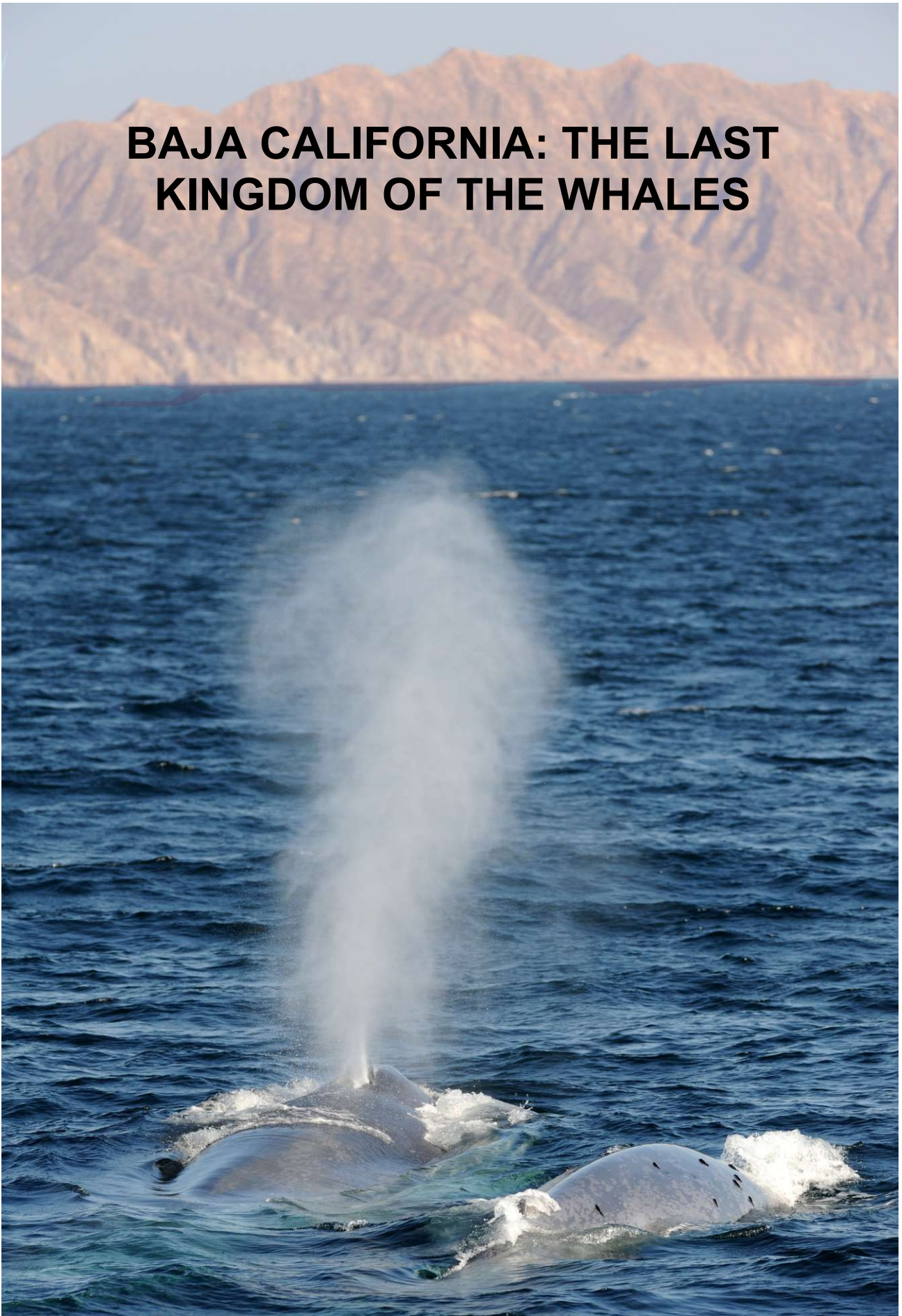


BAJA CALIFORNIA: THE LAST KINGDOM OF THE WHALES



Baja California is THE place on Earth to encounter the endangered and mighty Blue Whale. Here, a cow and her calf, with the impressive mountains of Baja in the background. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Several alcid species were seen on the first day, including Scripps's Murrelet (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

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8 – 19 April / 22 APRIL 2013

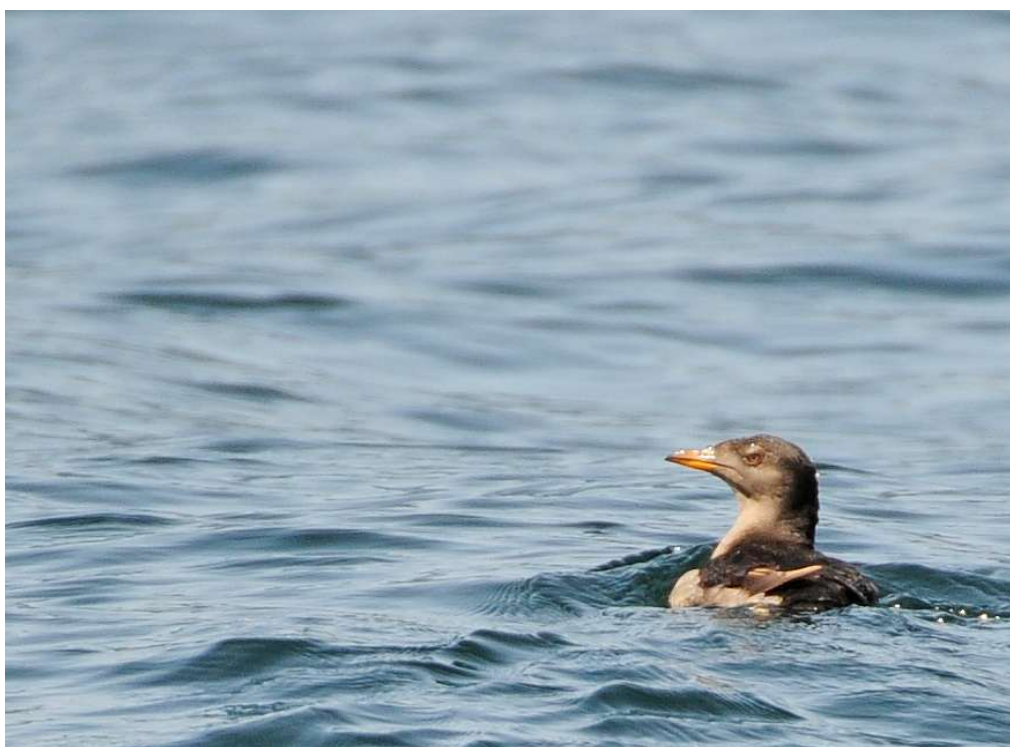
LEADER: DANI LOPEZ-VELASCO and PETER GAEDE

Many of this year's well-travelled tour participants said, after the end of the trip, that the Baja California cruise was definitely one of the ultimate wildlife experiences on Earth. And I can only fully agree with them. There were just too many highlights and heart-touching moments to name them all, but a few are worth mentioning. The time spent with the Gray Whales at Laguna San Ignacio, with the many close encounters experienced, was truly magical. All our Blue Whale, the largest animal ever to roam our planet, sightings, referring to no less than 10 individuals, were simply amazing, especially the last one, in which a large female with its calf swam around our boat for half an hour. A large pod of fishing False Killer Whales, which thanks

to the hydrophone that was laid underwater, could be heard at the same time as we watched them, was both fantastic and unexpected. And of course the breaching Humpback Whales were, as usual, incredible. Plenty of bird specialties were also seen too, including elegant Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses, thousands of Black-vented Shearwaters, Black and Least Storm Petrels giving very close views, stunning Red-billed Tropicbirds, sheer numbers of Red-necked and Red Phalaropes, endemic Yellow-footed and Heermann's Gulls and great views of the endemic Craveri's Murrelet, as well as Scripps's. During our landings we also saw endemic Xantus's Hummingbirds, Large-billed Savannah Sparrows and Gray Thrashers, as well as other interesting species like California Gnatcatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Phainopepla or Canyon Wren. And, during the extension, several exciting endemics, such as Baja Pygmy-Owl, San Lucas Robin or Belding's Yellowthroat were encountered, together with other scarce species such as Elf Owl or Thick-billed Kingbird. Overall, an exciting combination of both cetaceans and birds, all making for an unforgettable trip.

