

**BAJA CALIFORNIA:
AMONG THE GREAT
WHALES**

FEBRUARY 23 – MARCH 1, 2008

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TOUR REPORT
BAJA CALIFORNIA: AMONG THE GREAT WHALES
February 23–March 1, 2008

By Michael O'Brien

This year's Baja cruise was a delightful experience for everyone. The Baja region is incredibly beautiful and full of life, and we had the added good fortune of spectacular weather. It was a privilege to travel with such a professional organization as Lindblad Expeditions/National Geographic. Their staff was superb and took care of our every need. The ship, the rooms, the food, the service, and the captain were all excellent. Their incredible staff of naturalists provided expert interpretation about every aspect of the natural world, from geology and plants on up to fish, reptiles, birds, and of course, whales.

Our experiences with marine mammals on this cruise were just breathtaking: snorkeling with California sea lions, pods of bottlenose dolphins and long-beaked common dolphins riding our bow, a humpback whale exhibiting virtually every behavior imaginable, a blue whale literally playing with our ship, and those unforgettable gray whales approaching our zodiacs and allowing us to pet them!

Although everyone's primary interest in this cruise was whales, the birding was also excellent, and we were able to see all three Baja endemics along with a long list of other species. We owe a special thanks to Lindblad for organizing (and paying for!) our impromptu excursion to La Florida to look for Gray Thrasher. The outing was successful!

On our first morning we awoke in the Sea of Cortez just south of Isla Carmen. After watching our first Magnificent Frigatebirds and Yellow-footed Gulls, it wasn't long before we came upon our first whale of the trip, which just happened to be the largest animal ever to exist on earth—a blue whale! There turned out to be two there, and we stayed with them for more than half an hour. But soon we were distracted by another distant whale—this time a humpback. As we approached, we enjoyed watching this animal perform a wonderful array of behaviors: breaching, lobtailing, tail throws, pectoral slapping, and lunging. What a show!

In the afternoon, we had a nice hike on the pristine Isla Santa Catalina with its abundant cardon cacti. We found a nice assortment of birds there such as Peregrine Falcon, White-winged Dove, Gila and Ladder-backed woodpeckers, Gray and Ash-throated flycatchers, Loggerhead Shrike, Common Raven, Verdin, and Black-throated Sparrow. There were also some other fascinating creatures including the island-endemic emerald-tailed side-blotched lizard, the stunning silver-banded hairstreak, and the very local Hepburn's metalmark.

We began our next day in San Jose Channel where, in the early morning light, we had nice views of several Craveri's Murrelets as we cruised through a relatively calm stretch

of water. Our first whales of the day were four fin whales that allowed sufficiently close approach for us to see their oddly asymmetric coloration—white on the right lower jaw and dark on the left. This asymmetry is believed to be modified countershading, an adaptation for the species' tendency to roll on its right side while feeding.

After leaving the fin whales we headed south and came upon another blue whale. But unlike the ones on the previous day, this one wanted to play! For the next 25 minutes, this massive animal, which we estimated to be about 50–60 feet in length, swam right alongside our ship. It switched from one side to the other, sometimes at the bow, sometimes at the stern, and often straight underneath us! Every time it submerged it seemed to reappear on the other side of the ship as if it were toying with us. Well, we fell right into his game and found ourselves doing laps around the deck trying to get in position for his next surfacing! Nobody on board had ever had such an experience with a blue whale before, and none of us will ever forget this one.

Our next stop on this eventful day was Los Islotes, a tiny island that harbors a thriving colony of California sea lions. Some of us went snorkeling here and had the amazing experience of sharing a quiet cove with these inquisitive animals, many of which playfully swirled around us! The undersea life here was equally impressive. Highlights included tan sea star, brown urchin, blue-and-gold snapper, king angelfish, Cortez damselfish, and guineafowl puffer. Above the surface, those of us who didn't snorkel took a zodiac ride around the island and had wonderful views of the sea lions, as well as the abundant Brown and Blue-footed boobies which were perched on the cliffs.

