

Northern California 2018



Yellow-billed Magpie, Mines Road



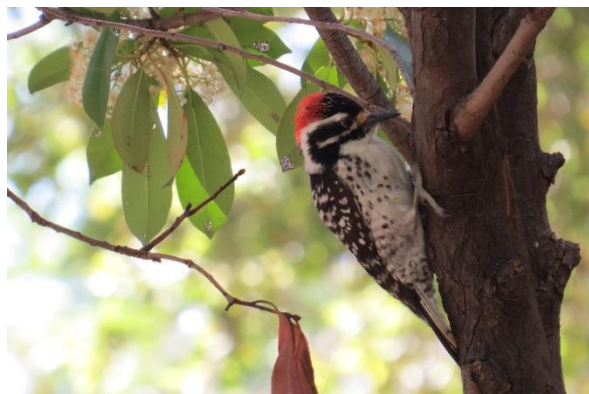
California Scrub Jay, Del Valle Regional Park, Mines Road

Introduction

After a very nice trip to New York and New Jersey in 2016, my wife and I and our two boys (12 and 15) again decided to go the United States in spring. I have been birding the western part of the country (Washington State and Arizona) on previous visits to the USA, but I had never been to California before, so there were still about forty endemic or range restricted new species to look for, and although this was a family holiday, I succeeded in finding 37 lifers, **May 1st to May 10th 2018**.



Allen's Hummingbird, San Francisco



Nuttall's Woodpecker, Mines Road

We arrived by plane on May 1 and spent the next two days in San Francisco. The first day we visited San Francisco Botanical Garden (*Allen's Hummingbird* and *California Scrub Jay*) and walked through Golden Gate Park (*McGillivray's Warbler* and *California Towhee*) all the way to Land's End (*Black Oystercatcher*), where we took bus 38 back to our hotel in Market Street. The next day we walked the piers near Fisherman's Wharf (*Clark's Grebe*) and boarded the ferry to Alcatraz (*Elegant Tern*), enjoying perfect weather and amazing vistas. On 4 May we picked up our rental car (booked in advance) at Alamo in downtown San Francisco and drove to Mines Road near Livermore. At Mines Road we connected with all the species we set out for: *California Quail* (lots of them!), *Greater Roadrunner*, *Nuttall's Woodpecker*, *Lewis's Woodpecker*, *Yellow-billed Magpie*, *Wrentit*, *California Thrasher*, *Bell's Sparrow* and *Lawrence's Goldfinch*; most of these birds were seen at MP 6.27 in Alameda County. Early afternoon we drove to Monterey where on two days sea watches at Point Pinos produced *Black-footed Albatross*, *Black Scoter* and *Cassin's* and *Rhinoceros Auklet*. After a short night a whale watching trip off Moss Landing gave *Sea Otters*, *Humpback Whales*, *Risso's Dolphins* and a *Pink-footed Shearwater* and shorebirds at Moss Landing State Beach included *Long-billed Curlews* and *Marbled Godwits* along Jetty's Road.

An early morning visit to Asilomar State Beach in Monterey for rocky shorebirds was rewarded with six *Black Turnstones* in full summer plumage. Driving Highway 1, in again perfect weather, we drove one of the world's most celebrated routes and learned that this was completely justified, feeling even more lucky when I saw a *California Condor* high over the ridge at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. Two *Black Swifts* and an *Olive-sided Flycatcher* in the car park were lifers too. On our way to Yosemite NP the next day we found one of our targets at Merced National Wildlife Refuge: we observed at least 57 *White-faced Ibis*. Tricolored Blackbirds proved too difficult to find that afternoon. At Yosemite NP the views were out of this world, but the birding was somewhat slow; still, I added *Calliope Hummingbird*, *White-headed Woodpecker*, *Hammond's Flycatcher*, *Mountain Chickadee* and *Thick-billed Fox Sparrow* to my list of lifers on May 9. Next morning at Wawona Meadow, we tried for several species we missed the day before and were happy with *Northern Pygmy Owl*, *Williamson's Sapsucker* and *Cassin's Finch*. Driving back to San Francisco one last stop at Merced NWR finally produced the sought after *Tricolored Blackbird* after which we revisited Livermore where we spend our last evening. From there it was only 45 minutes to San Francisco International airport the next morning, where we returned the car and flew back home to the Netherlands, looking back on twelve wonderful days in Northern California.

Day to day account

2 May

San Francisco Botanical Garden, Golden Gate Park, Land's End

We arrived in San Francisco at 7.15 pm after a long but pleasant flight from Frankfurt and slept at 9.15. When I woke up at 4.30 am the next morning, the whole family was already awake, texting on their phones with friends in Holland that lived nine hours ahead of us. When my wife and children were working the suitcases for clothes, I viewed a small garden opposite our Civic Center Holiday Inn hotel where I saw my first birds: *Anna's Hummingbird*, *American Robin* and *House Finch*; *Western Gulls* were up in the air. We went out at 8 and had breakfast at Starbucks in Market Street and reached the Golden Gate Park and San Francisco Botanical Garden at 9.45. *Black Phoebes* and *Song Sparrows* proved common, a *Pygmy Nuthatch* was one of the first birds we saw. Soon enough *Allen's Hummingbirds* appeared and we took some time photographing them among colorful flowers. At least six of them showed with some *Anna's Hummingbirds* thrown in as well. *Golden-crowned Kinglets* and *Chestnut-backed Chickadees* sang from large evergreen trees and my first *California Scrub Jay* was much appreciated, looking up we had a *Red-shouldered Hawk* coming over.