Our epic journey began at San Diego harbor, where in the late afternoon all passengers embarked on board "Searcher", a 95 ft (30 mt) boat which would be our home for the next 10 days. Once everyone had stored their belongings in their cabins, we had a briefing by our captain, Art Taylor, who reviewed important information for the trip. After meeting all of the other crew members, we left the dock and headed south for Ensenada, the first port in Mexico. The night was turbulent, as a storm had gone through the area the previous day resulting in rough seas. Nevertheless most of us managed to get some sleep.

We awoke already in Mexico, to clear skies in Ensenada, where we cleared customs and started looking for wildlife in the harbor prior to departure. Several species of birds were observed while travelling past the jetty, including our first Surf Scoters, Western and Black-necked Grebes of the trip. We then motored towards and circled around the Islas Todos Santos. Several species of pinnipeds and other birds were seen from the boat, thanks to the skills of our captain, who positioned the boat very close to shore. In one of the beach coves, a number of female and immature Northern Elephant Seals swam about, while Harbor (Common) Seals were observed on the beach and in the water also. Bird highlights included both American and Black Oystercatchers, Western Gull, Brown Pelican, Brandt's and Double-crested Cormorants and a subadult Brown Booby. Our first alcids were also seen in transit to the islands: several Scripps's Murrelets (Xantus's Murrelet has now been split into Guadalupe and Scripps's Murrelets) and our only Common Murres (Common Guillemots) of the trip. The rest of the day was spent travelling toward Islas San Benitos, and, with decreasing swells during the journey south, we observed our first whales in the form of several Humpback Whales, a few groups of Short-beaked Common Dolphins and a northbound Gray Whale.



Rhinoceros Auklet was also seen on the first day. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Seabirds were also observed in good numbers and kept us entertained during the whole journey, and included many Pacific Loons migrating north -most of them adults in full breeding plumage- mixed with several Great Northern and Red-throated Loons, 3 species of shearwaters: endemic Black-vented, Pink-footed and Sooty Shearwaters, our only Pelagic Cormorants of the tour, several Rhinoceros and Cassin's Auklets on the water, as well as at least 10 Scripps's Murrelets, a couple dozens of Pacific Northern Fulmars, including some very dark individuals, a Pomarine Skua, Bonaparte's, a single American Herring, California and 10 stunning Sabine's Gulls, as well as Elegant and Royal Terns. Special mention of course goes to the albatrosses, which were new to most of the Birdquesters on board. We had at least 8 Black-footed and 1 Laysan Albatrosses, which gave excellent and prolonged views. The numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes were also surprising, with an estimated 2000 seen, although the real figure was probably much higher. Although in much smaller numbers, Red (Grey) Phalaropes were also seen.



Both Laysan (above) and Black-footed Albatrosses (below) were seen very well on our first day at sea. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



The Searcher approached the arid and remote San Benito Islands the next morning and landed by 8:30. Our group went ashore and made a hike to circumnavigate West San Benito, a rugged island with a tiny fishing village and a lighthouse set amongst impressive headlands, sandy coves and rocky reefs. We first visited the Northern Elephant Seal colony, where large numbers of seals, including pups, females and immature males, were seen at very close range out on the beach, giving great photographic opportunities. Seeing these creatures so close was certainly the highlight of our visit to the island, with the astonished look of some pups being particularly appealing.



A photogenic Northern Elephant Seal pup, wearing a fashionable sea-weed dress. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

A Little Blue Heron was seen foraging in the kelp wrack nearby, which represented an island first record for this species. We also found several groups of Guadalupe Fur Seals on the rocky shoreline along the island's northern coast. Once brought to the edge of extinction by sealers, numbers are starting to recover and colonists have fanned out from Isla Guadalupe to recover some lost territory. The endemic San Benito Island Tarweed was in bloom around the village, giving a splash of color to the otherwise arid isle. Quite a few Western Ospreys were nesting on the island, together with a pair of Peregrine Falcons, and several migrants were tallied, including Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Merlin, Red-tailed Hawk, Black Turnstone, Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow. Large-billed Savannah Sparrows (endemic San Benito Island subspecies, *sanctorum*) were present just about everywhere on the island and we took some nice pictures of them.



Large-billed Savannah Sparrow (left) and Black Turnstone (right). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Our boat left Islas San Benitos during the late afternoon and headed south for Laguna San Ignacio. Various species of seabirds were observed following our departure, including large numbers of Black-vented Shearwaters, with an estimated 1200 birds seen, 1 Black-footed Albatross, a few smart looking -and pretty much endemic- Heermann's Gulls, Cassin's Auklets and our first Craveri's Murrelets, a much wanted endemic. The lack of Red-necked Phalaropes was surprising given the previous day's numbers, while a small group of Pacific White-sided Dolphins put in a brief appearance at the ship's bow.

Searcher approached the entrance to the famous and magical Laguna San Ignacio after breakfast. Many Gray Whales were already seen during our transit prior to entering the lagoon. By lucky chance, this huge sheltered saline lagoon, butting right against the Pacific Ocean, has escaped 'development' and remains a pristine wilderness. Each year, over 300 adult female Gray Whales migrate from Alaska and the Pacific Northwest to have their calves here. The calves are born in the midwinter period and grow rapidly before leaving the lagoon with their mothers from mid-March through April. We entered the lagoon through its narrow, surf-choked mouth by 9 am, experiencing a sudden change in conditions as we passed over the sandbar at the mouth and entered the calm waters of the lagoon itself, our home for the better part of two days, where we dropped anchor within the observation area. During our two-day stay in the lagoon, we utilized local pangas (small local boats). Captained by our expert local guides, we were able to find and approach the whales without causing anxiety to the mothers or their calves. Three panga rides were conducted during our first day, one before lunch and two after. Several "friendly" Gray Whale cow-calf pairs were seen during our first outing, and all passengers had the opportunity to have several memorable close encounters. Prior to our first panga trip, our captain told us something that will probably last in our minds forever: "It's not about you touching the whale, but about the whale touching you..." and how right he was. It was certainly a magical and unforgettable experience. I think every one of us was so excited and moved by our first encounters that at first we couldn't even concentrate on taking pictures, but rather preferred to simply enjoy the whole experience with our senses. It's difficult to describe the feeling of seeing the head of a whale calf popping out of the surface, a few centimetres from your hands, with its small eye curiously looking at you, then breathing, covering your face with spray and then proceeding to ask to be stroked...while at the same time the 15 metres long mom rolls and scratches on the bottom of the boat, making all the panga shake! These up close and personal Gray Whale encounters are definitely one of the ultimate wildlife experiences on Earth, and it should be experienced at least once during your life. Gray Whales were also observed from the decks of the Searcher during the entire stay, and we spent a fair amount of time trying to get shots of breaching individuals, with some of the most acrobatic ones jumping completely out of the water. What a sight!! Our local experts estimated that approximately 100 Gray Whales were in the lagoon during our stay. Other observations included several pods of friendly Common Bottlenosed Dolphins and various seabirds such as Royal Terns and Pomarine Skuas. Following dinner, an evening program on Gray Whale biology was given, and then the ship's lights and generator were switched off, affording a quiet experience in the lagoon and an opportunity to view the impressive night sky, with the milky way in all its glory, while whales were heard very close to the Searcher, all making for yet another unforgettable experience.



