



WINTER HIGH TIDES IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA 18–26 January 2019

\$3,270 – double, \$3,870 – single

Our Bay Area High Tides tour is back! The January peak tide will be one of the highest in many years, almost 10 feet above sea level at some locations. This will make for phenomenal birding and tidepooling in the rich habitats of the central California coast. As a bonus, we have added a couple days in the Central Valley to witness the winter concentrations of raptors and waterbirds, including 1000s of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes. Join us this coming winter for our return to the central California. We'll show you an abundance of wintering and California specialty birds while visiting the best habitat oases in this major metropolitan area.

Your Host and Trail Boss, Stephen Shunk

TRIP SUMMARY

Our tour will take us from Monterey Bay to San Francisco Bay and the Central Valley to experience an abundance of bird life. The region's mild climate and amazing habitat diversity contribute to outstanding winter birding, and depending on the weather, we could easily tally over 200 bird species. We will spend 2 nights in each of 4 different locations to optimize our habitat diversity and our chance to experience the very best of central California birding.

Monterey Bay Area

We will meet at the San Jose International Airport and will immediately head south toward Monterey. Our first two nights will be spent in the Monterey Bay area, exploring the tidal estuaries, open waters, and protected harbors of this spectacular region. We will time our visit to Pt. Lobos for the extreme low tide so that we can explore some of the Pacific Coast's most productive tidepools. While wandering through gardens of anemones, urchins, and sea palms, we will enjoy 'rockpipers' galore, with good chances for Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, and Black Turnstone. We will join the egrets for their low-tide fishing ritual, and we should have excellent looks at harbor seals and California sea lions.

Monterey Harbor always hosts the charismatic California sea otter, and the open bay could produce all three scoter species, Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, numerous loons and grebes, and an abundance of gulls, including Mew and Glaucous-winged Gulls. Our final stop in the region will take us to Moss Landing, at the mouth of Elkhorn Slough, where we will sort through a plethora of waterbirds while enjoying rafts of otters loafing in the harbor. We will make a special effort to visit the world-famous Phil's Fish Market, where we will savor the seafood bounty of the Pacific Ocean.



Southern San Francisco Bay Area

Our next two nights will take us into the south Bay Area to explore the region's expansive tidal estuaries and marshlands and its oases of native upland habitats. Some of the resident birds we can expect in local parks may include California Scrub-Jay, Wrentit, California Towhee, Oak Titmouse, California Quail, and Nuttall's Woodpecker.

On our main day here, we may visit Shoreline Lake and Charleston Slough for an abundance of waterbird species, including possible Black Skimmer and American Bittern—along with the resident Burrowing Owls. One of the big highlights of the South Bay will be a visit to the Palo Alto Yacht Harbor, legendary for its local population of multiple rail species. We should easily see Clapper and Virginia Rails as well as Sora, with a possibility for the elusive Black Rail. The extreme high tide will push the rails and wintering sparrows to the tops of the marsh vegetation, and the latter may include Swamp and Nelson's Sparrows among the Song Sparrows and Marsh Wrens. If time allows, we may head into Alum Rock Park for more California specialties, such as Acorn and Nuttall's woodpeckers, Hutton's Vireo, California Thrasher, Band-tailed Pigeon, and possible Canyon Wren or Northern Pygmy-Owl.



Alameda County to Marin County

We will depart San Jose via the eastern bayshore, aiming for Arrowhead Marsh. Arrowhead supports one of the highest concentrations of Clapper Rails in the Bay Area, and the rising tide will force the rails out of hiding. We could see dozens of Clappers, as well as Sora and Virginia Rail, with a chance for the very rare Yellow Rail. The tide also forces skulking songbirds up to easy viewing heights in the marsh vegetation, and we could again see wintering Nelson's or Swamp Sparrows among the resident songbirds. If it has been raining, the flooded uplands of this regional park can also host Cackling and Greater White-fronted Geese, as well as Eurasian Wigeon and the rare Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal.



After Arrowhead, we will head to Oakland's Lake Merritt, which hosts an amazing diversity of wintering waterfowl. A few of the expected species will include Canvasback, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Greater Scaup, and the Tufted Duck is all but annual at this urban park. Ornamental trees around the lake may host Red-breasted and possible Williamson's or Red-naped Sapsuckers.

Following lunch in San Francisco, we will cross the Golden Gate Bridge and bird at Las Gallinas Sewage Ponds, then spending the next two nights in Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Point Reyes Region

We will spend this leg of the trip in the vicinity of Point Reyes National Seashore. The birding in the region is some of the best in California and will take us from pine forest to coastal estuary in search of tidal and upland specialties. We will visit Bolinas Lagoon at the high tide, where we could see many Eurasian Wigeon and possible Tufted Duck. Riparian habitats in the area could produce wintering Townsend's Warbler and Red-breasted Sapsucker, as well as Hermit Warbler, Wrentit, Hutton's Vireo, and Lesser Goldfinch.

