

California 4th – 25th October 2023



(Tule) Elk

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A three-week trip to well-known and oft visited parks and wildlife areas of California. But for both of us it was our first trip to the state.

We flew from London to San Francisco and in reverse at the end of the trip. We flew Virgin Atlantic airlines and hired a car through Virgin - Dollar, a subsidiary of Hertz.

In compiling the itinerary I used information from the California trip reports in mammalwatching.com, a Field Guide to Finding Mammals in North America by Vladimir Dinets and some personal gen from Charles Hood, Phil Telfer and Chris Townend - thank you folks. Also thank you to Venkat Sankar for the identification of the chipmunks Tim and I saw at Yosemite.

We both had Echo Meter Touch 2 bat detectors and thermal imagers with us. Bats detected on the Echo Meter are listed in the trip report and of course come with the health warning that the bat detector isn't always accurate. Sometimes it was too dark to see the bats detected and sometimes there was more than one species flitting about so we couldn't always be certain which species was which. We used thermal imagers not only at night but during the day at times. In fact, the first Black Bear we got onto was found with the thermal imager in daylight. Using the imagers we found many rodents at night, mostly at Point Reyes and Pinnacle's National Park. Even with a spotlight on many of them we couldn't be 100% certain of the identity of most of them.

During the day it was hot and sunny, although it was chilly at times at higher elevations in the early mornings and at night. We encountered the notorious sea fog twice – on a late afternoon at Point Reyes and then again when we went to Santa Cruz Island, when the fog hung over the sea all day.



Black Bear

Itinerary and sightings

Wed 4th – Sat 7th Point Reyes National Seashore. O/N Inverness. Arrived after dark.

Wed – Mule Deer, Coyote, Raccoon, American Badger.

Thurs – Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Mule Deer, Elk, Bobcat, Coyote, Grey Fox, California Sea Lion, Harbour Seal, Elephant Seal, Humpback Whale.

Fri – Western Grey Squirrel, Dusky-footed Woodrat, Mule Deer, Elk, Bobcat, Grey Fox, Humpback Whale.

Sat - Sonoma Chipmunk, Western Grey Squirrel, Botta's Pocket Gopher, Brush Rabbit, Mule Deer, Elk, Bobcat, Coyote, Grey Fox, River Otter, California Sea Lion, Harbour Seal, Elephant Seal.



Elephant Seals

Sun 8th – Tues 10th Yosemite National Park. O/N El Portal.

Sun – California Ground Squirrel, Mule Deer.

Mon - Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, California Ground Squirrel, Belding's Ground Squirrel, Lodgepole Chipmunk, Western Grey Squirrel, Mule Deer, Black Bear.

Tues – Golden Mantled Ground Squirrel, California Ground Squirrel, Belding's Ground Squirrel, Least Chipmunk, Lodgepole Chipmunk, American Pika, Mule Deer, Black Bear.



Lodgepole Chipmunk



Belding's Ground Squirrel



Golden-mantle ground Squirrel



American Pika



Bobcat



Botta's Pocket Gopher and Great Blue Heron at lunch

Wed 11th – Thurs 12th Monterey Bay. O/N Watsonville.

Wed - Ano Nuevo: Mule Deer, Sea Otter, California Sea Lion, Harbour Seal, Elephant Seal.
Moss Landing: Sea Otter, Harbour Seal.

Thurs – Big Sur/Highway 1: Mule Deer, Raccoon, Bottlenose Dolphin. Los Lobos State Park:
Western Grey Squirrel, California Vole, Brush Rabbit, Sea Otter, California Sea Lion.



California Vole above, California Ground Squirrel below.





Black-tailed Jackrabbit



Desert Cottontail



Brush Rabbit

Fri 13th – Sat 14th Monterey Bay. O/N Pacific Grove.

Fri - Monterey Bay Whale Watch, 4 hour trip: Common Dolphin, Humpback Whale.

Sat – Monterey Bay Whale Watch, 8 hour trip: Pacific White-sided Dolphin, Bottlenose Dolphin, Common Dolphin, Risso’s Dolphin, Orca, Humpback Whale.

Monterey Harbour (both days): Sea Otter, California Sea Lion, Harbour Seal.

Pacific Grove/Lynn ‘Rip’ Van Winkle Wood: Eastern Fox Squirrel, Western Grey Squirrel, Mule Deer.



Sonoma Chipmunk

Sun 15th – Mon 16th Pinnacles National Park (West). O/N Soledad.

Sun - On route, through Carmel Valley – California Ground Squirrel, Wild Boar.