A breaching Gray Whale is a truly spectacular sight. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Seeing the eye of any whale is always special. Here, a Gray Whale calf starring at the camera. (Barbara Baker)



Smiles and happy faces amongst Birdquesters during a close encounter with a Gray Whale. (Alec Gilliespie)

The Searcher continued its visit to Laguna San Ignacio the next day. Again, three panga trips were made to look for whales. Many were again observed throughout the day, and many interesting actions were seen, with several whales exhibiting very friendly behavior and allowing close encounters, while others were seen breaching, spy-hopping, and feeding. No matter how many times we went out, we just couldn't get tired of seeing these marvelous creatures in their environment. A late-morning panga ride was made to the mangrove area (coincident with high tide), during which many bird species were seen, including several species of herons, egrets and shorebirds. Amongst the highlights, many Black Brant Geese, a few Reddish Egrets and Tricoloured Herons, single Green and Black-crowned Night Herons, a flock of American White Ibis, a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers, calling Clapper Rails, several Greater Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwits, aptly-named Long-billed Curlews, Long-billed Dowitchers, Caspian Terns and a mangrove speciality near its northern end of its range, the beautiful Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler. The final activity in the lagoon for some passengers was a beach walk along the western shoreline of the observation zone. The beach had many seashells and other marine-life artifacts, including a large sea turtle skull. Later we found a large flock of feeding Western Sandpipers, with smaller numbers of Snowy and Semipalmated plovers, Dunlin and Sanderling also present. Everyone enjoyed seeing a beach in such a pristine and undeveloped condition. After getting back on board, Searcher raised the anchor in the evening and negotiated the breakers to exit Laguna San Ignacio. We all felt a bit sad after the previous magical days with the whales. A last Gray Whale appeared, as if it wanted to say goodbye, and then the boat headed south, making way for Magdalena Bay.



Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler (left) and Long-billed Curlew (right) seen during our mangrove boat trip. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Laguna San Ignacio hosted, apart from the whales, many birds too, including breeding plumaged Great Northern Loons (above) and Royal Terns (below. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



The next day was a day of travel, with the Searcher continuing its transit between Laguna San Ignacio and Cabo San Lucas. Calm conditions and partly cloudy skies made for excellent whale watching and led to a constant vigil for sightings of marine mammals and seabirds. Undoubtedly the highlight of the day was the extraordinary Blue Whales. Many people had come on this trip with the Blue Whale -the largest animal that has ever lived on our planet- as their main target, so it was a great relief that we had such good views of them so early on the trip. A total of 7 individuals were logged, giving some prolonged and very close encounters, in which we came to admire their extraordinary size as well as the color that's given their english name. Nowadays Blue Whales are pretty rare throughout its entire range, and at most places they are far from guaranteed. However, in April in Baja California you have excellent chances of seeing them, and up to this date, we have never missed it on any of our cruises. In addition, several Bryde's whales and Humpback Whales were also seen. There were also a variety of seabirds that were observed, with highlights being the sheer numbers of Red (Grey) Phalaropes seen in a particular area, with a count of 5500 birds, although the real numbers was probably at least twice that figure. Our first Black Storm Petrels, 8 Craveri's Murrelets, a few Masked Boobies, a single immature Nazca Booby, identified after checking the pictures taken, and several stunning Red-billed Tropicbirds were also recorded.



Depending on the light, Blue Whales can look either silvery-grey (above) or dark-blue (below). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)





Craveri's Murrelet is a scarce Baja endemic breeder. We had great views of several birds during the cruise (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

At dawn next day, the Searcher rounded Cabo San Lucas and we saw the famous arch rocks, also known as "lands end." Shortly after passing Cabo, we began encountering Humpback Whales, perhaps as many as 30 or more, mostly in the vicinity of the Gorda Banks. We were rewarded with very good views of Humpback behaviors such as complete breachings out of the water and fluking right next to the boat.



Humpback Whales are the most acrobatic and playfull of all the world's whales. (Alec Gilliespie)

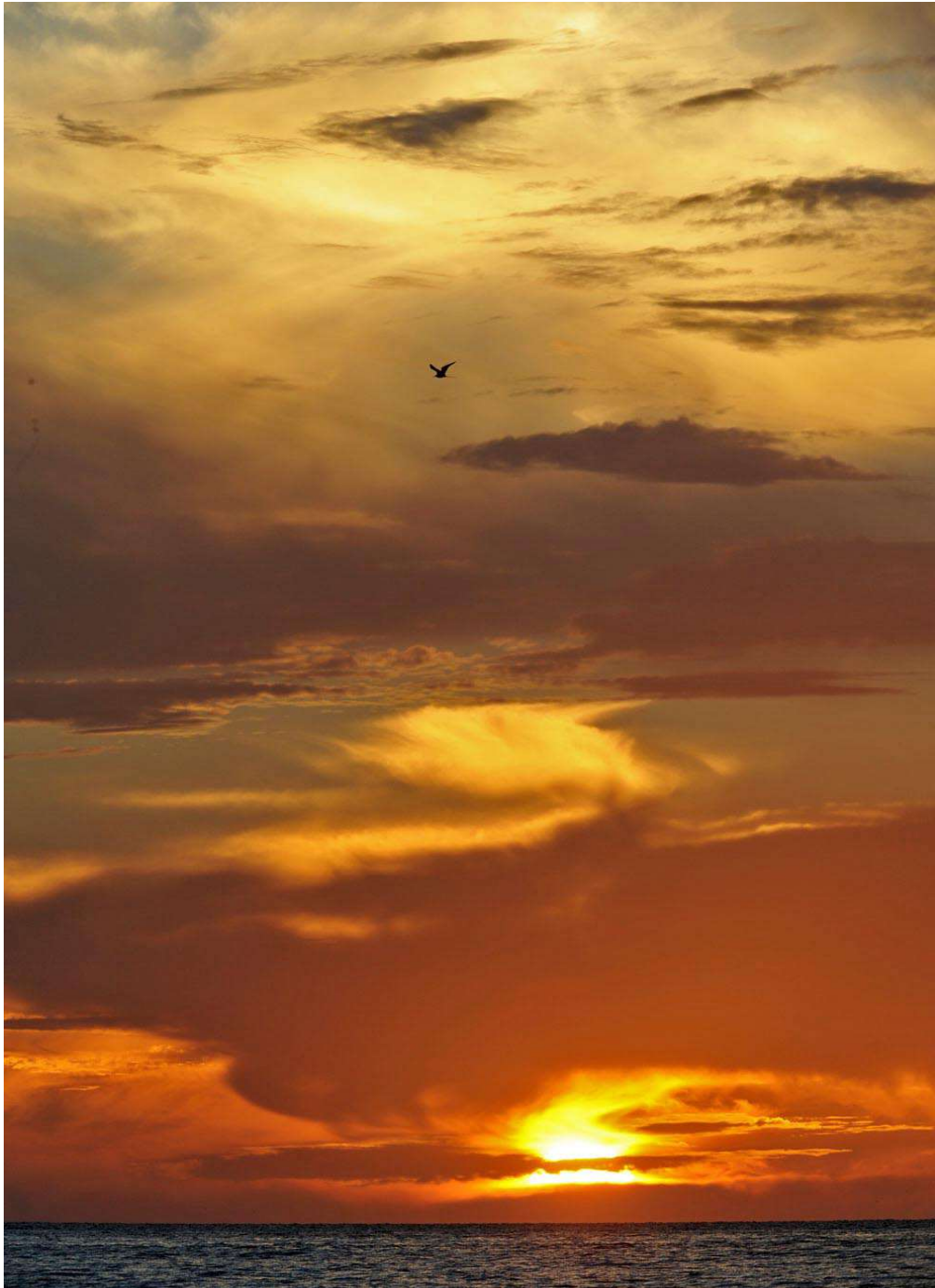
A few Craveri's Murrelets were also seen very well, while Magnificent Frigatebirds soared overhead. The Searcher arrived at Los Frailes - Cabo Pulmo Marine Park in the afternoon, our first landfall in the Gulf of California. All Birdquesters went ashore for a couple of hours to look for birds, plants, and other life, and the highlights included several typical Baja California species, including a pair of Northern Crested Caracaras, a coovey of California Quails, White-winged, Common and Ruddy Ground Doves and a Greater Roadrunner seen by some. We were also lucky enough to record several Costa's Hummingbirds, noisy Gila and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Ash-throated Flycatchers, widespread Verdins, conspicuous Cactus Wrens, a pair of California Gnatcatchers, our first true Baja endemic landbird in form of a pair of Gray Trashers, Northern Mockingbirds, several Pyrrhuloxias, colorful Northern Cardinals, a single Black-headed Grosbeak, Lark Sparrows, Hooded Orioles and plenty of House Finches. The Searcher left Los Frailes in the evening, and while heading north towards Punta Colorado we all admired a beautiful sunset.



