen for some last minute birding and Cedar Waxwing was the final new species for the trip.



*Bobcat by Chris Townend*





**Numerous waders were seen during the tour**

**Black Oystercatcher (above)  
Greater Yellowlegs (below)**





**Monterey Bay is one of the best places in  
the world to see Whales & Dolphins**

**Grey Whale (above)  
Risso's Dolphin and calf (below)**





**Rhinoceros Auklet (above) and Sea Otter (below)  
Both seen very well during our boat trips in  
Monterey Bay**





**We enjoyed ridiculously close views of Ridgway's Rail around SFO Bay!**





**Townsend's Warbler (top)**  
**Audubon's Warbler (middle)**  
**Prairie Warbler, a California rarity! (bottom)**





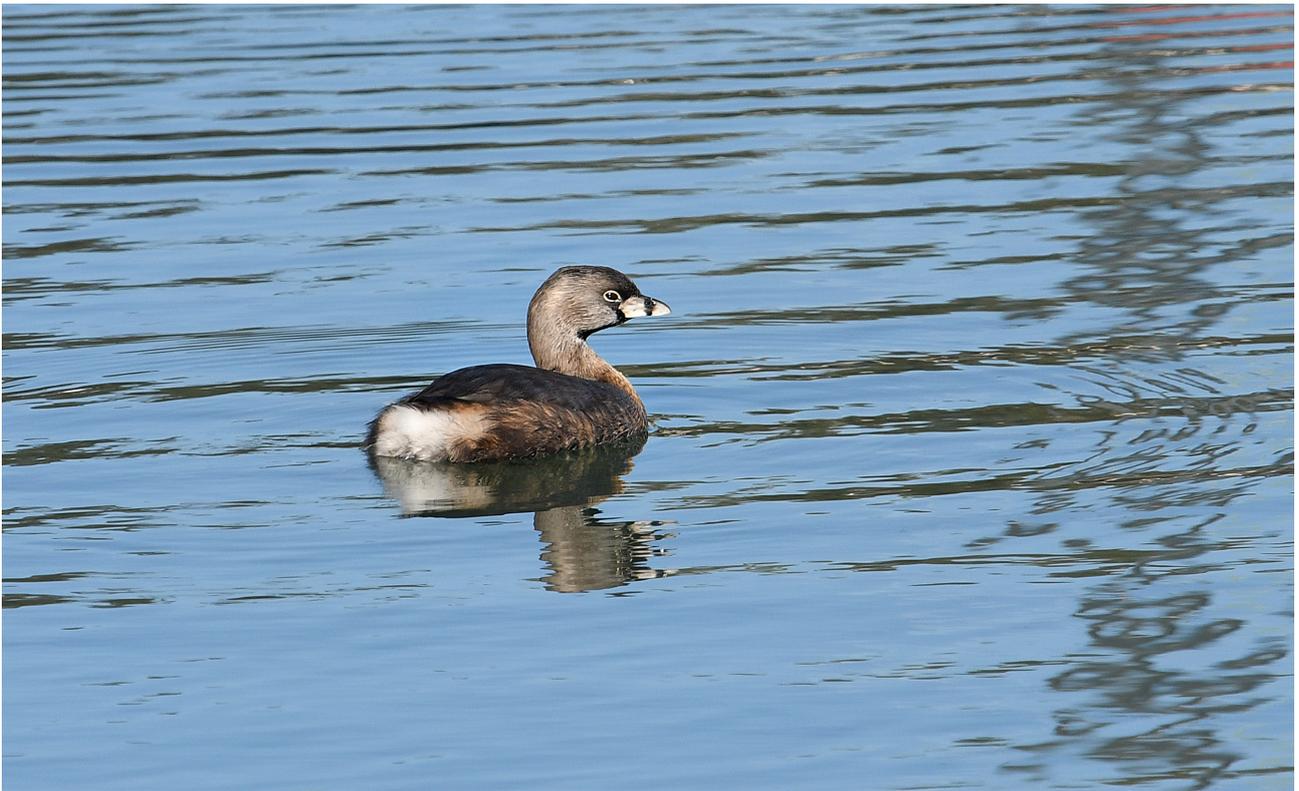
**Black-tailed Jackrabbit at Coyote Point (top)  
Sea Otters in Monterey Bay (middle)  
Northern Elephant Seals at Año Nuevo State Park (bottom)**