We spent the afternoon on land exploring Isla de Espiritu Santo. Though breezy conditions kept bird activity down (and caused us to cancel our planned barbeque), we did see quite a few interesting butterflies including several Sonoran hairstreaks, a sleepy orange, and our first Howarth's white (a species we would see in numbers at Magdalena Bay).

Our third day was spent right around the tip of Baja. We began offshore not far from Los Frailes and worked our way toward Gorda Bank. This area was productive for seabirds and we had good views of Pink-footed and Black-vented shearwaters, as well as Black and Least storm-petrels. It was also productive for marine mammals. We saw at least ten humpback whales here, our first gray whales, and we were visited by a huge pod of bottlenose dolphins, probably numbering between 500 and 1,000 animals! Some of them rode our bow for a few minutes before moving on. In this area we also saw quite a few *Mobula* rays and a couple of marlin leaping high out of the water.

In the afternoon, we (along with four huge cruise ships!) docked at the bustling tourist town of Cabo San Lucas. From there we drove to Estero San Jose, which was no doubt our single best outing for birds on the trip. This estuary serves as an oasis in a parched landscape and also as a "migrant trap" due to its location near the tip of the Baja peninsula. Highlights at the estuary included a Cackling Goose (a real rarity here), three species of teal, four species of herons, three species of falcons, Common Moorhen, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Dowitcher, Common Ground-Dove, Xantus's

Hummingbird (a Baja endemic), Black Phoebe, Vermilion Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird (a local rarity), seven species of warblers including Belding's Yellowthroat (another Baja endemic), Western Tanager, Orchard (another local rarity), Scott's, and Hooded Orioles, and Blue Grosbeak. And we were there for only a little over two hours in the heat of the day! At the end of this birdy day we enjoyed margaritas on deck as we cruised past Friars Rocks at sunset. Along the way, we saw hundreds of Magnificent Frigatebirds and a single Masked Booby gathering to roost. The sunset itself was spectacular, complete with green flash!

On our next day we awoke out in the Pacific south of Isla Santa Margarita. This was another excellent stretch for seabirds and we saw many Black-vented and a few Pink-footed shearwaters, one Sooty Shearwater, one Least Storm-Petrel, at least 70 Craveri's Murrelets, and a couple of large rafts of Red Phalaropes. We were also visited for a good ten minutes by a large pod of long-beaked common dolphins, many of which rode our bow. They were fun to watch, not only from deck, but also from the lounge on the ship's "bow cam"! We reached Magdalena Bay by about 11 a.m. and would spend the remaining two-and-a-half days of the cruise there. The reason why was clear. Magdalena Bay is one of only a few "calving" areas for gray whales, and we saw up to 20 individuals per day here. We spent a good deal of time watching these whales and also had the privilege of having mother and calf approach our zodiacs and allow us to pet them! This incredible experience was clearly the highlight of the trip for most of us!

Birding was also excellent around Magdalena Bay. The shallow waters here harbored good numbers of waterfowl including Brant, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoter, and Red-breasted Merganser. Eared Grebes and Pacific Loons were also numerous. The tidal flats were teeming with shorebirds including Black-bellied, Semipalmated, and Wilson's Plovers, American Oystercatcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Sanderling, Western and Least sandpipers, Dunlin, and Short-billed Dowitcher. We had remarkably close views of many of these birds during our zodiac or kayak explorations of the mangrove channels around the northern part of the bay. These outings also produced a variety of other interesting species such as Reddish Egret, both Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned night-herons, Zone-tailed Hawk, Western Scrub-Jay, and "Mangrove" Yellow Warbler.

We made one special outing to the desert habitat of La Florida to look for Gray Thrasher, a Baja endemic. We were successful at finding the thrasher and also saw Eurasian Collared-Dove (a new outpost for the species); Costa's Hummingbird; Verdin; Cactus Wren; Lark, White-crowned, and Brewer's Sparrows; Western Meadowlark; and Scott's Oriole.