A wonderful sunset at Baja. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

We next sailed all night and anchored at Punta Colorado on the north end of Isla San Jose shortly after first light. Our morning started with a gorgeous sunrise adjacent the vertical cliff walls of the island. After breakfast we went ashore to explore and to look for birds and plants. We climbed out onto a rocky outcropping to view a cetacean vertebrae and a sea turtle fossil in the 4-8 million year old (Pliocene age) rocks. A relatively intact whale vertebrae protruding from the rock was a major highlight too. Our first Yellow-footed Gulls, a Baja speciality, were seen very well here, and other new species for us included a pair of Rock Wrens, Blue-grey Gnatcatchers, several Black-throated Sparrows and a singing Plumbeous Vireo. Once back at the boat, Captain Art repositioned Searcher and some of us elected to go snorkeling. A great decision, as conditions were perfect for enjoying the colorful variety of fish on display. Following lunch, the Searcher raised anchor and headed north past Isla Santa Cruz towards Agua Verde. We had several highlights during this journey. The first was a long encounter with a very friendly cow and calf Blue Whale, which swam around the boat for an hour, giving the best possible views. The water was very clean and

visibility was excellent, so we could see both animals under the water well before they surfaced, with their bodies appearing as a stunning turquoise blue. This was definitely one of the top moments of the trip. We also encountered large group of approximately 1200 traveling Long-beaked Common Dolphins, and associated with them were quite a few seabirds, including many Pink-footed, Sooty and Black-vented Shearwaters, 15 Black Storm-Petrels, a single Blue-footed and a dozen Brown Boobies, plenty of Brown Pelicans, lots of Magnificent Frigatebirds, 2 Pomarine Skuas and a few Yellow-footed Gulls. We also made a special chumming stop, with fish oil, which was much appreciated by all participants, as it brought large numbers of Black Storm-Petrels very close to the boat, as well as our first Least Storm-Petrels of the trip.



Magnificent Frigatebird admiring yet another spectacular sunset near Punta Colorado. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Brown Booby (left) and Black Storm Petrel (right). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Its not unusual to encounter large pods of Long-beaked Common Dolphins within the Sea of Cortez. (Alec Gilliespie)

Our captain anchored Searcher at Agua Verde on the Baja Peninsula during the night, which allowed us the opportunity for an early morning walk. We walked from the beach through a large grove of palms and a freshwater pond, where we found a number of species of birds, including a pair of Zone-tailed Hawks, a single Western Osprey, White-throated Swifts overhead, several California Quails, Cactus Wrens, California Gnatcatchers, 3 migrant Mourning Doves, our first California (Western) Scrub-Jays and Phainopeplas, a Nashville Warbler, 2 colorful Western Tanagers, and large numbers of sparrows that included Brewer's, Lark and White-crowned Sparrows. After returning to Searcher, some of us had a very nice bit of snorkeling along a rocky ledge. A lucky few even saw a Panamic Green Moray-Eel and a Large-mouthed Blenny. Our afternoon was spent traveling towards the Isla Santa Catalina, and en route we encountered a massive feeding frenzy of seabirds and enjoyed great views of hundreds of Pink-footed, Sooty and Black-vented Shearwaters, around 100 Black and 50 Least Storm-Petrels, giving great comparisons side by side, 300 Brown Pelicans, several Brown Boobies and no less than 50 Pomarine Skuas. We arrived at Isla Santa Catalina in the afternoon and off loaded the skiffs for an island hike. Everyone went on a lovely arroyo (dry stream bed) walk amidst cardon and barrel cactus, and numerous other desert plants. This island is famous for its large cardon and endemic barrel cactus, both of which are some of the largest cacti in the world. The arroyo wound through the cactus forest, which also featured many other types of desert plants such as elephant tree, palo verde, several kinds of cholla cactus, mammillaria, and jojoba bush. We also saw one Isla Catalina Rattlesnake, an endemic species of rattlesnake, and a few different lizards, including several island endemic Chuckwallas, as well as Desert Iguanas. Amongst birds, a family of Loggerhead Shrikes was a nice addition to our list. Searcher then raised anchor and we travelled to Tembabiche for the night.



Impressive Cacti (left) and Santa Catalina Rattlesnake (right) at Santa Catalina island. (Dani Lopez-Velasco and Alec Gilliespie)

The following morning, we went for a hike to the mangrove wetland behind the dunes, where our target, Wilson's Plover, was soon located. Large numbers of Yellow-footed Gulls were present on the beach, and we also had a Reddish Egret, a nice summer adult Laughing Gull, a Violet-green Swallow, several California Gnatcatchers, Gray Thrashers, an Orange-crowned Warbler and a beautiful Green-tailed Towhee.



Gray Thrasher (left) and California Gnatcatcher (right) are pretty common in Baja. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

We then traveled to Nopolo, in search of Xantus's Hummingbird, a Baja endemic that so far had eluded us. We went for a hike up the arroyo past a small grove of mangroves, and most of us had brief looks at 2 female Xantus's Hummingbirds. In the afternoon, Searcher raised anchor and headed northwest in search of whales and dolphins in the San Jose channel. It was here that we had one of our best encounters of the trip, a pod of 25-30 False Killer Whales. Captain Art has visited the Gulf of California for more than 25 years, and it was only the second time ever he had seen these uncommon cetaceans, so we certainly were very lucky! At first the whales were traveling, but then they stopped to feed on jacks, and we had a great time watching and photographing these magnificent animals around the boat. We observed several whales breaching and spyhopping, and thanks to the hydrophone that was laid underwater, we could even hear their vocalizations at the same time as we watched them. Yet another unforgettable experience! Because of the feeding frenzy on the small tunas, an oil slick was formed which attracted large numbers of Black and Least Storm-Petrels, and we also had an unexpected 4 Laysan Albatrosses, which are very rare inside the gulf, as well as 3 delightful Red-billed Tropicbirds and 2 Long-tailed Jaegers. Our evening was spent in a protected cove at Isla San Jose where we enjoyed a great Barbeque and margaritas to celebrate our sightings.