**Surfbird in Monterey Bay (top)  
Long-billed Curlew at Moss Landing (bottom)**





**Pied-billed Grebe at Coyote Point (above)  
Monarch Butterflies at Pacific Grove (below)**





**Least Sandpipers on Limantour Beach (above)  
Green Heron at Coyote Point (below)**





**Male and female Barrow's Goldeneye amongst  
Common Goldeneye and Buffleheads at Putah Creek (above)**

**Surf Scoter off Limantour Beach (below)**





**The striking Red-winged Blackbird (above)  
and Western Meadowlark (below)**





**Northern Harriers were a regular distraction  
Male (above) and a juvenile (below)**





**Golden-crowned Sparrow (above)  
and Western Bluebird (below)**





**A family of Snow Geese at Colusa NWR (above)  
Sandhill Cranes amongst the fruit trees (below)**





**Snow Geese heading off into the sunset to roost (above)  
Our first Bobcat sighting at Point Reyes (below)**





**We enjoyed numerous Bobcat sightings around  
the Point Reyes National Seashore**

**A minimum of five different animals were seen  
and over 60 minutes of viewing time!**





**More beautiful Bobcats!  
Point Reyes National Seashore**



The following **bird checklist** follows the nomenclature and classification from Gill F, D Donsker & P Rasmussen (Eds). 2022. **IOC World Bird List** (v12.1). <https://www.worldbirdnames.org/new/>

The IOC World Bird List complements three other primary world bird lists that differ slightly in their primary goals and taxonomic philosophy, i.e. [The Clements Checklist of the Birds of the World](#), [The Howard & Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World](#), 4th Edition, and [HBW Alive/Bird Life International](#).

**The mammal checklist** mostly follows [the IUCN framework](#) (Red List) but also the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) [www.gbif.org](http://www.gbif.org) and Handbook of The Mammals of the World.

## **Total number of birds recorded: 168 species**

### **Brant Goose**

*Branta bernicla*

A surprise during our boat trip in Monterey Bay on the 9th were 3 birds flying over the sea.

### **Canada Goose**

*Branta canadensis*

Recorded on at least even days.

### **Cackling Goose**

*Branta hutchinsii*

Surprisingly high numbers at Colusa NWR on the 14th with in excess of 100 birds in one flock and another 50+ birds at other sites during the same day.

### **Ross's Goose**

*Anser rossii*

A fantastic spectacle seeing this species mixed in with Snow Geese on the 13th and 14th with estimated max. counts of up to 10,00 birds as a mixed flock.

### **Snow Goose**

*Anser caerulescens*

A fantastic spectacle seeing this species mixed in with Ross's Geese on the 13th and 14th with estimated max. counts of up to 10,00 birds as a mixed flock.

### **Greater White-fronted Goose**

*Anser albifrons*

Recorded at Coulsa NWR on the 13th & 14th and an estimated max. count of 1,500 birds.

### **Cinnamon Teal**

*Spatula cyanoptera*

This striking duck ws recorded on two days and included stunning males. Max. count of 4 birds at Colusa NWR on the 14th.

### **Northern Shoveler**

*Spatula clypeata*

Recorded on four days.

### **Gadwall**

*Mareca strepera*

Recorded on five days.

### **American Wigeon**

*Mareca americana*

Recorded on five days.

### **Mallard**

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Recorded on seven days.

### **Northern Pintail**

*Anas acuta*

Recorded on three days. Far smaller numbers recorded this year in Sacramento Valley.

**Green-winged Teal**

Recorded on three days.

*Anas carolinensis*

**Canvasback**

Small groups recorded on three days, mostly around SFO Bay.

*Aythya valisineria*

**Redhead**

Four birds at Salinas River NWR on the 9th for this that chose not to take the second boat trip in Monterey Bay.

