

# CALIFORNIA SPECIALTIES

APRIL 24 – MAY 3, 2010

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*Southern California has long been regarded as one of the great birding areas in the country. This is due to a wide variety of habitats including deserts, mountains, shoreline, chaparral, grasslands, and pelagic—all regions visited by the tour. It's no accident that some of the highest Christmas Count and Big Day lists come from this region. As a further attraction, California is characterized by a high degree of endemism. Where else in the country would one go to look for Xantus's Murrelet, Allen's Hummingbird, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Island Scrub-Jay, Yellow-billed Magpie, California Gnatcatcher, California Thrasher, California Towhee, and the recently split Oak Titmouse? This tour is planned in a manner to provide maximum opportunity to see all these specialties. Mountain Quail, White-headed Woodpecker, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and Le Conte's Thrasher are best seen here, and we will attempt to find any wintering Yellow-footed Gulls, which may be lingering at the Salton Sea.*

*Our route takes us from coastal San Diego through the Anza-Borrego Desert, to the Salton Sea, to interior plains and mountains, and back to the coast at Santa Barbara, culminating in a boat trip to Santa Cruz Island for Island Scrub-Jay and pelagic birds along the way. The San Diego segment will focus on the California Gnatcatcher and associated chaparral birds such as California Thrasher and "Bell's" Sage Sparrow, as well as Western and Clark's grebes at an adjacent lake. Birding the county's interior may yield Gray Vireo, Black-chinned Sparrow and—we hope—Lawrence's Goldfinch.*

*We'll travel to the Salton Sea via the starkly beautiful Anza-Borrego Desert, named after an early Spanish explorer and home to the rare desert bighorn sheep, which inhabit its rugged mountains. At over 600,000 acres, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is the largest state park in the forty-eight contiguous states. Species we may encounter in this area include Greater Roadrunner, White-throated Swift, Costa's Hummingbird, Verdin, Rock and Canyon wrens, Phainopepla, and western migrants in a desert oasis. We also have a chance to see the enigmatic Lawrence's Goldfinch in our travel this day.*

*An entire day will be devoted to birding the southern end of the Salton Sea, a unique body of water in a below-sea-level desert sink, whose only outlet is through evaporation. For this reason, its water is much saltier than the ocean and supports only three or four species of fish. Due to its unlikely location in the middle of a desert, however, the sea functions as a natural magnet for gulls and shorebirds. The waterbird spectacle here can be truly remarkable! Sometimes, a few Yellow-footed Gulls stay to overwinter and we will attempt to find one. These gulls are rare in the Salton Sea at this time of year, but this is the only place outside Mexico where they may be found. The desert scrub in the region holds Gambel's Quail, Burrowing Owl, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Crissal*

*Thrasher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Abert's Towhee, all of which we will endeavor to see first thing in the morning.*

*In the southwest corner of the San Joaquin Valley, our base in Taft provides close access to the habitat of the virtually mythical Le Conte's Thrasher. We'll try for this very local, difficult species in a location considered the best in California for seeing this phantom bird. Following our morning thrasher quest, we will travel well up the slope on nearby Mount Pinos, whose summit exceeds 8,000 feet in altitude. The old-growth Jeffrey pine forests here are a delight, and birding in the cool, higher elevations should produce encounters with Band-tailed Pigeon, White-headed Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Green-tailed Towhee, the thick-billed stephensi race of Fox Sparrow (a likely future split candidate), and Cassin's Finch. Mountain Quail, while difficult, are resident here.*

*The route through Cuyama Valley to Shell Beach will take us through classic oak savanna and chaparral habitats. Both Tricolored Blackbird and Lawrence's Goldfinch are possible—although these species are irruptive and unpredictable, with many occurring in some years while being totally absent in others.*

*Our motel in Shell Beach sits atop a sea cliff complete with nearby Peregrine Falcon eyrie and nesting Pelagic Cormorants and Pigeon Guillemots. A morning watching Brandt's and Pelagic cormorants, Pigeon Guillemots, gulls and other shorebirds always proves interesting. Moving downcoast toward Santa Barbara, we'll stop at a variety of good birding venues, looking for rocky shorebirds and woodland/savanna species including the Yellow-billed Magpie.*

*The last birding day of the tour combines the romance (although, hopefully, not the pain) of a pelagic trip with the opportunity to find one of North America's most restricted endemics, the Island Scrub-Jay of Santa Cruz Island. After leaving Ventura Harbor, we'll watch for both Sooty and Pink-footed shearwaters. Flocks of the beautiful Pacific Loon fly swiftly up-channel on their way to their tundra breeding sites. We may be fortunate and see Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers as well. Nearing the island we hope to encounter Xantus's Murrelet, which breeds on the Channel Islands. The island itself should produce endemic races of Allen's Hummingbird (non-migratory), Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Song Sparrow, as well as the occasionally difficult Island Scrub- Jay.*

**April 24, Day 1: Arrival in San Diego.** After arriving in San Diego, participants will meet in the lobby of the Mission Valley Resort at 6:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Mission Valley Resort, San Diego

**April 25, Day 2: Mission Trails Regional Park, San Elijo Lagoon and San Diego Coast.** Our morning will begin at Mission Trails Regional Park for California Gnatcatcher, Bell's Vireo and hopefully many migrant species that move through this canyon. We will then drive 30 minutes north to San Elijo Lagoon for a second try (if needed) at California Gnatcatcher and other local specialties such as Cassin's Kingbird, California Thrasher, Wrentit, and Bell's Sage Sparrow. After lunch we will enjoy some coastal San Diego birding.

