

California 2008. Introduction.

Contributed by Jos

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An amazing trip, pelagics full of seabirds and whales, Californian Condors in the mountains, close encounters with Black Bears in Yosemite and the hoped-for Roadrunners and Burrowing Owls in the deserts.

Visiting from 21st August till 5th September, this tour of California exceeded all expectations, leaving me in awe day after day, not only of the breath-taking landscapes, but also of the amazing birds and mammals encountered at virtually every stop. All my targets, ranging from Blue Whale to Black Bear, Burrowing Owl to California Condor, were seen and I eventually returned home with no less than (260) species of bird seen and an impressive 32 species of mammal.

Itinerary

Beginning and finishing in San Francisco, the trip essentially consisted of a 3100 mile loop. After a stunning start at the West Pinnacles National Monument and mind-blowing pelagic off Monterey, I then headed eastward to the mighty peaks and stunning landscapes of Yosemite National Park. From there I dropped down to the hot desertlands surrounding Lakes Mono and Crawley before heading ever further south into lands that became more and more extreme, with temperatures nudging above 45 C. All the time birding remained not just productive, but staggering, with all the main birds seen and many unexpected bonuses to boot. Barely a dozen or so miles off the Mexican border, the southern end of Salton Sea marked the southernmost point of my trip and also, without doubt, the most productive of all the birding localities that I encountered. Absolutely awesome, the birding was phenomenal, the landscape remarkable. From there, I cut westward back to the coast, visiting Newport Bay just south of Los Angeles and then the Ventura area further north, including a trip out to Santa Cruz Island. With time running out, I then returned to the mountains with a day in the Mount Pinos area, before a return to Yosemite, another look at the West Pinnacles area and a last, superb day in the Monterey Bay area.

For ease of reading, this report is divided into the following parts:

Part One. The first half of the trip, covering the excellent Monterey pelagic, plus the northern leg of my travels (West Pinnacles and Yosemite) and all the desertlands, from Lake Mono and Lake Crawley down to Jawbone Canyon and Big Morongo. [Click HERE](#) to read.

Part Two. Accounts of the excellent Salton Sea, along with Borrego Springs, all birding sites along the Pacific coast, plus Mount Pinos and return trips to Yosemite and West Pinnacles. [Click HERE](#) to read.