The flowers also attracted butterflies: *California Pipevine Swallowtails* were common here and wonderful objects to take pictures of; *Sandhill Skipper* and *Western Tiger Swallowtails* were also present. We walked out of the north gate of the Botanical Garden into Golden Gate Park and walked from east to west. In a well vegetated part of the park near Stow Lake we found a singing *Pacific Wren* and a *McGillivray's Warbler* and more common species such as *American Bushtit*, *Steller's Jay* and

Dark-eyed Junco. Stow Lake was swarming with *Violet-green* and *Tree Swallows* and Spreckels Lake had a *Pied-billed Grebe*, a first winter *Snow Goose* and a *Ring-billed Gull*. We walked nearly ten kilometers before we reached the beach at the Dutch Windmill, with a *West Coast Lady* butterfly found by Tom and my first *California Towhee* flying up from the side of the road here. At the beach an approachable *California Gull* was an interesting study object with *Brandt's* and *Pelagic Cormorants* flying past. It was high tide, so the only shorebirds were *Sanderlings* and 28 **Hudsonian Whimbrels**, chasing the waves at the beach. At Cliff House we had a nice cup of coffee and Suthro Baths produced several *American Coots* and *Double-crested Cormorants*. I heard and then saw my first *Black Oystercatcher* fly in from Seal Rocks, but as soon as it landed it tucked its bill in and started sleeping on the rocky island, filled with *Brandt's Cormorants* and *Western Gulls*. *House Finch* and *Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrow* were singing at Point Lobos, *Surf Scoter* and *Brown Pelican* were out at sea. It was now time to get back to the hotel and get dinner, so from Land's End we took bus 38 back to Market Street, a twenty minutes bus ride through San Francisco, straight from the beach into the city center, filling up fast, with most people getting out and in at Geary.



Seal Rock and Suthro Baths, Land's End

3 May

Alcatraz, Pier 39

We left the hotel for Fisherman's Wharf at 9 am with MUNI train F and arrived near Pier 37 at ten. We walked towards the water and found three *Western Grebes* accompanied by a lifer *Clark's Grebe*, a good start. We then walked to Pier 33 for our trip to Alcatraz with birds on the lawn and in sidewalk trees and shrubs: an *Anna's Hummingbird* at his favorite perch, *Black Phoebes*, *Brewer's Blackbirds* and a singing *White-crowned Sparrow* seemed unbothered by the street noise. After some shopping we boarded for Alcatraz at 11.30 am and enjoyed the magnificent view of the San Francisco Bay from the Golden Gate Bridge all the way round to Bay Bridge. *Brown Pelicans* and a *Pacific Diver* were flying up in front of the boat, *Double-crested Cormorants* and *Western Grebes* showed from the deck. When we arrived at Alcatraz red-footed **Pigeon Guillemots** proved photogenic and confiding with *Brandt's Cormorants* all around them. A noisy and heron rookery hosted *Snowy Egrets* and *Black-crowned Night Herons* and *Western Gulls* ruled the rocky island, Alcatraz now a sanctuary for sea birds, years after the prison's closure in 1963. I heard a *Black Oystercatcher*, but the rest of the family was eager to do the Alcatraz tour inside the famous prison.

The audio tour took two hours and was very entertaining and after taking pictures of the San Francisco skyline under a bright blue sky, we boarded the ferry again. I had spotted a distant *Elegant Tern* from Alcatraz earlier on, but back on the ferry I heard the Sandwich Tern-like call of *Elegant Terns* up close: two flew right over our heads! Awesome. This species used to be a fall migrant in this area, but lately numbers of *Elegant Tern* are also increasing in spring. We enjoyed several *Brown Pelicans* dive-bombing close to the boat and we saw our only (first winter) *Heermann's Gull* of the trip and a summer plumaged *Forster's Tern*. Back on solid ground we enjoyed the **California Sea Lions** at Pier

39, walked some piers, did some shopping and asked our taxi driver to drive us through the crooked streets of San Francisco, back to our hotel early evening.



Alcatraz in the background



4 May

Mines Road, Livermore

We drove to Livermore today in perfect weather, on our way to Mines Road where a dozen lifers were waiting for me. First, we picked up our rental car at Alamo in downtown San Francisco at 11 am. Things went smoothly and 50 minutes later we reached Livermore where *White-throated Swifts* greeted us at the traffic lights and we had lunch in one of the food courts in town, before we reached Mines Road early afternoon. Our first stop was at Del Valle Regional Park where we parked the car in the big parking lot and walked the picnic area while Brent prepared himself for swimming in the lake. Tom and I found a confiding *Nuttall's Woodpecker*, *Hooded Oriole* and many *California Scrub Jays*. *Red-tailed Hawks* and *Northern Raven* were up in the air, the lake was filled with *Western Grebes*. I counted at least 33, but did not check for Clark's (already seen yesterday) for there were other goodies to be found. Brent did not make it into the lake, he was fed up with the painful waterfront pebbles, so an hour later we were back on Mines Road, driving south. Mines Road is a winding road just south of Livermore through Alameda County all the way down to Santa Clara County through hills filled with oak trees, wineries, ranches, chaparral and cottonwoods. This road is very popular in the birding community and sightings are logged by mileposts that are found along the road. Remember that virtually all land to either side of this sometimes dangerously narrow road is enclosed private property, so avoid parking near houses and do not block any gates or roads (more info on page 22).



Acorn Woodpeckers and *California Scrub Jays* were very common, *American Bushtit* and *Red-winged Blackbirds* were also seen in good numbers. At MP 6.27 (GPS 37.605 / -121.664) there was some parking space, so we stopped, got out of the car and hit the jackpot. A big oak tree held at least six

lively *Phainopeplas*, *Anna's Hummingbird*, ***Western Kingbird***, *Ash-throated Flycatcher*, *Bullock's Oriole* and the surrounding chaparral hosted singing *California Thrasher* and *Wrentit*; a *Bell's Sparrow* was also heard and glimpsed as it flew downhill. When my first *Yellow-billed Magpie* came flying in I tried to grab my camera and my binoculars at the same time, but was a bit too overexcited. My camera hit the rocky ground and my lens did not survive the impact. End of camera. *American Kestrel* (later we saw two more), *Western Wood Pewee*, *Western Bluebird* and *Lazuli Buntings* were all here, but no pictures could be made, sadly. Still, what a place, five lifers and many good birds in ten minutes, all at MP 6.27.



Mines Road, MP 6.27, Phainopepla tree to the left

We decided to drive on and learned that *Northern Mockingbirds* and *Oak Titmouse* were also common and our first *California Quails* appeared at the side of the road. What a beauties! Driving down Mines Road we saw another six roadside quails. Near the 'bathtub' at MP 12.63 we stopped and photographed a *Variable Checkerspot* butterfly and decided to drive back to Livermore. After a few minutes we again spotted *California Quails* and *Brewer's Blackbirds* and when Tom tried the photograph the quails with his camera I was alerted to the calls of one of my main targets. These things always happen when you don't have a camera: a gorgeous male ***Lawrence's Goldfinch*** settled on a wire, 5 meters from the car, right in front of me. Louise took pictures with her phone and I filmed the bird with my Iphone (with poor results). Luckily Tom came to the rescue and he could make one good picture with his camera. A nice picture, but not the quality this bird deserves. I would have made amazing pictures if I still had my camera, because the bird was there, close and on my side of the car, then foraging on the ground, before flying off when blackbirds came too close. Happy and disappointed at the same time we drove back to Livermore where *Wild Turkey* numbers reached 40, roaming the fields on both sides of the road. On the last stretch of Mines Road, before the turn off to Tesla Road, we saw two more *Yellow-billed Magpies*. Tom and I agreed that this was our first stop at first light tomorrow.

