



## **Southern California Birding June 13-21, 2009**

**Leaders:** Brian Rapoza, Bill Boeringer

**Participants:** Rick and Nancy Blanchette, Roxanne Featherly, Nancy Freedman, Troy Henderson, Bob and Alice Pace, Jeanette Rawls, Carlos Sanchez and Davis Schaffter

Our trip to southern California began and ended in Los Angeles; conveniently, all participants arrived on the same flight. After picking up our rental vans, we headed south, ticking off House Finch and Western Gull before reaching our itinerary's first destination, Sand Dune Park in Manhattan Beach, just south of Los Angeles International Airport. This is reportedly a good place to find Spotted Dove, an introduced species to California. As it turned out, Saturday afternoon was not a good time to visit. The place was packed with locals, leaving no place to park, so we moved on to our next destination, the Palos Verde Peninsula in southern Los Angeles County. Our target species there was California Gnatcatcher, a resident of now severely threatened coastal sage scrub habitat. At our first stop, White Point Nature Reserve, singing Blue Grosbeaks greeted us at the entrance. During our hike through the reserve, we also spotted White-throated Swift, Common Raven and California Towhee. Heermann's Gulls were seen across the road at Royal Palms State Beach. Temperatures were comfortably cool along the coast. We next visited the Ocean Trails area, where in sage scrub surrounding the golf course, we found several very cooperative **California Gnatcatchers**. Also seen there were Allen's Hummingbird, Black Phoebe, Bushtit and Lesser Goldfinch. We then headed north, back through traffic-choked Los Angeles to our first night's lodging in Ventura.



Santa Cruz Island in Channel Islands National Park, home to the endemic Island Scrub Jay, was our next day's destination. After a short drive to Ventura Harbor, starting point for the Island Packers ferry to Santa Cruz, we scanned the harbor, shoreline and jetties before boarding, ticking off Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorant, Bonaparte's Gull and Brewer's Blackbird. Several Sooty Shearwaters were sighted during our smooth, though chilly passage to Santa Cruz. At Scorpion Anchorage, where most passengers disembarked, we spotted several Pigeon Guillemots, a pair of Black Oystercatchers and a Common Loon. We then continued on to Prisoners Harbor, an area where scrub-jays are more common. We began our exploration of the island by joining a ranger-



led tour of an area managed by the Nature Conservancy. Along the way we found Northern Flicker, Black Phoebe, Bewick's Wren and Bullock's Oriole, but no scrub jays, so we decided to head out on our own. We returned to our starting point and birded along a road leading to Eagle Canyon, in an area managed by the National Park Service. After a steep climb to about 600 feet in elevation, we were delighted to find a pair of very cooperative **Island Scrub Jays**. Though others were later seen closer to Prisoners Harbor,

everyone agreed that the strenuous hike was well worth it. Other land birds seen while on the island included Allen's and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Pacific-slope and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Orange-crowned Warbler (*sordida* subspecies), Spotted Towhee, Rufous-crowned and Song Sparrows and House Finch. On the return trip to Ventura, we had great looks at both Sooty and Pink-footed Shearwaters, but less than satisfying looks at a pair of Xantu's Murrelets. A Western Grebe was in Ventura Harbor, as were **California Sea Lions** and a Harbor Seal. Before returning to our motel, we hiked along the beach towards the mouth of the Santa Clara River. In this very birdy area, we found a pair of "Black" Brant, plus Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Snowy Plover, Black Oystercatcher, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Caspian, Elegant, Common and Least Terns and Great-tailed Grackle.