*Aythya americana*

**Ring-necked Duck**

Recorded on five days with a max. count of 30+ birds at Colusa NWR.

*Aythya collaris*

**Greater Scaup**

Small flocks recorded on four days with counts of hundreds on the 12th around Point Reyes National Seashore.

*Aythya marila*

**Lesser Scaup**

Less common than Greater Scaup. Recorded on three days with a max. count of 27 birds at Abbott's Lagoon on the morning of the 12th.

*Aythya affinis*

**Surf Scoter**

Great views throughout much of the tour with birds records on seven days.

*Melanitta perspicillata*

**Long-tailed Duck**

An unexpected species with an immature male and a female seen on the 9th.

*Clangula hyemalis*

**Bufflehead**

Numerous great view with birds recorded on seven days, including a leucistic male bird around Point Reyes on the 12th.

*Bucephala albeola*

**Common Goldeneye**

Small number recorded on five days.

*Bucephala clangula*

**Barrow's Goldeneye**

Excellent views of 2 drakes and a female at Putah Creek on the 13th.

*Bucephala islandica*

**Hooded Merganser**

Recorded on two days with 3 birds at Abbott's Lagoon on the 12th and 2 birds at Putah Creek on the 13th.

*Lophodytes cucullatus*

**Common Merganser**

A redhead was seen well on the 8th at Andrew Molera State Park.

*Mergus merganser*

**Red-breasted Merganser**

Small numbers recorded on four days.

*Mergus serrator*

**Ruddy Duck**

Small numbers recorded on four days.

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

**California Quail**

Excellent views of this west coast speciality. Recorded on four days with a high count of 16 birds at Andrew Molera on the 8th.

*Callipepla californica*

**Wild Turkey**

Six birds whilst exploring the agricultural areas NE of Colusa on the 14th.

*Meleagris gallopavo*

**Common Pheasant*****Phasianus colchicus***

A single bird at Colusa NWR on the 14th.

**White-throated Swift*****Aeronautes saxatalis***

A flock of 15 birds on the Big Sur coast on the 8th.

**Anna's Hummingbird*****Calypte anna***

Excellent views of this resident hummingbird over eight days.

**Allen's Hummingbird*****Selasphorus sasin***

A single bird on the 10th at Año Nuevo SP was either Rufous/Allen's and thought most likely be Allen's Hummingbird based on the views we had.

**Rock Dove*****Columba livia***

Recorded on seven days.

**Band-tailed Pigeon*****Patagioenas fasciata***

Recorded on five days with the best views at Franks feeders.

**Eurasian Collared Dove*****Streptopelia decaocto***

Recorded on six days.

**Mourning Dove*****Zenaida macroura***

Small numbers recorded on five days.

**Ridgway's Rail*****Rallus obsoletus obsoletus***

Ridiculous views of a very obliging bird at SFO Bay on the 6th. This species was previously considered a subspecies of Clapper Rail.

**Virginia Rail*****Rallus limicola***

A single bird was seen well by some at the marsh below Moonglow Dairy on the 9th.

**American Coot*****Fulica americana***

A common species on most lakes and ponds and recorded on six days.

**Sandhill Crane*****Antigone canadensis***

A total of 25 birds seen on our last full day whilst exploring the fields near Pennington.

**Pied-billed Grebe*****Podilymbus podiceps***

Recorded on just two days.

**Red-necked Grebe*****Podiceps grisegena***

A single bird on the sea off Limantour Beach on the 13th.

**Horned Grebe*****Podiceps auritus***

Small numbers records on four days in harbours and bays.

**Black-necked Grebe*****Podiceps nigricollis***

Commoner than Horned Grebe and recorded five days.

**Western Grebe*****Aechmophorus occidentalis***

Small numbers recorded on three days.

**Clark's Grebe*****Aechmophorus clarkii***

At least 1 bird seen well side by side with Western Grebe at Coyote Point on the 6th and then probably overlooked for the remainder of the tour.

**Black Oystercatcher*****Haematopus bachmani***

This west coast speciality was seen on four days with a high count of 5 birds on the 9th.

**Black-necked Stilt*****Himantopus mexicanus***

Recorded on three days with a high count of 60+ birds at Colusa NWR on the 14th.