False Killer Whales leaping out of the water. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



False Killer Whale pod. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

After anchoring in a protected cove on the west side of Isla Partida, we traveled a short distance to Cardonal cove for a hike along the mangrove-desert scrub interface. One the way, we saw a large group of travelling Smoothtail Mobula Rays, many of which were jumping near the boat. In the bay we observed several distant green sea turtles at the surface. During the hike, we had excellent views of a pair of the usually difficult Canyon Wren. By mid-morning we were back on the open ocean and had travelled north into the wind and high seas towards Los Islotes. We sheltered behind the rocks and had great views of the colony of Brown and Blue-footed Boobies on the rocks. Unforuntaely, due to sea conditions we couldnt get in the water with the sea lions, although we enjoyed their company from the boat nevertheless. We spent the remainder of the day traveling south past La Paz.



The Blue-footed (right and left) and Brown Boobies colony at Los Islotes was really impressive. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

After our final dinner on Searcher, we all recounted our favorite moments from a most memorable and wonderful trip. For many people, it had been the trip of a lifetime, and the close encounters with the Gray, Blue and Humpabck Whales, amongst others, will be remembered forever.



Our boat, the Searcher. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

After saying goodbye to the crew and some of the participants the next morning, those of us who were staying for the mainland Baja California extension visited a nearby marshy area where the endemic and highly localized Belding's Yellowthroat occurs. Within minutes of arriving we had found a bird, and during the course of the morning we had great views of no less than 7 yellowthroats. The birding was very good and we added many species to our list, including Pied-billed Grebe, no less than 3 Least Bitterns, White-faced Ibis, a good assortment of waterfowl such as Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon and Ruddy Duck. Other birds of note included a single Merlin, plenty of Common Gallinules and American Coots, several Killdeers, a Long-billed Dowitcher, finally very good and prolonged views of 2 Xantus's Hummingbirds, Gilded Flickers, Phainopepla, 4 showy Lazuli Buntings, a nice Blue Grosbeak, several Scott's Orioles and 2 brief Cassin's Kingbirds. After a sumptuous lunch we set off towards the small town of Los Barriles, our destination for the next 3 nights. On the way we spotted a Greater Roadrunner, and later we stopped at our Thick-billed Kingbird stakeout, where we had great views of a pair. The place was very birdy and we saw quite a few interesting things. Best of all were the 4 species of buntings seen. A brief female Painted Bunting was a good rarity in Baja, as were 2 Indigo Buntings which were in a pretty large Lazuli Bunting flock. A stunning pair of Varied Buntings were the last of the possible buntings to be seen in the area. Other highlights included single Cooper's Hawk and American Kestrel, several Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, California Towhee, Pyrrhuloxias and 3 skulking MacGillivray's Warblers. It was getting late, so we continued our journey until we finally arrived into town. Once we settled in our hotel, we went for a great seafood dinner, seeing a Lesser Nighthawk from the street.



The endemic Belding's Yellowthroat (left) was easily seen at Estero, together with several Cinnamon Teals (right). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

We were up very early next morning, and headed inland for a couple of hours towards a mountain range area where the rare and very localized Baird's Junco (split by some authorities from Yellow-eyed Junco), had been seen in the past, and where the endemic San Lucas Robin, (also split by some from American Robin) can be usually found. Once we arrived at the parking area, we heard the distant call of the endemic Baja Pygmy Owl, but unfortunately it didn't come close enough to be seen. We soon started walking uphill on a pretty steep trail, trying to get to the summit before it got too hot. On the way up we encountered several interesting species, like Band-tailed Pigeon, Great Horned Owl and many Acorn Woodpeckers of the distinctive *angustifrons* subspecies. After a bit of searching, 3 San Lucas Robins were also located, and one gave excellent views. Both Spotted and California Towhees and 3 Rufous-crowned Sparrows, were also recorded. However, even though we tried really hard for the junco at the spots where they had been seen a few years ago, there was no sign of them. Once at the summit, we spread out and again did a major search for the junco, lasting several hours, but to no avail. We also found a small water hole where we waited for a couple of hours during midday, as most if not all of the birds in the area seemed to be drinking there. However, even though there was quite a lot of activity, no juncos came. After having spent 7 hours in the area, without even hearing a junco, it seemed quite clear that most likely there were no birds present this year. Being some distance from the main stronghold of the species (a longer and much tougher trip is necessary in order to visit that area), as well as being at its lower altitude limit, we concluded that as with many other species with just a few pairs located on the edge of its distribution, some years they might be totally absent, and that was probably the case this year. After all the effort it was a pity we didn't see one, but at least we knew we had done everything we could, so reluctantly, we made our way downhill to the vehicles. After some final birding in a nearby canyon, where we saw a few good birds including a Zone-tailed Hawk and a Black-and-White Warbler, we went back to our hotel for a well deserved rest, seeing a few Eurasian Collared Doves around our accommodation.

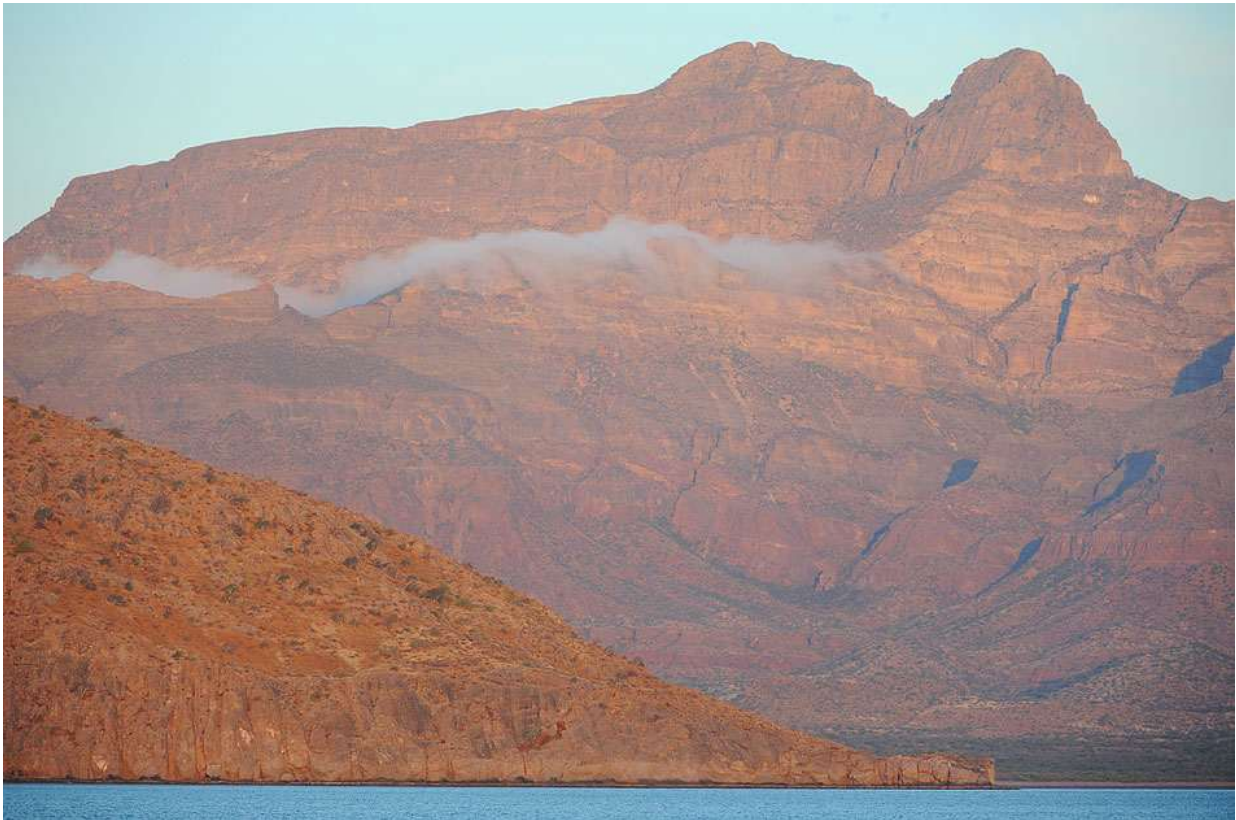
Before it got light, we went to look for the sought after and tiny Elf Owl. After a few stops, we eventually had outstanding views of a very cooperative individual, much to the delight of everyone. Next on the agenda was the Baja Pygmy Owl. We soon heard one and after much searching, saw it briefly sitting on top of a tree before it flew away. However, the views hadn't been satisfactory, so we kept searching. The sun had already risen when we heard a closer bird, and thankfully this one showed much better. We had lengthy, walk-away, scope views of this cute endemic as it kept singing, until it got mobbed away by some angry passerines. Nearby we found a Xantus's Hummingbird on its nest and an American Grey Flycatcher was also heard, while colorful Lesser Goldfinches were abundant throughout the place. Warblers were evident too, with Black-throated Grey, Black-and-White, American Yellow and Orange-crowned all showing well, while a male Varied Bunting gave also excellent views. We then moved off to our next destination, the sewage works and