The following day, we continued north into Santa Barbara County. Our first stop was at Nojoqui Falls County Park. In and around the park, we found **California Quail**, Red-shouldered Hawk, Acorn and Nuttall's Woodpeckers, Pacific-slope and Ash-throated Flycatcher, Hutton's Vireo, Western Scrub-Jay, Purple Martin, Violet-green Swallow, Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird, Yellow Warbler, Spotted Towhee and Dark-eyed Junco. Yellow-billed Magpies were spotted along the highway on our way to our next stop, Los Alamos County Park, but were seen by

only a few participants. The magpies, our second and final California endemic for the trip, were our target species at this park, but we failed to find any there. Birds we did see during our brief visit included Western Wood-Pewee, Wrentit and Black-headed Grosbeak. After lunch at an In-N-Out Burger in Santa Maria, we continued north to San Luis Obispo County. Our first

afternoon stop was at Oso Flaco Lake, where we quickly found a Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Other species seen included Gadwall, Cinnamon Teal, American White Pelican, Least Tern, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Bushtit, Marsh Wren, Swainson's Thrush and Wilson's Warbler. After a fuel stop (where we found our first Anna's Hummingbird), we headed to the rocky cliffs at Shell Beach, where we had up-close looks at Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants, Black Oystercatcher, Heermann's and Western Gulls (the latter with chicks) and Pigeon Guillemot. Also seen there were Harbor Seals, Sea Otters and, in the distance, breaching Humpback Whales! Our last stop before checking in at our motel in Arroyo Grande was at Lopez Lake County Park, where we found **Wild Turkey**, Western and Clark's Grebes, Bald Eagle, California Thrasher and California Towhee. A Hooded Oriole was spotted near the motel.



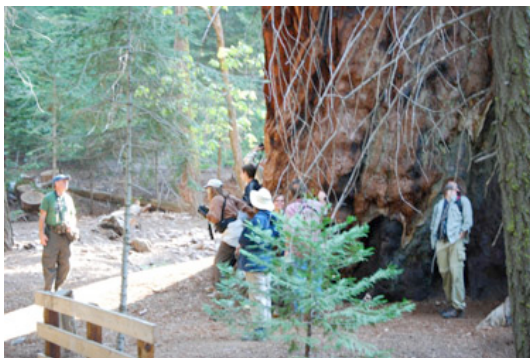
**Los Padres National Forest**, in the Sierra Madre range of northern Santa Barbara and Ventura counties and home to reintroduced California Condors, was next on our itinerary. Though we saw no condors during our visit, we found plenty of other birds. On Cottonwood Canyon Road, which we drove up to Bates Canyon Campground, the entire group had great looks at several Yellow-billed Magpies. Other birds found along this road included Western Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Warbling Vireo, Horned Lark, Blue-gray

Gnatcatcher, Phainopepla, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lark Sparrow, Bullock's Oriole and Lesser Goldfinch. We then continued east to Mt. Pinos and our first opportunity for high elevation species. Western Meadowlark and Brewer's Sparrow were found at low elevation stops. Our first Stellar's Jays were seen at our lunch stop in the town of Pine Mountain. At Mil Potrero Park, we saw Western Bluebirds and heard an Olive-sided Flycatcher. White-headed Woodpecker, Dusky Flycatcher, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted and Pigmy Nuthatch, "Audubon's" Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee and Fox Sparrow (thick-billed race) were all found during a walk through McGill Campground. At Iris Meadow, near the summit of Mt. Pinos, we added Calliope Hummingbird, Brown Creeper and Chipping Sparrow to our growing list. On our way back down the mountain, we heard, then spotted a pair of Clark's Nutcrackers. Leaving the Sierra Madres behind, we then headed north and east to the Kern River Valley, near the southern terminus of the Sierra Nevada Range. Our route led us through scenic Kern River Canyon, where we encountered several maniacal speed demons whose tailgating and constant horn honking eventually forced both of our vans to pull over and let them pass. Once safely at



our motel along the southern shore of Lake Isabella, we could once again enjoy the birds, which at the motel included Anna's Hummingbird and Say's Phoebe.