NIGHT: Mission Valley Resort, San Diego

**April 26, Day 3: Inland Oak Savannas; Anza-Borrego Desert.** Today begins with a drive to inland San Diego County to look for Gray Vireo, Black-chinned Sparrow, Oak Titmouse, and Bullock's Oriole. We'll try for Lawrence's Goldfinch en route to Anza-Borrego Desert, where we will look for such specialties as Long-eared

Owl, Costa's Hummingbird, Rock and Canyon wrens, Scott's Oriole and Black-throated Sparrow. We will then drive to Brawley as our base for the Salton Sea.

NIGHT: Brawley Inn, Brawley

**April 27, Day 4: Salton Sea.** Although early, we'll try for any lingering wintering Yellow-footed Gulls, Burrowing Owl, Crissal Thrasher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Abert's Towhee, and the thousands of waders and gulls found this time of year. You will be amazed at the spectacle.

NIGHT: Brawley Inn, Brawley

**April 28, Day 5: Brawley to Salton City to Big Morongo.** Today we will check any areas around the south end of the Salton Sea that were missed on the previous day and work our way up to Salton City. There are many locations to check here, especially for Yellow-footed Gulls, which often has one individual somewhere in this vast shoreline. If time permits, we will make it to Big Morongo by late afternoon and have a chance to check this wonderful desert oasis for migrating and resident birds. The caretaker has a number of bird feeders and chairs that we can relax in while watching the birds that come to feed.

NIGHT: Best Western Yucca Valley Hotel & Suites, Yucca Valley

**April 29, Day 6: Big Morongo to Taft, Kern County.** We will get an early start today at Big Morongo, which will permit us to walk some of the trails as well as check the feeders again. Then we will start the drive to Taft in Kern County. If we arrive early enough, we will search the nearby desert sagebrush vegetation for the elusive and shy Le Conte's Thrasher and also look for the inland or *canescens* race of Sage Sparrow.

NIGHT: Holland Inn & Suites, Taft

**April 30, Day 7: Maricopa and Mount Pinos.** The day will start early with a search for Le Conte's Thrasher and the *canescens* race of Sage Sparrow if we did not see them the previous evening. At nearby Mt. Pinos we'll look for White-headed Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee, the *stephensi* race of Fox Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, and possibly, Mountain Quail. California Condors are occasionally being seen here again so we will spend some time at two special lookout spots before heading across the Cayuma Valley to our final destination at the fancy Pismo Beach hotel where you will have balcony views of the Pacific. Last time, several participants watched dolphins cavorting from their balconies.

NIGHT: Best Western Shore Cliff Lodge, Pismo Beach

**May 1, Day 8: Savannah, Chaparral, and Sea Cliffs.** Today we'll travel through country known for the California endemic, Yellow-billed Magpie. Traveling down the coast en route to Santa Barbara, we will bird coastal southern San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties for western migrants and breeding species including Allen's Hummingbird, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Wrentit, California Thrasher, Hutton's Vireo and Spotted Towhee. We will stop at a rocky coastal cliff for Black Oystercatcher and the hope of migrants like Wandering Tattler, Surfbird and Black Turnstone that have mostly headed north to their breeding grounds. Pigeon Guillemots nest here in large numbers. Depending on our luck, we may have time to visit a few other locations on our way to Santa Barbara.

NIGHT: Best Western Pepper Tree Inn, Santa Barbara

**May 2, Day 9: Pelagic Trip; Santa Cruz Island.** Our catamaran departs at 8:00 a.m. for Santa Cruz Island via Ventura Harbor. Pelagic birding to and from the island should produce Pacific Loon in breeding plumage, Sooty and Pink-footed shearwater, Pomarine and Parasitic jaeger, and a good chance of Xantus's Murrelet. Sometimes whales are seen on our way to and/or back from the island. Once we dock at Prisoner's Harbor, we will look for

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Island Scrub-Jay along with endemic subspecies of Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Song Sparrow.