5 May

Mines Road, Livermore - Monterey

It was getting light at 6.15 am when we heard and saw our first *California Towhee* of the day (at least six more would follow along the road) and soon two *Yellow-billed Magpies* were seen near a nest with another three magpies flying over to a nest a little further down the road. Light was poor, so we decided to come back later for better pictures of this California endemic. *House Wren*, *House Finch* and other common species were neglected when we drove back to MP 6.27 where *Phainopeplas*, *California Thrasher*, *Wrentit* and a pair of *Bell's Sparrow* (now performing a little bit better) were still there. I was about to drive on when I heard the cooing sound of what might be a ***Greater Roadrunner***. I stepped out of the car again and there it was! And it was walking in my direction! He ran up to us, stopped, ran, stopped and ran, sometimes jumping straight up, then running again, allowing great pictures and memorable moments with one of the wonderful treasures of Mines Road. Tom followed

the roadrunner up the road while I searched a flock of *Lazuli Buntings* for additional species with an *American Kestrel* and *Red-tailed Hawk* coming over.



We continued along Mines Road, encountering amazing number of *California Quails*. We saw at least 28 birds here in three hours, reaching highest numbers beyond MP 12.5. Here the trees grew bigger and shadier; more open areas produced *Killdeer*, *Belted Kingfisher* and many *Red-winged Blackbirds*. I tried for the junction at MP 5.0 (Santa Clara County), but soon learned that we had far too little time. Trying to decently photograph one of the many quails with Tom's camera had taken a lot of time, so when we turned the car I thought I would miss out on one of the targets, Lewis's Woodpecker. Then at GPS 37.517 / -121.544 Tom pointed out a crow-like woodpecker flying over with an odd combination of colors; dark blue-green, gray and pink: a *Lewis's Woodpecker*! A second woodpecker followed, but this one had orange underwings, a *Northern Flicker*. Driving back we saw a pair of *Wood Ducks* flying up, disappointed that it was already 9am. We promised to be back for breakfast at the Hampton Inn in Livermore at 9.15, so no time for the magpies anymore. Back at the hotel we agreed to come back to Livermore on the return trip from Yosemite to San Francisco, five days from now, which will give us an opportunity to revisit Mines Road one more time. With the exception of good Yellow-billed Magpie pictures this area has given us every bird we wanted to see, excellent.

After a swimming pool break at our Hampton Inn hotel, we left for Monterey at 1 pm, where we tried to find me a new camera. We also visited a shop in Carmel and lost valuable (birding) time in shopping malls and in traffic. I eventually found myself a very nice brand new Fuji camera and arrived at Monterey Travel Lodge at eight. We unpacked our bags, ate at Denny's and went into bed early.

6 May

Moss Landing – Monterey, Asilomar State Beach



Before Tom and I embarked on our Sanctuary Monterey Bay Whale Watch trip with Sanctuary Cruises at Moss Landing at 8am, we visited Jetty Road first. Here at Moss Landing State Beach *Sea Otters* are the main attraction and easily seen in good numbers, but shorebirds also gather here when the tide is right. Now at 6am the tide was halfway and perfect for waders. We enjoyed 13 *Long-billed Curlews* and 11 *Marbled Godwits*, a *Grey Plover*, a *Short-billed Dowitcher*, 15 *Western Sandpipers*, 8 *Dunlins* and several *Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrows*. Back at the harbor we received instructions how to behave on board, a *Clark's Grebe* swimming next to the boat. As the boat sailed out of the harbor we enjoyed *Brown Pelicans* and *Brandt's Cormorants* that rested and bred on manmade structures and out at sea *Caspian Terns* and *Pigeon Guillemots* appeared. Within ten minutes after starting our boat trip we saw our first of at least 15 *Humpback Whales*. During our two hours' trip we saw them up close, interacting and later joined by several *Risso's Dolphins*. *Common Murres* were commonly seen in small groups and further away from the coast *Sooty Shearwater* numbers were building up, first ones and twos, then more, until we encountered a raft of at least 50 birds with one *Pink-footed Shearwater* mixed in. Some *Common Loons* were flying past, adult summer plumaged *Pacific Loons* were seen swimming, their silvery napes brightened up by the sun that had come in full force. Most *Pacific Loons* were found amidst rafts of *Brandt's Cormorant* with *Bonaparte's Gulls* and a *Foster's Tern* flying over. A *Red-throated Loon* was seen close to the harbor, when heading back. Back on land we revisited Jetty Road, now at low tide.



Humpback Whale, Moss Landing



Monterey

A *Western Willet*, 10 *Marbled Godwits*, a *Semipalmated Plover* and two *Black-winged Stilts* were present this time, allowing nice pictures. In the afternoon we went to Cannery Row in Monterey, looking for souvenirs. From one of the viewpoints here out at sea we observed two *Eared Grebes*, some *Pacific Divers* and several *Pigeon Guillemots* and at Lover's Point I heard and then saw a beautiful pair of *Black Oystercatchers*. At Asilomar State Beach the rest of the family went looking for shells and I conducted a short sea watch. Several days of northwesterlies may have been responsible for the summer plumaged *Pacific Divers* close to shore. A male *Surf Scoter* swam close to shore and (YES!!!) two *Black-footed Albatross* were also seen flying southwest in these conditions. The sea was a lot rougher now, waves so much higher than earlier today. After a nice meal we went back to the hotel, looking back on another amazing day. Perfect weather and wonderful moments and all that with a very fine new camera. Great stuff!

7 May

Monterey, Point Pinos - Highway 1: Big Sur, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, Carmel River Mouth

I was up again at 5.30 am, Tom still asleep. I reached Point Pinos at 5.50 and started my sea watch. My first decent bird going west was a *Rhinoceros Auklet*, followed by lots of *Pelagic Cormorants*, divers and a continuous stream of *Sooty Shearwaters*. Besides several *Common Murres* I also saw a *Cassin's Auklet* going southwest.