**American Avocet*****Recurvirostra americana***

Small numbers of this graceful wader seen on three days.

**Grey Plover*****Pluvialis squatarola***

Small numbers recorded on three days.

**Semipalmated Plover*****Charadrius semipalmatus***

Around 20 birds seen well on the 13th at Limantour Beach.

**Killdeer*****Charadrius vociferus***

Small numbers recorded on three days.

**Snowy Plover*****Charadrius nivosus***

A total of 29 birds were seen very well roosting on Limantour Beach on the 13th.

**Hudsonian Whimbrel*****Numenius hudsonicus***

Small numbers recorded on four days.

**Long-billed Curlew*****Numenius americanus***

This impressive looking Curlew was seen well over five days.

**Marbled Godwit*****Limosa fedoa***

This beautiful wader was recorded at SFO Bay and Moss Landing only.

**Black Turnstone*****Arenaria melanocephala***

This west coast speciality seen well on four days with a high count of 8 birds on the 6th.

**Surfbird*****Calidris virgata***

Another west coast speciality with 7 birds seen well on the 8th at Asilomar Beach.

**Sanderling*****Calidris alba***

Small groups recorded on three days.

**Dunlin*****Calidris alpina***

Small groups recorded on three days, mostly in with Least and Western Sandpipers.

**Least Sandpiper*****Calidris minutilla***

Great views of this American "Peep" over three days.

**Western Sandpiper*****Calidris mauri***

Large flocks recorded on two days.

**Long-billed Dowitcher*****Limnodromus scolopaceus***

Seen well enough to identify to species in SFO Bay on the 6th. Other birds recorded on three other days were simply recorded as LBD/SBD.

**Short-billed Dowitcher*****Limnodromus griseus***

Seen well enough to identify to species with Long-billed Dowitchers in SFO Bay on the 6th.

**Wilson's Snipe*****Gallinago delicata***

A single bird flushed at Colusa NWR on the 14th.

<b>Willet</b>	<b><i>Tringa semipalmata</i></b>
Large numbers seen on at least two days around SFO and Monterey.	
<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b>	<b><i>Tringa melanoleuca</i></b>
Single birds recorded on three days.	
<b>Black-legged Kittiwake</b>	<b><i>Rissa tridactyla</i></b>
A single bird resting on rocks at Asilomar Beach on the 8th.	
<b>Heermann's Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus heermanni</i></b>
Recorded around Monterey Bay on three days with a max. count of 30 birds.	
<b>Short-billed Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i></b>
Small numbers recorded on four days.	
<b>Ring-billed Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus delawarensis</i></b>
A relatively common species recorded on five days.	
<b>California Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus californicus</i></b>
A relatively common species recorded on five days.	
<b>Glaucous-winged Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus glaucescens</i></b>
Small numbers recorded on four days.	
<b>Western Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus occidentalis</i></b>
One of the commonest gull species recorded on six days.	
<b>American Herring Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus smithsonianus</i></b>
Small numbers recorded on four days.	
<b>Forster's Tern</b>	<b><i>Sterna forsteri</i></b>
Recorded around SFO Bay & Monterey Bay over two days with counts of 12 and 7 birds.	
<b>Common Murre</b>	<b><i>Uria aalge</i></b>
Regular small groups recorded during both boat trips in Monterey Bay on the 7th and 9th.	
<b>Rhinoceros Auklet</b>	<b><i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i></b>
Counts of 6 and 7 birds during each of the Monterey boat trips on the 7th and 9th.	
<b>Red-throated Loon</b>	<b><i>Gavia stellata</i></b>
Three birds off Limantour Beach on the 13th.	
<b>Pacific Loon</b>	<b><i>Gavia pacifica</i></b>
Counts of 6+ and 12+ birds during each boat trip in Monterey Bay.	
<b>Common Loon</b>	<b><i>Gavia immer</i></b>
Great close views of single figure counts on at least four days.	
<b>Northern Fulmar</b>	<b><i>Fulmarus glacialis</i></b>
Recorded on both Monterey boat trips on the 7th & 9th with both light & dark phase birds.	
<b>Brandt's Cormorant</b>	<b><i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i></b>
Seen on five days, mostly recorded around Monterey Bay.	
<b>Pelagic Cormorant</b>	<b><i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i></b>
Less common than the above species recorded on three days, including birds sat side by side with Brandt's Cormorants.	