nearby mudflats around La Paz. Large numbers of waders and herons were present and we spent an enjoyable time looking at them. Huge American White and Brown Pelicans were fishing in the bay, and we had nice views of our only Neotropic Cormorant of the trip. No less than 8 species of herons and 2 ibis, American White and White faced, were seen, totalling a few hundred birds. A Wood Stork was a rarity for the area and was seen very well. Four Black-bellied Whistling Ducks were a nice addition to our list, as were Northern Pintail and Northern Shoveler. Shorebirds were spread all over the place, with Grey (Black-bellied), Wilson's and Semipalmated Plovers, American Oystercatchers, a group of delightful American Avocets, a few Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, Least and Western Sandpipers, several Long-billed Dowitchers and a single Solitary Sandpiper all present. A large flock of Black Skimmers were roosting on a sandbar, together with a few Caspian Terns and a distant Forsters Tern, while nearby, Least Terns were seen fishing at close quarters. Black Phoebes were also around, as were 4 brilliant colored Vermilion Flycatchers. A copule of Northern Waterthrushes and a single Hermit Warbler were new additions to our wood warbler list, and 3 White-collared Seedeaters were also welcome. After some final looks at the waders, we slowly made our way back to our hotel, where we finally caught up with some much needed sleep.



The endemic Xantus's Hummingbird, here a nice male, is always one of the favourite birds of the tour. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Sadly this marked the end of the tour, as early the next morning saw us going to the airport for our planes back home. It had been a great end to a memorable trip, and I look forward to going back to Baja soon. If you want to experience one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on Earth, join us on our next Baja California cruise. You won't regret it!

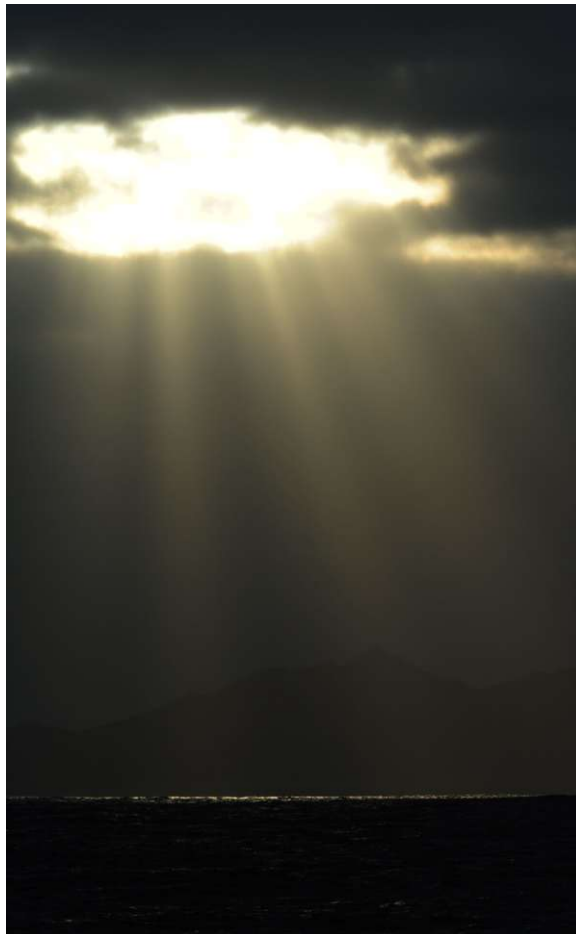


The scenery in Baja is breathtaking. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)





Fluking Humpback Whale (above). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

California Quail ◊ *Callipepla californica* Fairly common at suitable habitat.

Black-bellied Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis* Four birds were seen at La Paz.

(Black) Brant Goose ◊ *Branta bernicla nigricans* Particularly common at Laguna San Ignacio.



Black Brant. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

American Wigeon *Anas americana* Two females seen at Estero marsh during the extension.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Small flocks were seen at Estero and La Paz.

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* Ten birds at Estero and two pairs at La Paz.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Good numbers at La Paz.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* 20 birds were present at La Paz.

Redhead *Aythya americana* Five were seen at Estero.



Several species of waterfowl were present at Estero, including this female Redhead. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* A single bird was seen at Estero.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Three birds at Estero marsh.

Surf Scoter ♦ *Melanitta perspicillata* Common at Laguna San Ignacio.



Adult male Surf Scoters are stunning birds. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* A pair near Todos Santos island, and a further 2 at San Ignacio.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* 15 birds at Estero.

Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata* 10 birds seen in flight on our first day at sea.

Pacific Loon (P Diver) *Gavia pacifica* Good numbers were seen migrating north on our first day.

Great Northern Loon (G N Diver, Common L) *Gavia immer* Small numbers seen on the first 4 days of the tour.

Laysan Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria immutabilis* Great views of 1 on our first day, with a further 4 in the Sea of Cortez.

Black-footed Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria nigripes* 8 birds were seen very well during the journey towards San Benito.

Northern (Pacific) Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* At least 25 birds seen on our first day at sea, including dark-morphs.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* Fairly common, seen most days at sea.

Pink-footed Shearwater ♦ *Puffinus creatopus* Common, seen most days at sea, with a maximum of 250 birds.

Black-vented Shearwater ♦ *Puffinus opisthomelas* This Baja endemic breeder was common at sea.



Black-vented Shearwaters were commonly seen during the cruise. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Least Storm-Petrel ♦ *Oceanodroma microsoma* Fairly common within the Sea of Cortez, with a maximum of 150.



Least Storm-Petrel is the smallest Storm-Petrel in the world. Check the distinctive tail shape in the photo. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Black Storm-Petrel ♦ *Oceanodroma melania* Fairly common within the Sea of Cortez, with up to 200 birds seen.



Black-Storm Petrels were abundant within the Gulf of California. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* Seven birds were seen at Estero.

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis* Small numbers seen at scattered locations.

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* Ten birds were seen as we left Ensenada on our first day.

Red-billed Tropicbird ♦ *Phaethon aethereus* A total of 12 of these stunning birds were seen throughout the trip.



We saw several much-wanted Red-billed Tropicbirds during the cruise, and some gave very good views. (Dani Lopez-Velasco).

Wood Stork *Mycteria americana* A single bird was seen at La Paz.