When the stream of shearwaters dried up around 7 am I decided to look for rocky shorebirds, when in the dying seconds a female *Black Scoter* passed close to shore. Asilomar State Beach is a well-known spot for rocky shorebirds; I saw at least nine gorgeous ***Black Oystercatchers***, one pair was seen mating. I could not find Wandering Tattler and Surfbird, but carefully scrutinizing all the dark rocks gave six *Black Turnstones* in full summer plumage. I again promised to be home for breakfast at 9 am and at ten we started our Highway 1 adventure, heading for Big Sur.



We admired the famous coastline and stopped regularly to take in the scenery (one stop had a singing *Wrentit* close to the car) and at Big Sur we dined at the River Inn. *Steller's Jays* joined us at the restaurant table and streamside flowers attracted a variety of butterflies, not seen before on our trip. *Umber Skipper*, *Pale* and *Western Tiger Swallowtail*, *Lorquin's Admiral*, *Silvery Blue*, *Gabb's* and *Variable Checkerspot* and *California Ringlet* were all photographed here. At Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park we parked the car, paid the entrance fee and birded the parking lot. We had two *Allen's Hummingbirds*, a singing *Wrentit* and *Purple Finch*, a lifer *Olive-sided Flycatcher* and a bright *Orange-crowned Warbler*, but our main target here was of course California Condor, that are regularly seen here, riding thermal updrafts along the hill that towers over the parking lot. My family went to see the Mcway Falls on the other side of the highway, a picturesque 80 foot waterfall that drops directly from the cliffs into the ocean. Luckily they liked it so much, it gave me just enough time to wait for a huge raptor to fly over the ridge (ridge shown in the back on first photo above), making the *Turkey Vultures* look small. I called the others and even they could see the distant *California Condor*, where they could not see the Turkey Vultures with the naked eye. For half a minute the bird remained visible to us, before it disappeared behind the ridge to the right. The weather was perfect and the day got better by the minute. Just before the condor appeared I had also seen two *Black Swifts* while scanning the hills, hawking through the air over the parking lot. They came from high up, went down for a few seconds, and rocketed out of sight a few seconds later. Amazing!

At Carmel River Mouth we made one last stop that produced nice pictures of common birds such as *Common Merganser*, *Snowy Egret*, *Killdeer*, *Western Sandpiper*, *Semipalmated Plover* and *Anna's Hummingbird*.

8 May

Los Banos, San Luis Refuge Complex: San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, Merced National Wildlife Refuge - Oakhurst near Yosemite NP

We left Monterey at 10 am for Yosemite NP, but agreed to pause for birding halfway at Los Banos Wildlife Area (part of San Luis Refuge Complex) at GPS 37.175 / -120.801 with two lifers in mind: *White-faced Ibis* and *Tricolored Blackbird*. En route we had several swallow species, *Loggerhead Shrikes* and *Western Meadowlarks* and when we arrived at the park I asked for directions and information where to find both of our targets at the visitor's center. Once a stronghold for Tricolors, they were struggling here also, numbers dwindling fast. They told us that Merced National Wildlife Refuge along Sandy Mush Road was a better bet. Numbers of *Tricolored Blackbirds* were higher there and the pools held more water, also improving our chances on the ibis. Los Banos appeared very dry indeed, therefore (?) the big reedy pond next to the center attracted many birds. We heard at least three booming *American Bitterns* in the reeds around the pond and many singing *Marsh Wrens* and *Common Yellowthroats*, an *Ash-throated Flycatcher* was busy fly catching. Half an hour later we arrived at Merced NWR and drove the auto tour route, a five miles round trip through wetlands and weedy meadows. This place still held water and what a place it was!



We counted at least 57 *White-faced Ibis*, 120 *Long-billed Dowitcher* (all in one tight flock), numerous *Black-necked Stilts* and many *House Sparrows* (!?), *Brown-headed Cowbirds*, *Brewer's Blackbirds* and some *Western Meadowlarks*. *Western Kingbirds* were virtually everywhere, in incredible numbers. *Red-winged Blackbirds* were also much in evidence, Tricolors however, were nowhere to be found.

Tom and I really tried and stretched the patience of our family members, but at 3 pm we agreed to leave for Yosemite. At 5 pm we reached Oakhurst, close to Yosemite NP and obtained the key of our Best Western Gateway Inn room, after which we walked the lush garden with photogenic *California Quails*, *California Towhees* and *California Ringlets*, but no new birds or butterflies. In the evening I walked the grounds for owls, but came up empty.

9 May

Yosemite NP: Glacier Point, McGurk Meadow, Yosemite Village

It was Yosemite Day today. I succeeded in getting our entire family at breakfast at 7 am and we left the hotel on route 41 at 8.10 am. It turned out that driving to Glacier Point in the park took 1,5 hours, far longer than anticipated. After 45 minutes we passed Wawona and 20 minutes later we reached the turn off to Glacier Point. Driving with my window open, the sounds of *Pacific Wren* and *Mountain Chickadees* were heard coming from within the forest. The view at Glacier Point was simply stunning and the birding was good around the parking lot here. *Hermit Warblers* sang high up in tall pine trees, two *Thick-billed Fox Sparrows* did the same, one of them coming down to feed on the ground in front of us. A *Sooty Grouse* was heard from the slope below the viewpoint and *White-headed Woodpeckers* called from inside the woods. A *Calliope Hummingbird* put in a short appearance, *Mountain Chickadees* and *Red-breasted Nuthatches* were around all the time.



And so it was already 11.15 when we decided to drive back and stop at McGurk Meadow for a walk with good birds. Our two hours' walk through the forest was pleasant, the path partly covered in snow. This is a famous Great Grey Owl site and at mid-day I did not have high expectations encountering one of these, but I expected to find several other lifers. We saw *Hoary Comma* butterfly and *Californian Tortoiseshell*, but the birding was slow; a slender-billed *Red Crossbill* was our most interesting species. We then drove into Yosemite Valley and admired all the famous views (Tunnel View, El Capitan, Bridalveil Falls etc.) and stopped at Yosemite Village for a late meal and souvenirs, with little birding time left. Around the visitor's center we found some nice birds: *Hammond Flycatchers*, *Warbling Vireo* and plenty of *Black-headed Grosbeaks*.