**Double-crested Cormorant*****Phalacrocorax auritus***

The commonest Cormorant seen on seven days. A less coastal species compared to Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants.

**White-faced Ibis*****Plegadis chihi***

Recorded around Colusa NWR on two days with a high count of 140 birds on the 13th.

**Green Heron*****Butorides virescens***

A single bird in the beautiful morning light at Coyote Point on the 6th.

**Great Blue Heron*****Ardea herodias***

A very common species recorded on eight days.

**Great Egret*****Ardea alba***

A very common species recorded on eight days.

**Snowy Egret*****Egretta thula***

Small numbers recorded on five days.

**American White Pelican*****Pelecanus erythrorhynchos***

A group of 10 birds on the 12th was our only sighting.

**Brown Pelican*****Pelecanus occidentalis***

Recorded on five days with a max. count of 40+ birds on the 6th.

**California Condor*****Gymnogyps californianus***

A superb wing-tagged adult seen along the Big Sur Coast on the 8th.

**Turkey Vulture*****Cathartes aura***

One of the commonest raptors recorded on all but the first day.

**Western Osprey*****Pandion haliaetus***

Single birds on the 9th at Salinas River and the 13th at Limantour Beach.

**Golden Eagle*****Aquila chrysaetos***

An adult and immature were seen along the Big Sur Coast on the 8th.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk*****Accipiter striatus***

Single birds on the 7th and the 9th.

**Cooper's Hawk*****Accipiter cooperii***

Single birds recorded on two days.

**Northern Harrier*****Circus hudsonius***

Some fabulous views over five days, including a male feeding on prey at close range.

**Bald Eagle*****Haliaeetus leucocephalus***

Recorded on two days around Colusa NWR. An adult caused havoc amongst the geese!

**Red-shouldered Hawk*****Buteo lineatus***

This stunning raptor was recorded on six days.

**Red-tailed Hawk*****Buteo jamaicensis***

One of the commonest raptors recorded on all but the first day.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl*****Aegolius acadicus***

Three birds heard during an evening visit near Olema where we saw one bird by torchlight.

**Burrowing Owl*****Athene cunicularia***

A single bird near Abbott's Lagoon on the morning of the 12th.

**Great Horned Owl*****Bubo virginianus***

Recorded on three days with birds seen well at night in the garden of our accommodation and again at dusk whilst returning to Williams on our last evening.

**Belted Kingfisher*****Megasceryle alcyon***

Recorded on three days with both male and female seen well at Coyote Point.

**Acorn Woodpecker*****Melanerpes formicivorus***

This highly gregarious and vocal species was recorded on six days.

**Nuttall's Woodpecker*****Dryobates nuttallii***

Two birds seen well whilst exploring the area to the NE of Colusa on the 14th.

**Downy Woodpecker*****Dryobates pubescens***

Male and female seen well on the 14th.

**Hairy Woodpecker*****Leuconotopicus villosus***

Recorded on three days.

**Northern Flicker*****Colaptes cafer***

This red-shafted form (striking red underwings in flight) was recorded on five days.

**American Kestrel*****Falco sparverius***

This very smart falcon was recorded on five days with up to 3 birds seen on the 8th.

**Merlin*****Falco columbarius***

A single male was recorded on the 9th by some of the group.

**Peregrine Falcon*****Falco peregrinus***

Good views of number of birds over five days from Monterey Bay to Colusa NWR.

**Black Phoebe*****Sayornis nigricans***

A common species, most often near water and seen on eight days.

**Say's Phoebe*****Sayornis saya***

Less birds wintering on the coast than previous tours. Singles on the 9th & 11th only.

**Loggerhead Shrike*****Lanius ludovicianus***

Two birds were seen on the 14th whilst exploring areas NE of Colusa NWR.