American White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* Common at Laguna San Ignacio and La Paz.

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi* Several birds seen at Estero and La Paz.

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* Great views of three birds at Estero during the extension.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Singles at San Ignacio and Timbabiche, and 30 at La Paz.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violaceus* A single bird at San Benito island, and 15 at La Paz.

Green Heron *Butorides virescens* A total of five birds were seen throughout the trip.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Seen during the extension at Estero and La Paz.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* Fairly common, with up to 25 at La Paz.

Great Egret (G White E) *Ardea alba* Fairly common, with up to 75 birds at La Paz.

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* A total of 14 birds seen throughout the trip, with 6 at Laguna San Ignacio.



Reddish Egret sitting in a mangrove at Laguna San Ignacio. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor* Seen at several locations, with 8 at San Ignacio and 10 at La Paz.

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* 18 birds were seen throughout the trip.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* Fairly common, seen at various localities.

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* A flock of 20 over San Ignacio Lagoon, and 100 at La Paz.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* Common throughout the trip.

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* Fairly common south of Laguna San Ignacio and at the Sea of Cortez.

Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebouxii* Small numbers within the Sea of Cortez, and around 100 breeding at Los Islotes.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* Two birds at sea near Bahia Magdalena.

Nazca Booby ♦ *Sula granti* An immature seen at sea near Bahia Magdalena was rather unexpected.



Note the orange tones on the bill, particularly around the base, typical of Nazca, that sets it apart from Masked. (Dani Lopez-Velasco).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Small numbers within the Sea of Cortez, and around 150 breeding at Los Islotes.



Small numbers of Brown Boobies were always present at feeding frenzies. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Pelagic Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* Two birds near Todos Santos island were the only ones of the tour.

Brandt's Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax penicillatus* Fairly common on the first few days of the tour.

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* A single bird was seen very well at La Paz.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* Small numbers seen throughout the trip.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* Particularly common in mainland Baja.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* A total of 11 scattered sightings throughout the tour.

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* Singles at Nopolo and La Laguna.

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* Two birds seen during the extension.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* A single bird was seen in flight over San Ignacio lagoon.

Zone-tailed Hawk *Buteo albonotatus* A pair at Agua Verde and a single bird at La Victoria.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* Small numbers recorded at various localities.

Northern Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* First seen at Los Frailes, small numbers daily during the extension.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* A single bird was seen at Miraflores during the extension.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* Three birds were seen during the tour.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* A total of nine scattered sightings throughout the trip.

Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris* (H) Heard only in the mangroves at Laguna San Ignacio.

Common Gallinule (Laughing G) *Gallinula galeata* Fairly common at Estero.

American Coot *Fulica americana* Seen at Estero and La Paz.

Black Oystercatcher ♦ *Haematopus bachmani* Eight birds were present at Isla Todos Santos.

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus* A single bird was seen at Isla Todos Santos.

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* Common at La Paz sewage works.

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* 45 of these delightful waders were seen at La Paz.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* Small numbers at San Ignacio and La Paz.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* Small numbers at San Ignacio and around 100 at La Paz.

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* Five birds at Timbabiche and six at La Paz.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* Small numbers at Estero and La Paz.

Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* A few seen at Los Frailes.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* 40 birds were seen at San Ignacio.



Short-billed Dowitchers (front), Marbled Godwit (centre) and Western Willet (back). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Small numbers at La Paz.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa* Good numbers were seen both at San Ignacio lagoon and La Paz.

Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus* Small numbers seen at scattered localities.

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus* Several birds were present at San Ignacio and La Paz.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* Eight birds were seen at San Ignacio lagoon.

(Western) Willet *Tringa semipalmata inornata* Fairly common at San Ignacio and La Paz.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* Small numbers noted at various localities.

Black Turnstone ♦ *Arenaria melanocephala* A few seen at close range at Isla San Benito.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* Large numbers were present at San Ignacio lagoon.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* Good numbers of breeding adults were seen at San Ignacio and La Paz.



Summer-plumaged Western Sandpiper. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* Two at San Ignacio and then large numbers at La Paz.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Small numbers of summer plumaged birds of the *pacifica* subspecies seen at San Ignacio.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Large numbers on our first day, with at least 2000 birds recorded.



Two breeding-plumaged female Red-necked Phalaropes (above) together with 4 Red Phalaropes. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Red Phalarope ♦ (Grey P) *Phalaropus fulicarius* Staggering numbers, no less than 5500 seen at sea on day 5.



Two Red Phalaropes, (below), typically still in non-breeding plumage by April, with 2 Red-necked Phalaropes. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Sabine's Gull ♦ *Xema sabini* A group of 10 birds was seen flying north on our first day at sea.

Bonaparte's Gull ♦ *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Several small groups were seen at sea on our first day.

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* A single adult at Timbabiche, and a further 15 at La Paz.

Heermann's Gull ♦ *Larus heermanni* We had many sightings of this stunning Baja breeding endemic during the tour.



Heermann's Gull at sea. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* A single first summer bird was seen at La Paz.

California Gull *Larus californicus* Small numbers noted throughout the trip.

Western Gull ♦ *Larus occidentalis* Good numbers were seen on the first few days of the tour.

Yellow-footed Gull ♦ *Larus livens* This Baja endemic was fairly common within the Sea of Cortez.



Yellow-footed Gull is mostly restricted to the Sea of Cortez. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* A 2° winter bird was seen and photographed on our first day at sea.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Three birds at San Ignacio and at least 25 at La Paz.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maxima* Good numbers on the first few days of the trip, especially at Laguna San Ignacio.

Elegant Tern *Thalasseus elegans* A few small groups on our first day at sea were the only ones of the tour.
Least Tern *Sternula antillarum* Two birds seen briefly at Los Islotes, and then great views of 4 at La Paz.
Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Single birds seen on the first day at sea and at La Paz.
Pomarine Skua (P Jaeger) *Stercorarius pomarinus* Fairly common at sea, with a maximum count of 45.



4 Pomarine Skuas can be seen on this photo, amongst a flock of Pink-footed and Sooty Shearwaters. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)



Pomarine Skua. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus* Two birds seen at Laguna San Ignacio.
Long-tailed Jaeger (L-t Skua) ♦ *Stercorarius longicaudus* Two adults were seen well at the Sea of Cortez.
Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge* Two birds on our first day at sea were the only ones of the trip.
Scripps's Murrelet ♦ *Synthliboramphus scrippsi* At least 12 birds were seen very well during our first day at sea.
Craveri's Murrelet ♦ *Synthliboramphus craveri* We recorded small numbers of this endemic on 6 different dates.
Cassin's Auklet ♦ *Ptychoramphus aleuticus* At least 200 of these tiny alcids were seen on our second day at sea.
Rhinoceros Auklet ♦ *Cerorhinca monocerata* 15 birds were recorded during our first day at sea.
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) (introduced) *Columba livia* Seen at San Benito and at various Baja California towns.
Band-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas fasciata* 10 birds were seen during the extension at La Victoria.
Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Four birds were present at Los Barriles.
White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* Fairly common in mainland Baja and on some of the islands visited.
Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* First seen at Agua Verde, and then several more during the extension.
Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina* Recorded at various locations.

Ruddy Ground Dove *Columbina talpacoti* Seen at Los Frailes and Estero.

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus* A single bird at Los Frailes and another one near Los Barriles.

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* A roosting bird was flushed at La Victoria.

Baja Pygmy-Owl ◇ *Glaucidium hoskinsii* A singing bird gave brilliant scope views during the extension.

Elf Owl ◇ *Micrathene whitneyi* We had great views of this charismatic owl during the extension.

Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis* Three birds were seen at Los Barriles.