Driving back to Oakhurst at leisure with a stop at Wawona was very enjoyable, but for the first time this holiday the birding was under par; we did not see or hear *Mountain Quail*, *Williamson's Sapsucker*, *Black-backed Woodpecker* and *Cassin's Finch*.

It was already dark when we returned to our Best Western Gateway Inn in Oakhurst, where we talked about another great day in California over a perfect dinner in the Oakhurst Grill restaurant.



California Ground Squirrel



Tunnel View, Yosemite NP

10 May

Yosemite NP: Wawona Meadow - Merced Wildlife Refuge - Mines Road, Livermore

Our last day and thinking of a strategy that would bring most new species, it brought me to Wawona Meadow. Driving all the way to and fro Glacier Point or Yosemite Valley would simply take too long, we had to drive back to Livermore sometime today and I still wanted to have another go at Tricolored Blackbirds at Merced NR too. Tom and I got out of the car at the abandoned golf course at Wawona hoping for some good birds and some Black Bears that had also eluded us so far. No bears this morning, but far more birds than yesterday. *Red Crossbill* flocks, a *Pine Siskin* and a female *Cassin's Finch* were found in tall trees surrounding the golf course, at the forest edge *Olive-sided* and *Pacific-slope Flycatcher* turned up and deeper in the woods we had a calling *Northern Pygmy Owl*, a *Williamson's Woodpecker*, *Brown Creeper* and a *Hammond's Flycatcher*; in the more open parts of the forest several *McGillivray's Warblers* were singing. At nine we drove back to the hotel, had a very nice breakfast and prepared ourselves for the return trip.

We drove back to Livermore at noon with one last stop at Merced NR where we drove the auto loop once more, scanning the blackbird flocks again. We finally found a female *Tricolored Blackbird* that ticked all the right boxes and a probable male, although *Red-winged* and *Bicolored Blackbird* males and females clouded my ID efforts. A neat adult *Swainson's Hawk* with a *California Ground Squirrel* in its talons, a female *Blue Grosbeak* and again good numbers of *White-faced Ibis* brightened up this successful day even more. Back in Livermore Brent and Louise were happy with a good hotel room Wi-Fi service and Tom and I returned to Mines Road where we easily found and photographed several *Yellow-billed Magpies*. In the evening we went into town for a final evening meal, packed our bags and flew back to the Netherlands from SFO the next day.

Species list. Birds in bold print are lifers.

- 1 Brant Goose, *branta bernicla*; one at Lovers Point, Monterey.
- 2 Canada Goose, *branta canadensis*; common.
- 3 Wood Duck, *aix sponsa*; a pair along Mines Road, Alameda County.
- 4 Cinnamon Teal, *spatula cyanoptera*; a pair at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 5 Northern Shoveler, *spatula clypeata*; small numbers at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 6 Gadwall, *mareca strepera*; two along Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 7 Mallard, *anas platyrhynchos*; common.
- 8 Northern Pintail, *anas acuta*; two pairs at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.

- 9 Surf Scoter, *melanitta perspicillata*; five at Land's End, San Francisco; a male present at Asilomar State Beach.
- 10 **Black Scoter**, *melanitta americana*; a female passing by during my Point Pinos sea watch early morning on May 7th.
- 11 Common Merganser, *mergus merganser*; adult female with duckling at Carmel River Mouth.
- 12 Red-breasted Merganser, *mergus serrator*; a female present at Point Pinos, Monterey.
- 13 **California Quail**, *callipepla californica*; very common at Mines Road, Livermore, eight seen on our visit on May 4th. The next day we saw at least 28 birds here in three hours, reaching highest numbers beyond MP 12.5, driving south. These beauties were also seen at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, and on the grounds of the Best Western Gateway Inn in Oakhurst.



- 14 Wild Turkey, *meleagris gallopavo*; also very common along Mines Road, especially the first part of the road after leaving Tesla Road just south of Livermore, in parties of up to twenty.
- 15 Sooty Grouse, *dendragapus fuliginosus*; one at Glacier Point, Yosemite NP, we heard many series of low pulsing hoots.
- 16 Red-throated Loon, *gavia stellate*; one at the marina at Moss Landing.
- 17 Pacific Loon, *gavia pacifica*; common at sea at Moss Landing and at Monterey.
- 18 Common Loon, *gavia immer*; three flying past Point Pinos; one seen on our whale watching trip off Moss Landing.

- 19 **Black-footed Albatross**, *phoebastria nigripes*; two together flying past Asilomar State Beach on May 6th.
- 20 Sooty Shearwater, *ardenna grisea*; large numbers (hundreds) during an early morning sea watch at Point Pinos; rafts of at least 40 birds resting at sea during our whale watching trip off Moss Landing.
- 21 **Pink-footed Shearwater**, *ardenna creatopus*; one in a raft of resting Sooty Shearwaters during our whale watching trip off Moss Landing.
- 22 Pied-billed Grebe, *podilymbus podiceps*; one at Spreckels Lake in Golden Gate Park and one on the pond at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge visitor center.
- 23 Black-necked Grebe, *podiceps nigricollis*; two seen from Cannery Row, Monterey.
- 24 Western Grebe, *aechmophorus occidentalis*; common, mostly coastal, however, highest number at Del Valle Regional Park near Mines Road where I counted at least 33.



- 25 **Clark's Grebe**, *aechmophorus clarkia*; one with three Western Grebes at Pier 27 in San Francisco; one in the marina at Moss Landing, Sandholdt Road and one at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 26 **White-faced Ibis**, *plegadis chihi*; initially I expected to find this species at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, but at the visitor center I was told that the area had dried out and that Merced National Wildlife Refuge was a far better bet for this species. They were right, there was still plenty of water here; we counted at least 57 White-faced Ibis, including a party of 36 birds.
- 27 American Bittern, *botaurus lentiginosus*; three birds singing from the reeds around the pond at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge visitor center.
- 28 Black-crowned Night Heron, *nycticorax nycticorax*; there is an active rookery at Alcatraz, where they are easy to see. We also saw several birds at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 29 Green Heron, *butorides virescens*; one at Del Valle Regional Park; one near Los Banos Waterfowl Management Area
- 30 Great Blue Heron, *ardea herodias*; common.
- 31 American Egret, *ardea (alba) egretta*; one at Moss landing; two at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 32 Snowy Egret, *egretta thula*; common.
- 33 Brown Pelican, *pelecanus occidentalis*; common in coastal environments.