Breakfast the next morning included muffins freshly baked by the motel's gracious owner. Our first stop was at Audubon-California's Kern River Preserve. During our exploration of this bird-rich property, we found California Quail, White-tailed Kite, Black-chinned and **Anna's Hummingbirds**, Nuttall's and Hairy Woodpeckers, Willow and Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Scrub-Jay, Oak Titmouse, Bewick's and House Wrens (the latter abundant), Western Bluebird, Summer Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, Tricolored Blackbird and Lesser Goldfinch. As morning temperatures began to warm, we headed



next to the Greenhorn Mountains, bordering the western shore of Lake Isabella. On a forest road near Greenhorn Summit, we saw Red-breasted Sapsucker, White-headed Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, Townsend's Solitaire, Western Tanager, Fox Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco. Steep grades on the way down the mountain caused the brakes on Bill's van to briefly ignite! After a leisurely lunch in Kernville, allowing Bill's brakes to cool sufficiently, we drove north to **Sequoia National Monument**, in Tulare County. Along the way, Black Swifts were spotted in a canyon over the north fork of the Kern River. At Holey

#### Meadow

Campground, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hammond's Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, MacGillivray's and Wilson's

Warblers and Green-tailed Towhee were seen and Golden-crowned Kinglets were heard. At the Trail of 100 Giants, we strolled through a grove of enormous sequoias; here we found yet another Red-breasted Sapsucker, plus White-headed Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Warbler and Purple Finch. He then headed back to Lake Isabella for a quick dinner and to restock on supplies, then drove to our motel in Ridgecrest, arriving after nightfall.





Our first stop the next day was outside the town of Inyokern, at the home of Ed and Terri Middlemiss. Their property attracts a wide variety of desert birds, including elusive Le Conte's Thrashers, which they entice to their feeders using mealworms! Terri informed us that her resident thrasher had stopped singing after apparently failing to find a mate; in spite of her attempts to call the bird in, it never made an appearance. Other birds seen during our visit included California Quail, Costa's and **Black-chinned Hummingbirds**, Verdin, Phainopepla, Black-throated

Sparrow and Hooded Oriole. Next, we drove north to Chimney Peak National Backcountry Byway, in Inyo County. Shortly after we began our drive down this unpaved mountain road, we spotted a family of Mountain Quail by the side of the road! At Chimney Peak Campground, we flushed a large covey of Mountain Quail, but all scurried from sight before we could obtain adequate views. Also seen during our hike through the campground were Plumbeous Vireo, Steller's and Western Scrub-Jay, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Spotted



Towhee and Sage Sparrow. Lots of reptiles were seen in this area, including a horned toad; bushwhacking Bill also had a close encounter with a **Northern Pacific Rattlesnake!** We returned to the Lake Isabella area for lunch; some participants spotted a family of Ring-necked Pheasants before reaching the restaurant. Before our long drive through San Bernadino County to Indio, our destination for the next two nights, we made two more stops along the road between Lake Isabella and Ridgecrest. In a canyon across from Bert's Park, we found both Rock Wren and Scott's Oriole. At **Walker's Pass Campground**, we quickly located a flock of at least fifty noisy Pinyon Jays! We arrived at Indio just before sunset, discovering White-winged Dove, Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin and nesting Cactus Wrens right at the motel.



A circumnavigation of the Salton Sea was on our next day's itinerary. We headed south along the eastern shore of the sea, stopping along the highway to scope flocks of birds congregating along the shoreline. Seen here were Eared and Western Grebes, American White Pelican and California and Ring-billed Gulls, plus large numbers of flies, many of which hitchhiked with us throughout the day. Black-tailed Gnatcatchers were found in a brushy area near Wister State Waterfowl Area. Before arriving at the headquarters of Sonny Bono Salton Sea