To cap off an already wonderful trip, on our next-to-last morning we saw a Red-footed Booby (a rarity here) cruising over the mangroves where our ship was anchored. All in all, it was an incredible trip!

Day 1, 23 February: Charter flight from Los Angeles to La Paz, arriving in late afternoon; boarded the M.V. *Sea Lion* just before dinner and headed north through Bahia de La Paz to the Sea of Cortez.

Day 2, 24 February: Morning in the Sea of Cortez just south of Isla Carmen (Blue and Humpback Whales); afternoon hikes and snorkeling at Isla Santa Catalina.

Day 3, 25 February: Morning at San Jose Channel (Fin Whales, friendly Blue Whale!) and snorkeling and zodiac cruises at Los Islotes (California Sea Lions); afternoon at south end of Isla de Espiritu Santo (snorkeling, kayaking, walks; too windy for barbeque).

Day 4, 26 February: Morning off the tip of Baja from Los Frailes to Gorda Bank; afternoon docked at Cabo San Lucas; drive to Estero San Jose (many birds!); back on board for sunset off Friars Rocks (green flash and margaritas!).

Day 5, 27 February: Morning in the Pacific south of Isla Santa Margarita, cruising northward (numerous seabirds); entered Magdalena Bay at La Entrada by 11 am; afternoon walk on Magdalena Island (Sand Dollar Beach) and cruise northward through Magdalena Bay and Hull Canal.

Day 6, 28 February: All day anchored at north end of Magdalena Bay by Boca de Soledad; zodiac cruises to view (and pet!) Gray Whales; hikes on Magdalena Island; afternoon drive from Puerto Adolfo Lopez Manteos to near La Florida (Gray Thrasher).

Day 7, 29 February: All day in Magdalena Bay; morning zodiac cruises for Gray Whales near Devil's Bend; afternoon kayak and zodiac cruises at El Barril mangroves.

Day 8, 1 March: Early morning bus ride from San Carlos to La Paz, followed by charter flight to Los Angeles.

KEY TO SPECIES LISTS:

Estero=Estero San José

MB=Magdalena Bay

Regional specialties are underlined

Regional rarities are in ALL CAPS

Birds [in brackets] were seen by leaders only

BIRDS

ACKLING GOOSE – one of the Aleutian race (*B. h. leucopareia*) at Estero; apparently this bird had been present at least since January

Brant – hundreds (perhaps over 1000) in MB; these were the usual Pacific coast “Black” Brant (*B. b. nigricans*)

Blue-winged Teal – numerous at Estero

Cinnamon Teal – numerous at Estero

Green-winged Teal – numerous at Estero

Redhead – large rafts of several hundred in MB

Lesser Scaup – about 20 among Redheads in MB

Surf Scoter – one small flock at MB

Red-breasted Merganser – a few at MB

Pacific Loon – small numbers at MB

Common Loon – one at MB (but it was difficult to focus on because we were petting Gray Whales at the time!)

Eared Grebe – seen almost daily; especially abundant at San José Channel and MB

Pink-footed Shearwater – seen on several days including 10+ at Gorda Bank

Sooty Shearwater – one off La Entrada

Black-vented Shearwater – a few in Sea of Cortez; about 165 off Isla Santa Margarita; this species is an endemic breeder off the coast of Baja, though non-breeders disperse widely.

Black Storm-Petrel – 20 near Gorda Bank

Least Storm-Petrel – six near Gorda Bank; one off Isla Santa Margarita; another endemic breeder off the Baja coast, dispersing irregularly north to U.S. waters in fall.