**Steller's Jay*****Cyanocitta stelleri***

This striking and noisy Jay was seen well on five days.

**California Scrub-jay*****Aphelocoma californica***

A common species recorded on eight days and of the *californica* subsp.

**Yellow-billed Magpie*****Pica nuttalli***

This Californian endemic was recorded on the 13th near Putah Creek and the 14th whilst exploring the fruit/nut farming areas near Pennington.

**American Crow*****Corvus brachyrhynchos***

A very common species recorded on nine days.

**Northern Raven*****Corvus corax***

A common species recorded in small numbers on eight days.

**Cedar Waxwing*****Bombycilla cedrorum***

A small group of birds seen well in the SFO Botanical Gardens by some of the group.

**Oak Titmouse*****Baeolophus inornatus***

A striking "tufted" oak specialist with single birds seen on the 7th and the 13th.

**Chestnut-backed Chickadee*****Poecile rufescens***

This attractive Chickadee was recorded on two day in suitable habitat.

**Tree Swallow*****Tachycineta bicolor***

Counts of 2-3 overwintering birds were recorded on the 9th and 14th.

**Violet-green Swallow*****Tachycineta thalassina***

Two birds showed very well at Monterey Bay harbour on the 7th before our boat trip.

**American Bushtit*****Psaltriparus minimus***

Small groups were recorded on three days.

**Wrentit*****Chamaea fasciata***

This west coast speciality of chaparral and dense brush habitat was typically heard more than seen. Recorded on six days and seen well on the 8th on the Big Sur Coast and whilst looking for Bobcat near Point Reyes on the 12th

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet*****Corthylio calendula***

Recorded on four days.

**Marsh Wren*****Cistothorus palustris***

This skulking wren with an incredible mechanical song was recorded on two days and seen very well at Colusa NWR.

**Bewick's Wren*****Thryomanes bewickii***

Recorded on three days with birds seen best whilst looking for Bobcat!

**House Wren*****Troglodytes aedon***

A single bird near our accommodation on the 6th was the only sighting.

**Pygmy Nuthatch*****Sitta pygmaea***

Two birds showed very well in George Washington Park on the afternoon of the 7th.

**Northern Mockingbird*****Mimus polyglottos***

At least 4 birds recorded on the 14th whilst around Williams and Colusa NWR.

**California Thrasher*****Toxostoma redivivum***

Two birds showed well at the Salinas River for some of the group on the morning of the 9th and then seen very well by the whole group at Año Nuevo State Park on the 10th.

**Common Starling*****Sturnas vulgaris***

This introduced species was recorded on eight days.

**Mountain Bluebird*****Sialia currucoides***

A single bird on the 11th whilst exploring Point Reyes National Seashore.

**Western Bluebird*****Sialia mexicana***

Small numbers recorded on three days whilst at Point Reyes and near Pennington.

**Varied Thrush*****Ixoreus naevius***

This stunning thrush was seen on two mornings along the Limantour Road where we recorded counts of 10-12 birds including a couple that showed very well on the road.

**Hermit Thrush*****Catharus guttatus***

Two birds recorded on the 8th along the Big Sur coast and another 2 birds on the 10th around Point Reyes.

**American Robin*****Turdus migratorius***

Recorded on three days with an impressive sight of 20+ birds together at Andrew Molera State Park on the afternoon of the 8th.

**House Sparrow*****Passer domesticus***

This introduced species was recorded on five days.

**Buff-bellied Pipit*****Anthus rubescens***

Four birds were seen very well at Colusa NWR on the 14th.

**Purple Finch*****Haemorhous purpureus***

Two birds on the 8th at Andrew Molera State Park was the only sighting.

**House Finch*****Haemorhous mexicanus***

A very common species recorded on nine days with a max. count of at least 150 birds on the 10th.

**Red Crossbill*****Loxia curvirostra***

Four birds on the 11th whilst exploring Point Reyes National Seashore.

**Lesser Goldfinch*****Spinus psaltria***

Counts of up to 6 birds recorded on three days.

**Lark Sparrow*****Chondestes grammacus***

Great views of a single bird on a telephone wire on the afternoon of the 14th whilst exploring the agricultural fruit farming areas near Pennington.