Our first stop after departing Point Reyes will be the marshes at Suisun Bay, where we have another chance to find the elusive Black Rail. We will then course through agricultural Solano County, where we will begin our open-country segment of the tour. Fields in the region traditionally support flocks of wintering Mountain Plovers, along with Ferruginous Hawk and flocks of Horned Larks. Raptors will become abundant as we head into the Central Valley

San Joaquin Valley

The last leg of the tour will have us scouring the wetlands of the Central Valley, and specifically the habitats along the northern San Joaquin River and its tributaries. A stop at Cosumnes River—one of California’s only undammed rivers—will give us a taste of what’s to come in the next couple days, with plenty of Sandhill Cranes and waterfowl.

Our lodging will be close to the Merced and San Luis National Wildlife Refuges, which host an amazing abundance of wintering birds—from raptors to shorebirds to songbirds. We should see huge flocks of ‘white’ geese, plus cranes, plovers, Dunlin, sparrows, and much more.

We will leave the San Joaquin Valley and cross the Diablo Range westward, in time to reach San Jose airport by noon for 2 pm or later departures.

Bay Area Rarities

One of the highlights of birding in the Bay Area is the expectation of rarities that visit the region each winter. We will closely watch local bird reports and the tallies of local Christmas Bird Counts, and we may divert our route depending on our success at finding our primary target species. Just a few of the rare birds we have seen on past trips include: Emperor Goose; Brown Booby; Black Rail; Lesser Black-backed and Slaty-backed Gulls; Broad-winged Hawk; Rock Sandpiper; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Black-throated Blue Warbler; Blue Jay; Grasshopper Sparrow; and Rusty Blackbird. Rarities can actually be expected, at least partly owing to the abundance of birders in the region.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

This tour will appeal to birders at a broad range of experience levels. Birders with more advanced skills may be able to identify more of the anticipated species, while less experienced birders can be guaranteed excellent looks at many potential life-birds. Your guide, Stephen Shunk is a patient, experienced educator, and he will work diligently to help each participant learn bird identification, as well as general natural history and ecology of the region.



This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Each day will involve plenty of light walking, although the weather may force us to do some birding from the vehicle. We will occasionally walk over rugged terrain, but individual walks will be short and at a ‘birdwatcher’s pace,’ allowing each participant equal chance to view birds from all angles. We will eat breakfast at about 7:00 a.m. each morning, and we will often bird until sunset (about 5:15 p.m.), although the short winter days will allow us plenty of evening time for relaxation and a review of our day.

We will take a maximum group size of 5 participants and will travel in a comfortable minivan, allowing everyone their own window-seat. This is a non-smoking tour. We will stay in non-smoking hotels and eat in non-smoking restaurants.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Cool to mild temperatures predominate in winter in Central California, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience dense fog, pouring rain, or extended periods of sun, all in the same day. You should be prepared to be outside for short periods in rainy weather. Please pack conservatively, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and field guide. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we will have at least one spotting scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning. We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photographs.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend each night in comfortable motels. The tour fees below include lodging at both single and double occupancy. If you are traveling with a birding partner or wish to share a room with another birder, we should be able to accommodate you. If we are unable to place you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages from dinner on Friday, January 18, through breakfast on Saturday, January 26. We will eat most meals in restaurants that appeal to a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or even in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your personal preferences.



We will eat breakfast out on most mornings, though coffee and tea will be available for early risers in the hotel rooms and lobbies. We will eat lunches in local restaurants or rural cafes. Dinners will be eaten together at casual local eateries, often at dusk. In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide foods and beverages for snacks in the field. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of your birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks for your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

Your trip fee includes transportation from San Jose International Airport. Please arrive at SJC by 2:00 p.m. on Friday, January 18. We will return to San Jose airport by noon on Saturday, January 26, for 2 p.m. or later departures. If you plan to drive to San Jose, we will plan our rendezvous as the trip date approaches. If this schedule is difficult for you, let us know and we will do our best to help with your travel plans.

Our daily route will roughly follow the itinerary below. If you have additional questions about the route or certain birding spots, please contact us at your convenience.

Friday, January 18: San Jose to Monterey

Saturday, January 19: Monterey Bay Area

Sunday, January 20: Monterey Bay to San Jose

Monday, January 21: South SF Bay Area

Tuesday, January 22: San Jose to Alameda to Marin

Wednesday, January 23: Marin & Sonoma Counties

Thursday, January 24: Marin to Solano to Merced

Friday, January 25: San Joaquin Valley

Saturday, January 26: Merced to San Jose



*Acorn
Woodpecker*

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages; lodging at single or double occupancy; transportation from San Jose; facility, permit, and license fees; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guide. The fee does not include your guide's gratuity, which is never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

TOUR FEE: *\$3,870 single/\$3,270 double*
NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT: *\$100*
BALANCE DUE October 18, 2018: *\$3,770 single/\$3,170 double*

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 participants on this tour.

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 90 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 90 and 60 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 60 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future.

You may send your non-refundable \$100 deposit to the address below to hold your spot, with the balance due 90 days prior to trip date. *We look forward to seeing you in California this winter!*

CONTACT INFORMATION

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