- 34 Pelagic Cormorant, *phalacrocorax pelagicus*; common at rocky shores.
- 35 Brandt's Cormorant, *phalacrocorax penicillatus*; common in coastal waters and at sea, easy to see up close at Alcatraz and in the Monterey area..



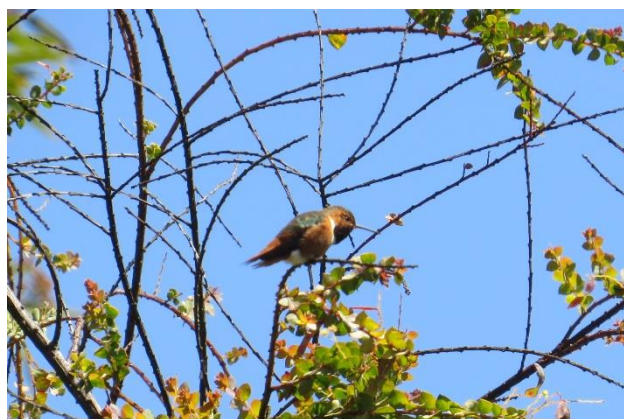
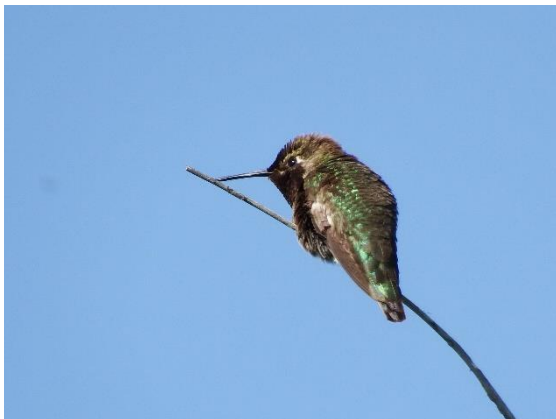
- 36 Double-crested Cormorant, *phalacrocorax auritus*; common.
- 37 Turkey Vulture, *cathartes aura*; common.
- 38 **California Condor**, *gymnogyps californianus*; one seen over Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, just west of the parking lot at GPS 36.158 / -121.671, far out over the distant ridge to the southeast, seen from the trail to the McWay Falls (parallel to Highway 1).
- 39 Golden Eagle, *aquila chrysaetos*; one near Mariposa on our way to Yosemite NP.
- 40 Sharp-shinned Hawk, *accipiter striatus*; one at McWay Falls, Highway One.
- 41 Red-shouldered Hawk, *buteo lineatus*; two over Golden Gate Park, Botanical Garden, San Francisco.
- 42 Swainson's Hawk, *buteo swainsoni*; one eating a California Ground Squirrel at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 43 Red-tailed Hawk, *buteo jamaicensis*; widespread.
- 44 American Coot, *fulica americana*; common.
- 45 **Black Oystercatcher**, *haematopus bachmani*; one on Seal Rocks, Land's End, San Francisco and one on Alcatraz Island. Common at Monterey: three at Lovers Point; one at Andy Jacobsen Park; four at Point Pinos, four at Asilomar State Beach.
- 46 Black-necked Stilt, *himantopus mexicanus*; two at Jetty Road, Moss Landing, at least 60 at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 47 Grey Plover, *pluvialis squatarola*; one at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 48 Semipalmated Plover, *charadrius semipalmatus*; one at Sandholdt Road, Moss Landing; two at Park Carmel River State Beach.
- 49 Killdeer, *charadrius vociferous*; common.
- 50 Snowy Plover, *charadrius nivosus*; one flyby at Asilomar State Beach, Monterey.
- 51 Hudsonian Whimbrel, *numenius hudsonicus*; 28 on the beach near Cliff House, Land's End, San Francisco; one Asilomar State Beach, Monterey; one Point Pinos, Monterey.

- 52 **Long-billed Curlew**, *numenius americanus*; 13 at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 53 **Marbled Godwit**, *limosa fedoa*; 12 at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 54 **Black Turnstone**, *arenaria melanocephala*; all in summer plumage on black breakwater rocks: five along Ocean View Boulevard near Point Pinos, Monterey at GPS 36.636 / - 121.937; and one showing nicely just east of Crespi Pond, Point Pinos.
- 55 Sanderling, *calidris alba*; 14 on the beach near Cliff House, Land's End, San Francisco, two Asilomar State Beach.
- 56 Dunlin, *calidris alpine*; eight at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 57 Western Sandpiper, *calidris mauri*; 15 at Jetty Road, Moss Landing; two at Carmel River Mouth.
- 58 Long-billed Dowitcher, *limnodromus scolopaceus*; a tight flock of circa 120 birds at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 59 Short-billed Dowitcher, *limnodromus griseus*; one at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 60 Spotted Sandpiper, *actitis macularius*; one at Carmel River Mouth.
- 61 (Western) Willet, *tringa (semipalmata) inornata*; one at Jetty Road, Moss Landing.
- 62 Greater Yellowlegs, *tringa melanoleuca*; one at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 63 Bonaparte's Gull, *chroicocephalus philadelphia*; at least ten seen off Moss Landing during our whale watching trip.
- 64 Heermann's Gull, *larus heermanni*; an immature bird seen from the Alcatraz ferry.
- 65 Western Gull, *larus occidentalis*; very common, but coastal.



- 66 California Gull, *larus californicus*; a handful in and around Golden Gate Park and at Land's End, San Francisco.
- 67 Ring-billed Gull, *larus delawarensis*; a second year bird at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.
- 68 Caspian Tern, *hydroprogne caspia*; two at Sandholdt Road, Moss Landing and one at Point Pinos, Monterey.
- 69 **Elegant Tern**, *thalasseus elegans*; one distantly seen from Alcatraz Island and two right over our heads on the Alcatraz ferry.
- 70 Forster's Tern, *sterna forsteri*; one over the Alcatraz ferry and one off Moss Landing..