White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis* Several birds seen at Agua Verde and Santa Catalina Island.

Xantus's Hummingbird ◇ *Basilinna xantusii* First recorded at Nopolo, and then fairly common during the extension.

Costa's Hummingbird ◇ *Calypte costae* Seen at various localities.

Acorn Woodpecker *Melanerpes formicivorus* Birds of the distinctive *angustifrons* subspecies seen in the extension.

Gila Woodpecker ◇ *Melanerpes uropygialis* Fairly common at suitable habitat.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Picoides scalaris* 3 birds seen during the main tour, and seven during the extension.

Gilded Flicker ◇ *Colaptes chrysoides* Seen at Estero and Miraflores during the extension.

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* Only seen at Nopolo and La Paz.

American Grey Flycatcher ◇ *Empidonax wrightii* (H) Heard only at La Laguna reserve.

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* Nice looks at several of these stunning flycatchers at La Paz.

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* Fairly common at suitable habitat.

Cassin's Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans* Two birds were seen at Estero.

Thick-billed Kingbird ◇ *Tyrannus crassirostris* Great views of a pair at Miraflores.

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* A family group was seen at Santa Catalina I, and a pair at Timbabiche.

Plumbeous Vireo *Vireo plumbeus* Two singing birds were seen well at San Jose Island.

Cassin's Vireo *Vireo cassinii* We had several sightings during the extension.

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus* Fairly common at Miraflores and La Victoria.

California (Western) Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma californica* Seen at scattered locations.

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax* Widespread at suitable habitat, with up to 10 seen at San Benito Island.

Phainopepla ◇ *Phainopepla nitens* First seen at Agua Verde, and then seen at various other locations.

Verdin ◇ *Auriparus flaviceps* Common and widespread in mainland Baja and the islands within the Gulf.

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina* A single bird in flight at Agua Verde.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* Several seen at Estero.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* A few seen near Los Barriles.

American Bushtit *Psaltiriparus minimus* Six were seen at La Victoria.

Cactus Wren *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* Fairly common and widespread at suitable habitat.

Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus* Great views of a pair at Punta Colorado.

Canyon Wren *Catherpes mexicanus* Excellent looks at this sometimes difficult species at Partida Island.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* Seen at several locations.

California Gnatcatcher ◇ *Polioptila californica* Fairly common at suitable habitat.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* Noted at scattered locations throughout the tour.

Gray Thrasher ◇ *Toxostoma cinereum* This Baja endemic was common in mainland Baja and some of the islands.

European Starling (introduced) *Sturnus vulgaris* Seen at various places during the trip.

House Sparrow (introduced) *Passer domesticus* This widespread species was seen at various locations.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* One bird at La Victoria.

San Lucas Robin ◇ *Turdus (migratorius) confinis* Great views of a couple of birds at La Victoria.

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* Fairly common and widespread at suitable habitat.

Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria* Only seen during the extension.

Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis* Two birds seen at the mangroves of La Paz.

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* Four of these delightful warblers were seen during the extension.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata* Seen at Timbabiche and Miraflores.

Nashville Warbler *Leiothlypis ruficapilla* Singles at Agua Verde and La Laguna.

Belding's Yellowthroat ◇ *Geothlypis beldingi* Great views of 7 of these range-restricted yellowthroats at Estero.

MacGillivray's Warbler *Geothlypis tolmiei* Three birds showed well at Miraflores.

American Yellow Warbler *Setophaga aestiva* First seen at Nopolo, and then several seen during the extension.

Mangrove Warbler *Setophaga petechia* Common in the mangroves of San Ignacio Lagoon.

Audubon's Warbler *Setophaga auduboni* A single bird at at San Benito, and a few more at Miraflores and La Paz.

Black-throated Gray Warbler *Setophaga nigrescens* A single bird showed well at La Laguna reserve.

Hermit Warbler *Setophaga occidentalis* A bird was seen briefly at La Paz sewage works.

Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus* Fairly common and widespread.

Scott's Oriole *Icterus parisorum* Seen daily during the extension.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* Small numbers were recorded at Estero and La Paz.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* A single bird was seen at San Benito Island.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* Seen on four dates, with good numbers at Agua Verde.

Large-billed Savannah Sparrow *Ammodramus sandwichensis sanctorum* Great views at San Benito.

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina* A single bird was seen at Agua Verde.

Brewer's Sparrow ♦ *Spizella breweri* At least six birds were present amongst other sparrows at Agua Verde.

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* First seen at Los Frailes, then quite common at Agua Verde.

Black-throated Sparrow ♦ *Amphispiza bilineata* A few birds seen at four different locations during the trip.



Black-throated Sparrows have striking head patterns. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Rufous-crowned Sparrow *Aimophila ruficeps* Excellent views of three birds at La Victoria.

Green-tailed Towhee ♦ *Pipilo chlorurus* A single bird eventually showed well at Timbabiche.

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus* Six birds were seen at La Victoria.

California Towhee *Melospiza crissalis* Several birds seen well during the extension.

White-collared Seedeater *Sporophila torqueola* Three birds seen at La Paz might have been escapes.

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* Several stunning males were seen at various locations throughout the trip.

Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* Recorded at widely scattered locations.

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* Fairly common at suitable habitat.

Pyrrhuloxia *Cardinalis sinuatus* Only seen at Los Frailes and Miraflores.

Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* Two birds were seen during the extension.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* At least two males were present within a large Lazuli Bunting flock at Miraflores.

Lazuli Bunting *Passerina amoena* 3 birds seen during the main tour and then fairly common during the extension.

Varied Bunting *Passerina versicolor* Excellent views of five different birds during the extension.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* (LO) A rarity in Baja: a single female at Miraflores with other 3 bunting species.

MAMMALS

Black-tailed Jack Rabbit *Lepus californicus* Three seen at La Victoria.

White-tailed Antelope-Squirrel *Ammospermophilus leucurus* Seen at Los Frailes.

Coyote *Canis latrans* Excellent views of two during our mangrove boat trip at San Ignacio.

Guadalupe Fur Seal *Arctocephalus townsendii* Around 75 seen at San Benito.



Guadalupe Fur Seal at San Benito island. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Californian Sea-Lion *Zalophus californianus* Fairly common.

Northern Elephant Seal *Mirounga angustirostris* Large numbers at San Benito island.



A sad-looking Northern Elephant Seal pup with its characteristic huge eyes. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Harbor Seal (Common S) *Phoca vitulina* Five were seen at isla Todos Santos.

Bryde's Whale *Balaenoptera brydei* A total of 5 seen during the main tour.



Bryde's Whale showing its typical dorsal fin. (Dani Lopez-Velasco).

Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus* One of the highlights of the trip, we had great views of 10 different individuals.

Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus* Two seen on the first two days.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Seen on five dates, with up to 30 at Gorda Banks.



The white parts of the pectoral fins of a Humpback can look turquoise blue from above the surface. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Gray Whale (Grey W) *Eschrichtius robustus* Many close encounters at Laguna San Ignacio.

False Killer Whale *Pseudorca crassidens* Excellent views of a pod of 25 animals at sea near San Jose island.



A rare image of a spy-hopping False Killer Whale. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Long-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus capensis* Large pods within the Sea of Cortez.



Long-beaked Common Dolphin with a remora, or suckerfish, attached to its skin. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

Short-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis* Several pods seen on the first few days of the trip.

Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin (C Bottlenose D) *Tursiops truncatus* Seen on five different dates.

Pacific White-sided Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obliquidens* Three were seen on the second day of the tour.



And last, not a mammal, but a fish. An impressive photo taken by tour participant Alec Gilliespie of a “flying” Smoothtail Mobula Ray.