Cliff Swallow and Great-tailed Grackle. The trail led us to the seashore as well as an adjacent impoundment teeming with Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Caspian and Common Terns and Black Skimmer. In the sea itself, we found Western and Clark's Grebes, as well as our first **Yellow-footed Gull**. At nearby Obsidian Butte, participants examined and photographed a Yellow-footed Gull at close range. At the Red Hill boat launch, a Lesser Nighthawk flew by, then perched right on the beach. On our way down to our lunch stop in Brawley, at the sea's southeastern end, we passed a marshy area that held large numbers of White-faced Ibis. After lunch we visited Cattle Call Park in Brawley, where we added Gila Woodpecker to our trip list. From there we headed south to Sunbeam Lake Park, in El Centro near the border with Mexico. Here we found the Greater White-fronted Goose and Cackling Goose that had been reported from this location. We also spotted an Inca Dove and a Monk Parakeet while at the park. We then backtracked to the southern tip of the sea, stopping first at Unit 1 of the National Wildlife Refuge. From an observation platform, we scoped distant waterfowl along the seashore, hoping for the Ross's Goose that had been reported there earlier. We also hiked a short trail along a cattail marsh and

National Wildlife Refuge, the first of many **Burrowing Owls** were spotted on dikes surrounding adjacent agricultural fields. Flocks of Long-billed Curlews, along with a few Marbled Godwits, fed in the fields while **Gull-billed Terns** hunted over canals paralleling the road. Around the headquarters building we found Gambel's Quail, Common Ground-Dove, Verdin and Abert's Towhee. On the Rock Hill Trail, which began at the headquarters, we saw Greater Roadrunner, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Western Kingbird,



heard “Yuma” Clapper Rails calling along the way. At our day’s last stop in the refuge, on nearby Poe Road, we saw two more Lesser Nighthawks as well as a Northern Harrier.

Our last full day in southern California began at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, near the western end of Joshua Tree National Park. We birded adjacent Covington Park first; the trees in this small park were filled with Vermilion Flycatchers! Also seen were Cooper’s Hawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Cassin’s Kingbird, Western Scrub-Jay, Bewick’s Wren, California Thrasher and Lesser Goldfinch. At the preserve, we hiked both the Desert Willow and Marsh Trails, where we found Willow Flycatcher, Bell’s Vireo, Bushtit, Yellow-breasted Chat and Summer Tanager. In the preserve’s parking area, a **Botta’s Pocket Gopher** was observed



scurrying in and out of its many burrows. We next headed into the San Jacinto Mountains. As we drove the winding road leading to the mountain resort village of Idyllwild, some participants spotted a Golden Eagle, perched on a distant rock. Acorn Woodpecker, Steller’s Jay, Mountain Chickadee and Western Bluebird were around the Lake Fulmar picnic area. After lunch in Idyllwild, we made a quick stop at the Idyllwild Nature Center; a flock of Band-tailed Pigeons was perched in pines surrounding the parking area. For a last attempt at high elevation species, we drove the winding dirt road up Black Mountain, adding White-headed Woodpecker, Violet-green Swallow, Pigmy and White-breasted Nuthatch, “Audubon’s” Warbler, Western Tanager and Dark-eyed Junco to our day list. Returning to Los Angeles County after dropping off participant Nancy Freedman at her brother’s house in Redlands, we made one last stop before checking in at our motel. At Anita Canyon, in the San Gabriel Mountains, we hoped to hike the trail to Sturtevant Falls to find both Black Swift and American Dipper, but a combination of difficulty finding the right trail, fading daylight and an earlier-than-expected closing time for the gate at the canyon entrance forced us to abort the hike. Swifts were flying over the parking area, but all appeared to be White-throated. We also had several Red-crowned parrots fly over; many more were seen once we reached our motel.

Before heading to Los Angeles International Airport the next morning, we made another attempt to visit Sand Dune Park in Manhattan Beach. Parking was readily available on this visit. Though we failed to find any Spotted Doves, we did see our last Western and Heermann’s Gulls, Allen’s Hummingbird and Western Scrub-Jay, plus a pair of Mitred Parakeets, before boarding our plane for the return flight to Miami.