Masked Booby – one adult at Friars Rocks

RED-FOOTED BOOBY – one subadult brown morph at MB near Boca de Soledad; this species is apparently quite rare in Baja, at least in winter

Blue-footed Booby – numerous in Sea of Cortez, especially at Los Islotes where we had close views of the nesting colony; at least a few fuzzy chicks were in evidence there

Brown Booby – numerous in Sea of Cortez; best views were at Los Islotes where many were perched on the rocks though apparently they are not known to nest there

American White Pelican – four in MB by Boca de Soledad

Brown Pelican – abundant throughout

Brandt's Cormorant – scattered in small numbers except for 4000+ in MB near La Entrada

Neotropic Cormorant – a few in MB mixed with the Double-crested

Double-crested Cormorant – hundreds nesting at MB; also numerous in Sea of Cortez

Magnificent Frigatebird – common everywhere, especially in Sea of Cortez; we watched many hundreds gathering to roost in the evening at Friars Rocks

Great Blue Heron – common at MB; a few elsewhere including one sitting on a nest on the cliffs at Los Islotes

Great Egret – numerous at Estero and MB

Snowy Egret – numerous at Estero; just a few at MB

Little Blue Heron – one at MB

Tricolored Heron – one at Estero; fairly common at MB

Reddish Egret – fairly common at MB

Green Heron – a few in the mangroves at MB

Black-crowned Night-Heron – a few at MB

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – a few at MB

White Ibis – a few at MB

Turkey Vulture – seen daily; these birds seem to occupy just about every large offshore island as well as the mainland

Osprey – very numerous around Cabo San Lucas and MB; a few elsewhere

Bald Eagle – three sightings of adults at MB; there seems to be a tiny resident population here

Northern Harrier – one at Isla Santa Catalina; several around MB

Sharp-shinned Hawk – one at Estero

Harris's Hawk – a few seen on the drive from San Carlos to La Paz

Zone-tailed Hawk – one seen at the El Barril mangroves in MB

Red-tailed Hawk – one at Isla de Espiritu Santo; several around Cabo San Lucas and on the drive from San Carlos to La Paz

Crested Caracara – several around MB and on the drive from San Carlos to La Paz

American Kestrel – numerous around Cabo San Lucas and Estero; a few elsewhere

Merlin – one at Estero and another at MB

Peregrine Falcon – about 6 at scattered locations; many of these were presumably of the continental subspecies, *P. f. anatum*, which breeds in Baja

Sora – one was heard at Estero

Common Moorhen – numerous at Estero
Black-bellied Plover – common at MB
Wilson's Plover – a few around MB
Semipalmated Plover – several at MB
Killdeer – one at Estero
American Oystercatcher – two at Isla Santa Catalina; several around MB
Black-necked Stilt – about 20 at Estero
Spotted Sandpiper – a few at scattered locations
Wandering Tattler – Wally & Karen saw one at Los Islotes
Greater Yellowlegs – about 20 among the mangroves at MB
Willet – common at MB; all of these were of the interior subspecies, “Western Willet” (*T. s. inornata*), which is a likely future “split” from the nominate coastal subspecies (“Eastern Willet”)
Whimbrel – common at MB
Long-billed Curlew – numerous at MB
Marbled Godwit – common at MB
Sanderling – a few at MB
Western Sandpiper – common at MB
Least Sandpiper – a few at MB
Dunlin – two at MB
Short-billed Dowitcher – numerous at MB
Long-billed Dowitcher – about 15 at Estero
Red Phalarope – about 300 in two large flocks at dawn southwest of Isla Santa Margarita were presumably this species (the similar Red-necked Phalarope is not known to winter here)
Laughing Gull – Wally saw one at Cabo San Lucas
Heerman's Gull – fairly common in Sea of Cortez
Ring-billed Gull – one at MB at Puerto Adolfo Lopez Mateos
California Gull – relatively scarce in Sea of Cortez but abundant from Gorda Bank to MB
Herring Gull – fairly common at MB
Yellow-footed Gull – abundant in Sea of Cortez south at least to Bahia de La Paz; one first year bird at MB near La Entrada was out of range though apparently they are increasing on the Pacific side of the peninsula; This species is virtually confined to the Sea of Cortez though a few wander out into the Pacific and others disperse northward in late summer to the Salton Sea in California.
Western Gull – abundant around MB
Glaucous-winged Gull – one first year bird at MB
Caspian Tern – several at MB
Forster's Tern – one at MB
Royal Tern – seen almost daily; most numerous at MB
Pomarine Jaeger – two seen south of Isla Carmen
Parasitic Jaeger – two at MB near La Entrada
[LONG-TAILED JAEGER – one seen (leader only) south of Isla Carmen; In recent years, a few of these birds have been seen in winter in the Sea of Cortez. Historically they are strictly migrants in this region. The reason for this change is unclear.]
Craveri's Murrelet – This species is an endemic breeder on islands in the Sea of Cortez and off the Baja coast, some dispersing northward to U.S. waters in fall. There is quite possibly no better way to see this species than on this cruise. We saw a few in the Sea of Cortez near Isla Carmen and Isla San Jose and about 70 off Isla Santa Margarita (thanks to calm waters). The waters were so calm off Isla Santa Margarita that we even got to hear these birds calling – a short descending trill, like shuffling a deck of cards but with a musical ring. It was delightful just seeing these birds but a rare treat to also hear them!
Rock Pigeon – around Cabo San Lucas