NIGHT: Best Western Pepper Tree Inn, Santa Barbara

**May 3, Day 10: Departure for Home.** Participants may plan to depart for home from Santa Barbara Airport any time today.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 7 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** Jeri Langham

**Jeri M. Langham** has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University, and after 38 years as a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento, retired in May 2008. He received the first Outstanding Teacher Award from the newly formed College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1997; the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Science Educational Equity and Minority Organization of Science Students organizations in 2005; and his University's third annual Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in 2006. Jeri has ardently birded all over North America, as well as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Peru, Argentina, Kenya, Borneo, and Australia. Born and raised in Venezuela, he speaks fluent Spanish. Known for his enthusiasm and boundless energy, Jeri thoroughly enjoys searching for birds and sharing them with others. His passion for teaching and his natural teaching abilities soon become apparent as his tour participants enjoy learning more about the biological world around them. Jeri is a former member of the Bausch and Lomb Birding Council and the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$2,495** per person in double occupancy from San Diego (tour ends in Santa Barbara). This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 9, all lodging for 9 nights during the tour, ground/boat transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include transportation from your home to our hotel in San Diego, and from the hotel in Santa Barbara to your home, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$500**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:  
120 days or more before departure date

Your refund will be:  
Your deposit minus \$150.

Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE:** A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** *Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.* This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**TRANSPORTATION AND BAGGAGE:** As space in the vehicle will be tight, we ask that you limit your luggage to one medium suitcase and a carry-on bag. As a precaution, we urge you to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, medication, toiletries, walking shoes and other essentials in your carry-on bag for your airline flight.

We will log approximately 1400 miles in the van during the tour. Although we will stop to bird many times, some days will be predominantly spent in transit.

**CLIMATE:** The weather in southern California is generally quite pleasant at this season. Daytime highs should range from the upper 50s to the low 80s, with 100 degrees possible in the desert. Nighttime lows should be in the 40s. Rain is not normally expected at this season; however, rain gear could prove useful. Altitudinal changes will vary from sea level to over 8,000 feet elevation. Most walks on this tour will be over short distances (a mile or less) and will be conducted at a moderate to leisurely pace. Some days may have a short, optional after-dinner trip. To take advantage of the best time for bird activity, we will usually begin birding during the dawn hours.

**CLOTHING:** Basic field clothing is appropriate for this tour. **PLEASE AVOID BRIGHT COLORS SUCH AS WHITE, YELLOW, ORANGE, PINK, RED and BABY BLUE** on clothes you will wear while we are birding. These colors are fine when not birding. A combination of long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts may be

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useful, given the widely varying temperatures. Cool mornings will call for sweaters, light jackets, or possibly a heavier jacket if temperatures dip low enough. A warm jacket, gloves, and a warm hat (all water-proof) are recommended for the pelagic trip and for potentially cold mornings. Be sure to have a comfortable pair of light, ankle-high hiking boots for occasional rocky terrain and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Casual attire will be acceptable for all restaurants in which we dine. You may wish to bring a swim suit.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. If you have a scope and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. It will be useful when we scan mudflats and coastlines.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Mosquitoes and other biting insects may be a problem, but it is unlikely. If you wish to take precautions, we suggest one bottle of Cutters and a pump-spray bottle of OFF or any other product with 100% DEET. There are no chiggers to worry about.

**OTHER ITEMS:** Other items should include a flashlight or headlamp, sunglasses, lip ointment, gloves (for chilly mornings and the pelagic trip), tissue paper, alarm clock, and ear plugs (for unlikely noisy nights). For the pelagic trip, bring the motion sickness remedy of your choice, if applicable.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

### ***Field Guides***

Burt, William H. and Richard Grossheider. *A Field Guide to the Mammals*. 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

Farrand, John Jr. *The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding*. Volumes 1, 2 and 3. New York: Chanticleer Press, Inc., 1983.

Floyd, Ted. *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *Butterflies Through Binoculars: The West: A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Western North*

*America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Jameson, E.W. Jr. and H.J. Peeters. *California Mammals*. California Natural History Guide Series. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Birds of North America (Kaufman Focus Guides)*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

National Geographic Society. *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006.

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer, editors. *Field Guide to the Birds of Western North America*. 1st Edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008.

Peterson, Roger T. *Peterson Field Guide to birds of North America*. 1st Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009.

Pough, Richard H. *Audubon Western Bird Guide*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975. Contains beautifully written, concise compilations of the habits of western specialties.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Stebbins, Robert C. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

### ***General Reading & Reference***

Garrett, Kimball and Jon Dunn. *Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution*. Los Angeles: Artisan Press, 1981.

Schram, Brad. *A Birder's Guide to Southern California*. 5th Edition. Colorado Springs: ABA Press, 2007.

Small, Arnold. *California Birds: Their Status and Distribution*. Vista, CA: Ibis Publishing, 1994.

Stallcup, Rich. *Ocean Birds of the Nearshore Pacific*. Stinson Beach, CA: Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 1990.

Zimmer, Kevin J. *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its Agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused

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portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 15, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.