- 71 Common Murre, *uria aalge*; frequently seen in small groups during our whale watching trip off Moss Landing.
- 72 Pigeon Guillemot, *cepphus columba*; easy to see, hear and photograph at Alcatraz Island, also observed close to shore at Monterey and Moss Landing.
- 73 **Cassin's Auklet**, *ptychoramphus aleuticus*; one past Point Pinos, Monterey, during an early morning sea watch.
- 74 **Rhinoceros Auklet**, *cerorhinca monocerata*; one past Point Pinos, Monterey, during an early morning sea watch.
- 75 Band-tailed Pigeon, *patagioenas fasciata*; one flying over the highway 101 near Morgan Hill; four flying over near McWay Falls, Highway 1; one at Best Western Gateway Inn in Oakhurst.
- 76 Mourning Dove, *zenaida macroura*; common.
- 77 Greater Roadrunner, *geococcyx californianus*; one walking up to our car, cooing, running and jumping, at Mines Road, MP 6.27, Alameda County. Wonderful!
- 78 **Northern Pygmy Owl**, *glaucidium californicum*; calling early morning at Wawona Meadow.
- 79 **American Black Swift**, *cypseloides niger*; two at McWay Falls, Highway 1.
- 80 White-throated Swift, *aeronautes saxatalis*; two over Livermore and two over Monterey. They were also seen at Big Sur, Highway 1 and at Yosemite NP.
- 81 Anna's Hummingbird, *calypte anna*; common.



- 82 **Allen's Hummingbird**, *selasphorus sasin*; can't be missed in Golden Gate Park, where we saw at least twelve males and females, the greater part seen at the Botanical Garden. Allen's Hummingbirds were also seen along Highway 1: one at Big Sur and one at the McWay Falls parking lot.
- 83 **Calliope Hummingbird**, *selasphorus calliope*; one at Glacier Point, Yosemite NP.
- 84 Belted Kingfisher, *megasceryle alcyon*; one along Mines Road, Santa Clara County.
- 85 **Lewis's Woodpecker**, *melanerpes lewis*; one flying over Mines Road, GPS 37.517 / -121.544, Santa Clara County.
- 86 Acorn Woodpecker, *melanerpes formicivorus*; very common along Mines Road; two at Big Sur along Highway 1.

- 87 **Williamson's Sapsucker**, *sphyrapicus thyroideus*; a noisy bird at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 88 **Nuttall's Woodpecker**, *dryobates nuttallii*; one heard at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; one showing really nice at Del Valle Regional Park near Mines Road, Alameda County.
- 89 Downy Woodpecker, *dryobates pubescens*; one at Del Valle Regional Park near Mines Road.
- 90 **White-headed Woodpecker**, *leuconotopicus albolarvatus*; noisy at Glacier Point, Yosemite NP and at Yosemite Valley, near the visitor center.
- 91 Northern Flicker, *colaptes auratus*; one flying over Mines Road.
- 92 American Kestrel, *falco sparverius*; four at Mines Road.
- 93 Black Phoebe, *sayornis nigricans*; common.



- 94 **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, *contopus cooperi*; one singing at the McWay Falls (Highway 1) parking lot and one at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 95 Western Wood Pewee, *contopus sordidulus*; two at Mines Road.
- 96 **Hammond's Flycatcher**, *empidonax hammondi*; two in Yosemite Valley, one at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 97 Pacific-slope Flycatcher, *empidonax difficilis*; one at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 98 Western Kingbird, *tyrannus verticalis*; abundant in the San Luis Refuge Complex area, between Los Banos and Merced, especially common at Merced National Wildlife Refuge. We saw a few birds at Mines Road, Alameda County.
- 99 Ash-throated Flycatcher, *myiarchus cinerascens*; two seen at Mines Road and one at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge.
- 100 Loggerhead Shrike, *lanius ludovicianus*; two at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 101 Warbling Vireo, *vireo gilvus swainsoni*; one at Yosemite Valley, near the visitor center.
- 102 **Yellow-billed Magpie**, *pica nuttalli*; several pairs in a loose colony in the first stretch of Mines Road after the turn off from Tesla Road south of Livermore and one at MP 6.27 Mines Road. We saw one flying over the highway near Modesto.
- 103 American Crow, *corvus brachyrhynchos*; common.
- 105 Northern Raven, *corvus corax*; common.

105 Steller's Jay, *cyanocitta stelleri*; common.



106 **California Scrub Jay**, *aphelocoma californica*; common.

107 **Phainopepla**, *phainopepla nitens*; six of them working a big solitary oak tree at MP 6.27 Mines Road on both days.

108 **Oak Titmouse**, *baeolophus inornatus*; common along Mines Road.

109 **Mountain Chickadee**, *poecile gambeli*; common at Yosemite NP.

110 Chestnut-backed Chickadee, *poecile rufescens*; present in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco and in Yosemite NP and heard in the grounds of the Best Western Gateway Inn in Oakhurst.

111 Violet-green Swallow, *tachycineta thalassina*; in mixed flocks at Stow Lake and Spreckels Lake in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; about ten at Sandholdt Road, Moss Landing; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.

112 Tree Swallow, *tachycineta bicolor*; see nr. 111.

113 Northern Rough-winged Swallow, *stelgidopteryx serripennis*; two at Monterey; six at Los Banos; eight at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.

114 Barn Swallow, *hirundo rustica*; common.

115 American Cliff Swallow, *petrochelidon pyrrhonota*; common.

116 American Bushtit, *psaltriparus minimus*; common.

117 **Wrentit**, *chamaea fasciata*; singing at MP 6.27, Mines Road on both days, singing at Grimes Point Scenic Overlook on Highway 1 and singing at McWay Falls parking lot.

118 Golden-crowned Kinglet, *regulus satrapa*; one in the Botanical Garden, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; common at Yosemite NP.

119 Marsh Wren, *cistothorus palustris*; several heard at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.

120 Pacific Wren, *troglodytes pacificus*; one singing in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; one singing along Wawona Road just after we turned left for Glacier Point, Yosemite NP.