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE – four at Puerto Adolfo Lopez Mateos; Unknown in Mexico just a decade ago, this species is now well established all along the U.S. border and through about the northern half of the Baja peninsula with scattered sightings south of there. It seems only a matter of time before they are common throughout the Baja peninsula.

White-winged Dove – a few at Isla Santa Catalina; numerous at Estero

Mourning Dove – two at Puerto Adolfo Lopez Mateos

Common Ground-Dove – several at Estero

Greater Roadrunner – a few got to see one on the drive from San Carlos to La Paz

Xantus's Hummingbird – two at Estero; a Baja endemic

Costa's Hummingbird – one at Estero; one at La Florida

Belted Kingfisher – a few at MB

Gila Woodpecker – in all desert habitats such as at Isla Santa Catalina and Estero

Ladder-backed Woodpecker – one at Isla Santa Catalina

Gilded Flicker – singles at Estero and La Florida

Gray Flycatcher – singles at Isla Santa Catalina and Isla de Espiritu Santo

Black Phoebe – two at Estero

Vermilion Flycatcher – two at Estero and one on Magdalena Island near Boca de Soledad

Ash-throated Flycatcher – ISJ, ES

TROPICAL KINGBIRD – one at Estero; this species has recently colonized the area and may nest there

Loggerhead Shrike – about six on Isla Santa Catalina; a few elsewhere

Western Scrub-Jay – a few in the mangroves at MB

Common Raven – saw them at a few sites with cliffs including Isla Santa Catalina, Isla de Espiritu Santo, and La Entrada

Horned Lark – a few on Magdalena Island; these are of the endemic subspecies, *E. a. magdalenae*

[**Tree Swallow** – a few distant birds at MB – leader only]

Violet-green Swallow – a few each at Los Islitos, Isla de Espiritu Santo, and Cabo San Lucas

[**Barn Swallow** – one at Estero – leader only]

Verdin – several at Isla Santa Catalina; a couple others at Estero and La Florida

Cactus Wren – seen at Estero and La Florida

Canyon Wren – one heard-only at Los Islitos, an interesting location for this species

[**Marsh Wren** – one heard by leader-only at Estero]

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – one at Isla Santa Catalina

Northern Mockingbird – seen almost daily, wherever we landed on shore

Gray Thrasher – four birds at La Florida; this was a special excursion specifically to look for this Baja endemic – a very successful outing!

European Starling – well established around Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Adolfo Lopez Manteos, Ciudad Constitucion, and La Paz; this is apparently a recent range extension

Phainopepla – quick looks by a few of us on the drive from San Carlos to La Paz

Orange-crowned Warbler – good numbers at Estero, a few at MB, and one at the airport in La Paz; At least the La Paz bird was of the brighter Pacific Coast subspecies, *V. s. lutescens*. Some others appeared to be of the duller Rocky Mountain subspecies, *orestra*, though many are difficult to distinguish by mid-winter.