**Sooty Fox-sparrow*****Passerella unalaschcensis***

A single bird on the 9th was only seen by some of the group.

**Dark-eyed Junco*****Junco hyemalis***

The highly attractive and distinct subsp. of the west "Oregon Junco" was recorded on nine days with some excellent views.

**White-crowned Sparrow*****Zonotrichia leucophrys***

A very common species recorded on eight days.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow*****Zonotrichia atricapilla***

Very easily seen during the winter months compared to Summer. We recorded very obliging small groups on eight days.

**Savannah Sparrow*****Passerculus sandwichensis***

Recorded on three days around Point Reyes and Colusa NWR with max. counts of 30+ birds at Colusa.

**Song Sparrow*****Melospiza melodia***

A common species with a great song recorded on seven days.

**California Towhee*****Melospiza crissalis***

This somewhat underwhelming west coast speciality was seen well on at least six days.

**Spotted Towhee*****Pipilo maculatus***

A much more shy species than California Towhee with birds seen well on four days.

**Western Meadowlark*****Sturnella neglecta***

A stunning species recorded on five days with counts of 20+ birds on some days.

**Tricolored Blackbird*****Agelaius tricolor***

This west coast speciality was seen well with Red-winged Blackbirds at the Moon Glow Dairy on the 9th and gave opportunities to see the subtle differences.

**Red-winged Blackbird*****Agelaius phoeniceus***

Recorded in large flocks on five days and including the very distinctive “Bi-coloured” *californicus* race at the Moon Glow Dairy on the 9th

**Brown-headed Cowbird*****Molothrus ater***

Recorded on three days, often in amongst Red-winged Blackbird flocks, with the best views around the Point Reyes National Seashore.

**Brewer's Blackbird*****Euphagus cyanocephalus***

These characterful Blackbirds were recorded on nine days and were often very tame and close to habitation.

**Common Yellowthroat*****Geothlypis trichas***

A stunning male below Moonglow Dairy on the 9th showed very well around the marsh.

**Audubon's Warbler*****Setophaga auduboni***

Now considered a separate species to Myrtle Warbler. Birds were recorded on at least five days often giving very close views allowing the distinctive yellow throat to be seen compared to the white throat of Myrtle Warbler.

**Prairie Warbler*****Setophaga discolor***

This long-staying rarity for California showed very well just a minute's walk from our hotel in Monterey on the morning of the 8th.

**Myrtle Warbler*****Setophaga coronata***

These Taiga breeding species winter across N America with small numbers wintering in California with the more common resident Audubon's Warbler and therefore allowing good opportunities to compare the two species. Birds were recorded on at least two days (6th and 14th). Myrtle Warblers have a distinctive paler throat and more streaked breast compared to the Audubon's Warbler in winter plumage.

**Townsend's Warbler*****Setophaga townsendi***

This stunning warbler was seen very well on two days whilst around Monterey. The best views were at Cannery Row in the same tree as Audubon's Warbler and Prairie Warbler!



## **Total number of mammals recorded: 21 species**

### **Bobcat**

### ***Lynx rufus***

Fabulous daily sightings involving at least 5 different animals with prolonged viewing totalling over 60 minutes whilst in the Point Reyes National Seashore. A single distant animal near our accommodation on the evening of the 10th was a good starter. This was then hugely improved upon the following day when three different animals were seen well by the group. This included an amazingly unconcerned animal that showed incredibly well during the middle of the day. On the evening of the 12th, a male was seen scent marking and trotted right across the road in front of us.

### **Coyote**

### ***Canis latrans***

Prolonged views with animals seen on two days around the Point Reyes National Seashore with a max. day count of 12 animals. The most memorable encounters were watching a group of animals in a roadside field and hearing them calling very close to us.

### **Steller's Sea Lion**

### ***Eumetopias jubatus***

A great spot by Steve of an animal on Año Nuevo Island amongst California Sea Lions.

### **Californian Sea Lion**

### ***Zalophus californianus***

Recorded in large numbers on four days in Monterey Bay and Año Nuevo State Park.