121 House Wren, *troglodytes aedon*; common.

122 Pygmy Nuthatch, *sitta pygmaea*; seen at two locations in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

123 Red-breasted Nuthatch, *sitta canadensis*; common in Yosemite NP.

124 Brown Creeper, *certhia americana*; several heard at Yosemite NP.

- 125 Northern Mockingbird, *mimus polyglottos*; common along Mines Road.
- 126 **California Thrasher**, *toxostoma redivivum*; Mines Road, singing at MP 6.27, Alameda County.
- 127 Western Bluebird, *sialia mexicana*; common along Mines Road.
- 128 American Robin, *turdus migratorius*; common.
- 129 Purple Finch, *haemorhous purpureus californicus*; adult male singing at the McWay Falls parking lot (Hihgway 1); two singing at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 130 **Cassin's Finch**, *haemorhous cassinii*; a female at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 131 House Finch, *haemorhous mexicanus*; common.
- 132 Red Crossbill, *loxia curvirostra*; Yosemite NP hosted good numbers this year: we saw a slender-billed type crossbill at McGurk Meadow and a flock of at least 20 at Wawona Meadow.
- 133 **Lawrence's Goldfinch**, *spinus lawrencei*; a male at Mines Road, GPS 37.579 / -121.588, near 'the bathtub' at MP 12.63, Alameda County.
- 134 Lesser Goldfinch, *spinus psaltria*; one at Mines Road.
- 135 Pine Siskin, *spinus pinus*; one at Wawona Meadow.
- 136 **Thick-billed Fox Sparrow**, *passerella megarhyncha*; two singing around the parking lot at Glacier Point, Yosemite NP. One of them came down, working the leaf litter close to the sidewalk.
- 137 Song Sparrow, *melospiza melodia*; common.



- 138 White-crowned Sparrow, *zonotrichia leucophrys*; several seen in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; ssp *nuttalli* common in coastal scrub (singing at Land's End in San Francisco, Asilomar State Beach in Monterey and Jetty Road, Moss Landing. We found one in a small sidewalk flower bed down The Embarcadero near Pier 39 in San Francisco, singing its heart out amidst the street noise of passing cars and people.
- 139 Dark-eyed Junco, *junco hyemalis*; common.
- 140 Savannah Sparrow, *passerculus sandwichensis*; one at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.
- 141 **Bell's Sparrow**, *artemisiospiza belli*; Mines Road, a pair at MP 6.27.
- 142 Spotted Towhee, *pipilo maculatus*; one at Mines Road.

- 143 **California Towhee**, *melozone crissalis*; common.
- 144 Western Meadowlark, *sturnella neglecta*; several en route, e.g. near Hollister and four at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 145 Bullock's Oriole, *icterus bullockii*; a pair at MP 6.27, Mines Road, seen on both days.
- 146 Hooded Oriole, *icterus cucullatus*; two at Del Valle Regional Park, off Mines Road, Livermore.
- 147 **Tricolored Blackbird**, *agelaius tricolor*; after searching in vain on 8 May, we finally found a female Tricolored Blackbird that ticked all the right boxes at Merced National Wildlife Refuge on May 10th. We also had a probable male, although hundreds of Red-winged and some Bicolored Blackbird males and females clouded my ID efforts. This species is doing really bad and is getting harder and harder to find in the San Luis Refuge Complex area, showing a steep decline, even at this former stronghold.
- 148 Red-winged Blackbird, *agelaius phoeniceus*; common.
- 149 Brown-headed Cowbird, *molothrus ater*; one at Tesla Road, Livermore; common at San Luis National Wildlife Refuge.
- 150 Brewer's Blackbird, *euphagus cyanocephalus*; common.
- 151 Orange-crowned Warbler, *leiothlypis celata*; adult male at the McWay Falls parking lot.
- 152 Nashville Warbler, *leiothlypis ruficapilla ridgwayi*; a female in our backyard at Oakhurst Best Western Plus Yosemite Gateway Inn.
- 153 **MacGillivray's Warbler**, *geothlypis tolmiei*; one singing in Golden Gate park, San Francisco; three singing at Wawona Meadow.
- 154 Common Yellowthroat, *geothlypis trichas*; one near the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge visitor center.
- 155 Audubon's Warbler, *setophaga auduboni*; one at McGurk Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 156 Hermit Warbler, *setophaga occidentalis*; two birds singing at Glacier Point, Yosemite NP.
- 157 Western Tanager, *piranga ludoviciana*; one at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 158 Black-headed Grosbeak, *pheucticus melanocephalus*; common at Yosemite Valley; a female was seen at Wawona Meadow, Yosemite NP.
- 159 Blue Grosbeak, *passerina caerulea*; a female at Merced National Wildlife Refuge.
- 160 Lazuli Bunting, *passerina amoena*; several flocks along Mines Road, biggest flock held 25 birds.

Butterflies

Umber Skipper, *poanes melane*; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.

Sandhill Skipper, *polites sabuleti*; four at Botanical Garden, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

Pale Swallowtail, *papilio eurymedon*; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.

Western Tiger Swallowtail, *papilio rutulus*; three at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco; two at Big Sur, Highway 1.

California Pipevine Swallowtail, *battus philenor hirsute*; at least 20 in the Botanical Garden, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

Sara Orangetip, *anthocharis sara*; two at the McWay Falls parking lot.

Margined White, *peris marginalis*; one at the McWay Falls parking lot.

Small White, *peris rapae*; three at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

Silvery Blue, *glaucopsyche lygdamus*; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.



Variable Checkerspot, *euphydryas chalcedona*; two at Mines Road; two at near Big Sur, Highway 1; one at Tunnel View, Yosemite NP.

Gabb's Checkerspot, *chlosyne gabbii*; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.

Red Admiral, *vanessa atalanta*; one at Monterey.

West Coast Lady, *vanessa annabella*; one at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

California Tortoiseshell, *nymphalis californica*; one at McGurk Meadow, Yosemite NP.

Hoary Comma, *polygonia gracilis*; one at McGurk Meadow, Yosemite NP.

Lorquin's Admiral, *limenitis lorquini*; one at Big Sur, Highway 1.



California Ringlet, *coenonympha tullia californica*; two at Big Sur, Highway 1 and two on the grounds of the Best Western Gateway Inn in Oakhurst. Habitat totally different from *coenonympha tullia* in Europe; in California I found them on neatly manicured hotel lawns.

Mammals

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

California Mule Deer

Coyote

Harbour Seal

Risso's Dolphin

Western Gray Squirrel

California Ground Squirrel

California Sea Lion

Desert Cottontail

Humpback Whale

Sea Otter

Lodgepole Chipmunk



Extra information on Mines Road:

<http://www.10000birds.com/make-mine-mines-road.htm>

<https://atowhee.blog/2010/06/21/day-three-make-mine-mines-road/>

Pages 250 to 254 in 'Birding Northern California' by John Kemper
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Note: All my observations with GPS coordinates can be found at www.observado.org, under my name, Jaap Westra. For any additional information email me at jaapwestra@icloud.com.