“**Northern**” **Yellow Warbler** – good numbers at Estero; these are migrants from the north (*aestiva* group)

“**Mangrove**” **Yellow Warbler** – nice looks in the mangroves at MB; these year-round residents are currently classified as a subspecies of Yellow Warbler (*erithachorides* group) but are a likely future “split”; the local subspecies here is *D. p. [e.] castaneiceps*.

Yellow-rumped Warbler – numerous at Estero; these were of the Rocky Mountain subspecies (*D. c. auduboni* = "Audubon's Warbler"); the nominate northern subspecies (*D. c. coronata* = "Myrtle Warbler") also occurs sparingly in Baja

Northern Waterthrush – one heard-only at Estero

Common Yellowthroat – numerous at Estero

Belding's Yellowthroat – several offering nice views at Estero; this is another Baja endemic

Wilson's Warbler – several at Estero

Western Tanager – several at Estero

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER – one photographed by Mary Helsaple at Estero; This is another recent immigrant to Baja – apparently becoming established. It's difficult to visualize these little birds flying across the Sea of Cortez to arrive here!

Green-tailed Towhee – one bid us farewell at the airport in La Paz

Brewer's Sparrow – several at La Florida

Lark Sparrow – several at La Florida

Black-throated Sparrow – several at Isla Santa Catalina and two at La Florida

Savannah Sparrow – seen by several members of our group on Magdalena Island; it is not clear whether these birds were migrants from the north or members of the endemic subspecies, *P. s. magdalenae* (part of the "Large-billed Sparrow" group – a possible future "split").

Lincoln's Sparrow – a couple heard-only at Estero

White-crowned Sparrow – several each at Estero and La Florida

Northern Cardinal – two at Estero

Blue Grosbeak – two at Estero

Varied Bunting – one female at Estero

Western Meadowlark – two at La Florida

ORCHARD ORIOLE – one adult male at Estero; a rare but regular vagrant here

Hooded Oriole – several at Estero

Scott's Oriole – brief views of one at Estero; excellent views of one at La Florida (perched on an Osprey nest!)

House Finch – numerous at Cabo San Lucas/Estero; a few also at Isla Santa Catalina and Puerto Adolfo Lopez Mateos

House Sparrow – several at Cabo San Lucas and La Paz

MAMMALS

Black Jackrabbit (*Lepus insularis*) – great looks at this beautiful island endemic at Isla de Espiritu Santo

Black-tailed Jackrabbit – a few on Magdalena Island

Espiritu Santo Island Antelope-Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus insularis*) – another island endemic seen at Isla de Espiritu Santo

Coyote – surprisingly numerous around MB; they apparently like tennis shoes!

California Sea Lion – the snorkelers had spectacular encounters with these animals at the big Los Islitos colony; smaller numbers were also seen at Friars Rocks and offshore near La Entrada

Fin Whale – close views of four animals near San Jose Channel

Blue Whale – We saw two on our first morning near Isla Carmen but had a spectacular encounter with one the next day near San Jose Channel. The latter animal, which we estimated to be between 50 and 60 feet in length, spent at least 25 minutes circling (and going under!) our ship. It clearly seemed to be playing with us, appearing on one side, then the other. He had us all doing laps around the ship! It was the closest encounter with a Blue Whale that anyone on board had ever had, including Lindblad's veteran naturalists.

Bryde's Whale – (pronounced “broo-dus”) A few of us had brief views of this uncommon and elusive animal as we were steaming south toward Los Islitos – it's small size, tall falcate dorsal fin (which appeared as soon as it surfaced), and high arching dolphin-like swimming style identified it.

Humpback Whale – one south of Isla Carmen on our first morning and at least ten two days later near Gorda Bank. The one near Isla Carmen exhibited just about every behavior imaginable from a Humpback including breaching, lobtailing, tail throws, pectoral slapping, and lunging – just spectacular! Just as memorable was our last Humpback of the trip, a young one off Friars Rocks which breached more than thirty times right off the bow in the fading light after sunset.

