

CALIFORNIA SPECIALTIES

APRIL 21 – 29, 2008

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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' 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 LeConte'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 deserts, including 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 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! We'll search for any Yellow-footed Gulls lingering here from the winter. 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 Maricopa provides close access to the habitat of the virtually mythical LeConte'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 Tri-colored 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 among 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 shore birds 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' Murrelet, which breeds on the Channel Islands. The island itself should produce endemic races of Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Song Sparrow, as well as the occasionally difficult Island Scrub Jay.

April 21, 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 22, Day 2: Lake Hodges Area, San Diego Coast. We'll drive 30 minutes north to Lake Hodges for California Gnatcatcher and other local specialties such as White-tailed Kite, White-throated Swift, Cassin's Kingbird, California Thrasher, and Sage Sparrow. We will then enjoy some coastal San Diego birding.

NIGHT: Mission Valley Resort, San Diego

April 23, 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 a base for the Salton Sea.

NIGHT: Brawley Inn, Brawley

April 24, Day 4: Salton Sea. Although early, we'll try for any lingering wintering Yellow-footed Gulls and pursue Fulvous Whistling Duck, Burrowing Owl, Crissal Thrasher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Abert's Towhee, and the thousands of waders and gulls found this time of year.

NIGHT: Brawley Inn, Brawley

April 25, Day 5: Travel Day to Maricopa, Kern County. We will drive north with a stop in the Morongo Valley, a desert oasis for migrant birding.

NIGHT: Motel 8, Maricopa

April 26, Day 6: Maricopa and Mount Pinos. The day will start early with a search for LeConte's Thrasher. At nearby Mt. Pinos we'll look for White-headed Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee, *stephensi* Fox Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, and the possible Mountain Quail. California Condors are occasionally being seen here again.

NIGHT: Best Western Shore Cliff Lodge

April 27, Day 7: 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'll bird coastal southern San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara county 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'll stop at a rocky coastal cliff for Black Oystercatcher and the hope of migrants like Wandering Tattler, Surfbird and Black Turnstone. Pigeon Guillemots nest here in large numbers. We'll then continue on to Santa Barbara.

NIGHT: Best Western Pepper Tree Inn, Santa Barbara

April 28, Day 8: Pelagic Trip; Santa Cruz Island. On our 8:00am boat trip to Santa Cruz Island via Ventura Harbor, we'll look for Island Scrub Jay along with endemic sub-species of Allen's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Song Sparrow. 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' Murrelet.

NIGHT: Best Western Pepper Tree Inn, Santa Barbara

April 29, Day 9: 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: Brad Schram

Brad Schram became fascinated with birds as a child in the mountains of California, the start of an enthusiasm that modified and enriched his life. He has birded on all the continents and scores of the world's oceanic islands. Since his early retirement from the business world in 1996 he has led birding tours in much of the American West as well as Alaska, Hawaii, Antarctica and the subantarctic islands, Iceland-East Greenland, and Trinidad and Tobago. While serving as bird-naturalist on adventure cruise ships, his travels have included Kamchatka, the Aleutians, and the Bering Sea; numerous islands throughout Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia; the Canadian High Arctic; and Antarctic voyages. He is author of the latest edition of the *ABA/Lane Guide: A Birder's Guide to Southern California*. Although focused on the world of birds, his passion for experiencing them extends to the larger world as well. He lives with his wife Dianne in Arroyo Grande, California.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2350** 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 8, all lodging for 8 nights during the tour, ground/boat transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader(s). 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 **\$390**. 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 90 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$125** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 90 and 70 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 70 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 to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
90 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$125.
Between 90 and 70 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
Fewer than 70 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **A waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

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(s) 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(s) 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. A combination of long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts may be 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 waterproof) 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 repair, 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. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at 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, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

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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.

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.

Peterson, Roger T. *Field Guide to Western Birds*. 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

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 Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

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 pas-

senger 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 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 17, 2007 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.