During nine days of birding, total of 193 species of birds were tallied:

Greater White-fronted Goose

Brant

Cackling Goose

Gadwall

Mallard  
Blue-winged Teal  
Cinnamon Teal  
Lesser Scaup  
Ruddy Duck  
Ring-necked Pheasant  
Wild Turkey  
Mountain Quail  
California Quail  
Gambel's Quail  
Common Loon  
Pied-billed Grebe  
Eared Grebe  
Western Grebe  
Clark's Grebe  
Pink-footed Shearwater  
Sooty Shearwater  
American White Pelican  
Brown Pelican  
Brandt's Cormorant  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Pelagic Cormorant  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black-crowned Night-Heron  
White-faced Ibis  
Turkey Vulture  
Osprey  
White-tailed Kite  
Bald Eagle  
Northern Harrier  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Golden Eagle  
American Kestrel  
Clapper Rail (heard only)  
American Coot  
Snowy Plover  
Killdeer  
Black Oystercatcher



Black-necked Stilt  
American Avocet  
Willet  
Whimbrel  
Long-billed Curlew  
Marbled Godwit  
Bonaparte's Gull  
Heermann's Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
California Gull  
Yellow-footed Gull  
Western Gull  
Gull-billed Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Elegant Tern  
Common Tern  
Least Tern  
Black Skimmer  
Pigeon Guillemot  
Xantu's Murrelet  
Rock Pigeon  
Band-tailed Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
Inca Dove  
Monk Parakeet  
Mitre Parakeet  
Red-crowned Parrot  
Greater Roadrunner  
Burrowing Owl  
Lesser Nighthawk  
Black Swift  
White-throated Swift  
Black-chinned Hummingbird  
Anna's Hummingbird  
Costa's Hummingbird  
Calliope Hummingbird  
Allen's Hummingbird  
Acorn Woodpecker  
Gila Woodpecker  
Red-breasted Sapsucker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker

Nuttall's Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
White-headed Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Olive-sided Flycatcher (heard only)  
Western Wood-Pewee  
Willow Flycatcher  
Hammond's Flycatcher  
Dusky Flycatcher  
Pacific-slope Flycatcher  
Black Phoebe  
Say's Phoebe  
Vermilion Flycatcher  
Ash-throated Flycatcher  
Brown-crested Flycatcher  
Cassin's Kingbird  
Western Kingbird  
Loggerhead Shrike  
Bell's Vireo  
Plumbeous Vireo  
Hutton's Vireo  
Warbling Vireo  
Steller's Jay  
Western Scrub-Jay  
Island Scrub-Jay  
Pinyon Jay  
Clark's Nutcracker  
Yellow-billed Magpie  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Horned Lark  
Purple Martin  
Violet-green Swallow  
Cliff Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Mountain Chickadee  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
Oak Titmouse  
Verdin  
Bushtit  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Pigmy Nuthatch

Brown Creeper  
Cactus Wren  
Rock Wren  
Bewick's Wren  
House Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Golden-crowned Kinglet (heard only)  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
California Gnatcatcher  
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher  
Western Bluebird  
Townsend's Solitaire  
Swainson's Thrush  
American Robin  
Wrentit  
Northern Mockingbird  
California Thrasher  
European Starling  
Phainopepla  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Yellow Warbler  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Hermit Warbler  
MacGillivray's Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
Wilson's Warbler  
Yellow-breasted Chat  
Summer Tanager  
Western Tanager  
Green-tailed Towhee  
Spotted Towhee  
California Towhee  
Abert's Towhee  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Black-throated Sparrow  
Sage Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow (thick-billed)  
Song Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Black-headed Grosbeak  
Blue Grosbeak



Red-winged Blackbird  
Tricolored Blackbird  
Western Meadowlark  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Great-tailed Grackle  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Hooded Oriole  
Bullock's Oriole  
Scott's Oriole  
Purple Finch  
House Finch  
Lesser Goldfinch  
House Sparrow