Gray Whale – We saw our first ones near Gorda Bank and a few others on our cruise north off Isla Santa Margarita. But the real show was in Magdalena Bay where we saw up to 20 per day in the tranquil shallow waters near Boca de Soledad. Here, we had the life-altering experience of having a mother and calf approach our zodiacs and allow us to pet them! Despite hearing about this unique and relatively recent behavior, it still seems unimaginable. Perhaps the mother Gray Whales have determined these small boats to be “safe toys” for their babies to play with. For just about everyone in our group, this ranked as the top experience of the cruise (though a few “salty” veterans who had already petted a Gray Whale ranked the Blue Whale experience at the top – quite understandably!).

Long-beaked Common Dolphin – We encountered several large pods (300-400+) of these striking animals as we headed north off Isla Santa Margarita. One playful group rode our bow for ten minutes. They were actually audible, making high-pitched chattering whistles as they “surfed” effortlessly below the surface, sometimes leaping out of the water and sometimes swimming upside down! For those inside the lounge, it was spectacular watching these animals from the ships “bow cam”. Another pod of a few hundred Common Dolphins seen on our first morning near Isla Carmen were either this species or their very similar Short-beaked cousin (photos were inconclusive – these two species are *very* similar as well as variable).

Pacific White-sided Dolphin – we saw a small pod of these beautiful animals as we approached La Entrada

Common Bottlenose Dolphin – This was the one marine mammal species that we saw every day, including in the shallows of Magdalena Bay. They were usually in small groups but we saw one huge pod of 500-1000 animals off Gorda Bank – they rode our bow for a few minutes before moving on.

REPTILES

Green Turtle – one was seen off Isla Margarita

Spiny-tailed Iguana – one at Estero

Common Side-blotched Lizard – seen at Isla de Espiritu Santo and Magdalena Island; this is the widespread species that occurs north through much of the western United States

Santa Catalina Island (Emerald-tailed) Side-blotched Lizard (*U. squamata*) – We saw this island endemic at Isla Santa Catalina. There are eight different island-endemic side-blotched lizards in Baja! An evolutionary biologist could spend a lifetime in this region focusing just on herpetology!

BUTTERFLIES

Pipevine Swallowtail – several at Estero

Great Southern White – one at the airport in La Paz

Howarth's White – quite a few of these around MB; also at Isla de Espiritu Santo

Southern Dogface – one at Isla de Espiritu Santo

Cloudless Sulphur – Estero and La Paz
Large Orange Sulphur – Estero and La Paz
Mexican Yellow – Estero
Dainty Sulphur – one at La Florida
Sleepy Orange – one at Isla de Espiritu Santo (it perched for nice scope views)
Sonoran Hairstreak – several at Isla de Espiritu Santo
Silver-banded Hairstreak – one at Isla Santa Catalina and several at Isla de Espiritu Santo
Ceraunus Blue – one at Isla de Espiritu Santo (another one that perched for good scope views)
Marine Blue – one at Estero
Hepburn's Metalmark – one at Isla Santa Catalina; this is a very isolated population – the bulk of the population occurs in adjacent Sonora and Chihuahua, but not on the Baja mainland
American Snout – one at Isla Santa Catalina
Mexican Fritillary – one at Estero
Gulf Fritillary – quite a few locations including Estero and MB
White Peacock – one at Estero
Blackened Bluewing – singles at Isla Santa Catalina and at the La Paz airport; though normally found in woodlands, this species is highly migratory and may show up in odd places; females of the Baja subspecies (*M. c. streckeri*) are considerably darker than those in mainland Mexico
Queen – seen at several locations including Estero, MB, and offshore over the Sea of Cortez
Dorantes Longtail – one at Estero
Long-tailed Skipper – one at the airport in La Paz
Fiery Skipper – one at the airport in La Paz

MISC. OTHER CRITTERS

Mobula ray – These are smaller relatives of the more familiar *Manta* rays. We saw numerous individuals leaping high out of the water near Gorda Bank. There are several different species of *Mobula* rays in the Baja region but distinguishing them in the field is generally not possible.
Ocean Sunfish – we saw one individual of this bizarre creature floating at the surface (as they do) near La Entrada