### **Northern Elephant Seal**

### ***Mirounga angustirostris***

Fabulous encounters of adult males, females and youngsters at Año Nuevo State Park on the morning of the 10th. Plus a single animal on Limantour Beach on the 12th. Worrying to hear from the park rangers at Año Nuevo State Park that for the first time ever, females were moving calves (highly uncharacteristic from all research) into the water to cool them down due to the increasing temperatures from climate change!

### **Common (Harbour) Seal**

### ***Phoca vitulina***

Sightings over three days with a max. day count of 12+ animals on the 6th.

### **Striped Skunk**

### ***Mephitis mephitis***

Steve and Chris saw an animal on the evening of the 12th.

**Northern Raccoon*****Procyon lotor***

A single animal seen well during a night drive on the 12th near Olema, Point Reyes.

**Sea Otter*****Enhydra lutris***

These special mammals were enjoyed in Monterey Bay and Moss Landing over four days and animals were even watched from our hotel rooms in Monterey!

**North American River Otter*****Lontra canadensis***

Another great find by Steve with a total of 3 animals feeding in Abbott's Lagoon, Point Reyes on the morning of the 12th.

**Wapiti*****Cervus canadensis nannodes***

Also known as Tule Elk. Up to 10+ animals near the Point Reyes Peninsula on two days.

**Mule Deer (Black-tailed Deer)*****Odocoileus hemionus columbianus***

A commonly encountered species seen on six days.

**Grey Whale*****Eschrichtius robustus***

Counts of 7 and 15 animals seen during our whale watching boat trips in Monterey Bay including some impressive tail flukes! We also recorded Grey Whale blows from land whilst waiting for California Condors to appear along the Big Sur coast on the 8th.

**Risso's Dolphin*****Grampus griseus***

A group of 30+ animals, including calves, were seen very well during our whale watching boat trip in Monterey Bay on the morning of the 7th.

**Pacific White-sided Dolphin*****Lagenorhynchus obliquidens***

Just 2 animals were seen during our boat trip in Monterey on the morning of the 7th.

**Black-tailed Jackrabbit*****Lepus californicus***

A memorable sighting of at least 4 animals "cavorting" at Coyote Point on the 6th and another 2 animals recorded near Williams on the 14th.

**Brush Rabbit*****Sylvilagus bachmani***

A single animal on the 10th only.

**California Ground Squirrel*****Otospermophilus beecheyi***

Some warm weather produced a number of sightings on four days with counts of 1-2 animals and at least 3 animals on the 8th.

**Eastern Grey Squirrel*****Sciurus carolinensis***

Singles of this introduced species were recorded on the 7th and 10th only.

**Western Grey Squirrel*****Sciurus griseus***

Seen well on a number of occasions on the 12th and 13th.

**Fox Squirrel*****Sciurus niger***

This introduced, but nonetheless attractive squirrel showed well in George Washington Park on the 7th.

**OTHER NOTABLE SPECIES RECORDED****Pacific Tree Frog*****Pseudacris regilla***

Recorded on the 10th and also heard calling at night at Point Reyes.

**Western Fence Lizard**

Recorded on at least three days.

**Monarch Butterfly**

Great to see counts well into the hundreds at Monarch Butterfly Reserve Pacific Grove.

**Yellow-faced Bumblebee**

A very distinctive bee seen on at least five days.

*Sceloporus occidentalis*

*Danaus plexippus*

*Bombus Vosnesenskii*



**San Francisco Botanical Gardens and crossing the chilly Big Sur River**





**Sunset at Point Reyes National Seashore**

## **Wise Birding Holidays Ltd**

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**Conservation Donation** – Following this tour to California £200 was transferred to the Wise Birding Holiday's central conservation fund.

Once a target amount has been reached this money will be used to support one single project in the hope of achieving more for species conservation. Currently this amounts to over £8,000. Some tours will continue to donate money to help some of the smaller projects that we feel will still benefit from smaller donations. Please visit [www.wisebirding.co.uk](http://www.wisebirding.co.uk) to find out more about the projects we support.

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*Bird and mammal watching tours*