Pinnacles NP: California Ground Squirrel, Heermann's Kangaroo Rat, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Desert Cottontail, Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Western Bonneted Bat, Mule Deer.

Mon – on route to Pinnacle's NP from Soledad – Wild Boar.

Pinnacle's NP: California Ground Squirrel, Heerman's Kangaroo Rat, Eastern Fox Squirrel, Brush Rabbit, Desert Cottontail, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, California Myotis, Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Western Bonneted Bat, Mule Deer, Coyote.

Tues 17th – Wed 18th Ventura, Santa Cruz Island. O/N Ventura.

Tues - On route to Ventura – Mule Deer, Coyote.

Ventura Harbour: California Sea lion.

Wed - Santa Cruz Island, Channel Island National Park: Island Grey Fox, California Sea Lion, Common Dolphin.



Island Grey Fox

Thurs 19th – Fri 20th Carrizo Plains National Monument. O/N Taft.

Thurs - California Ground Squirrel, Nelson's Antelope Squirrel, Elk, Coyote, Kit Fox.

Fri – California Ground Squirrel, Nelson's Antelope Squirrel, Desert Cottontail, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Giant Kangaroo Rat, Heermann's Kangaroo Rat, Hoary Bat, Tule Elk, Coyote, Kit Fox.

Sat 21st Carrizo Plains, Santa Maria. O/N Santa Maria. Slow drive around Carrizo Plains on route to Santa Maria – California Ground Squirrel, Nelson's Antelope Squirrel, Coyote.



Humpback Whale



California Myotis



Townsend's Big-eared bat



Coyote



Heermann's Kangaroo Rat



Risso's Dolphins



California Sea Lion

Sun 22nd Pinnacles National Park (West). O/N Soledad.

Merriam's Chipmunk, California Ground Squirrel, Desert Cottontail, Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Mule Deer, Grey Fox.

Mon 23rd - Tues 24th Pinnacles National Park (East). O/N Soledad.

Mon – Merriam's Chipmunk, California Ground Squirrel, Desert Cottontail, Eastern Fox Squirrel, California Myotis, Mule Deer.

Tues – Merriam's Chipmunk, California Ground Squirrel, Townsend's Big-eared bat, California Myotis, Canyon Bat, Mule Deer.



Merriam's Chipmunk



Least Chipmunk

Wed 25th Moss Landing, Elkhorn Slough Reserve, Henry Cowell Redwood State Park, San Francisco airport.

Moss Landing – Sea Otter.

Elkhorn Slough – California Ground Squirrel, Brush Rabbit, California Vole.

Henry Cowell Redwood SP – Western Grey Squirrel.

San Francisco Airport – evening flight back to London.

Bats recorded on Echo Meter Touch 2

California Myotis	<i>Myotis californicus</i>
Yuma Myotis	<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>
Long-eared Myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>
Silver-haired Bat	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>
Canyon Bat	<i>Parastrellus hesperus</i>
Big Brown Bat	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>
Western Yellow Bat	<i>Lasiurus xanthinus</i>
Hoary Bat	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>
Pallid Bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>
Brazilian Free-tailed Bat	<i>Tadarida brasiliensis</i>
Western Bonneted Bat	<i>Eumops perotis</i>
Big Free-tailed Bat	<i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>

Systematic List, 46 species.

California Ground Squirrel

Spermophilus beecheyi

Common, seen at nearly all places visited.

Belding's Ground Squirrel

Spermophilus beldingi

Seen at Soda Springs/Parson's Lodge the east side of Yosemite and at Saddlebag Lake outside the National Park, east of the east gate.

Nelson's Antelope Squirrel

Ammospermophilus nelsoni

Easily seen and in good numbers in the Carrizo Plains.

Least Chipmunk

Tamias minimus

Two or three seen on scree slope along Nunatak trail east of the east gate, Yosemite.

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

Spermophilus lateralis

Seen at Soda Springs/Parson's Lodge in Yosemite and Saddlebag Lake east of the east gate, Yosemite.

Lodgepole Chipmunk

Tamias speciosus

Seen along the approach road to Saddlebag Lake east of the east gate Yosemite, Soda Springs/Parson's Lodge and what was probably this species also seen briefly along various trails and zipping across the road in Yosemite.

Sonoma Chipmunk

Tamias sonomae

Only one seen, along Kule Loklo trail by the Kule Loklo recreated Coast Miwok Native American village. The trail starts at the Bear Valley Visitor Centre, Point Reyes.

Merriam's Chipmunk

Tamias merriami

Pinnacle's NP (East). One on the trail just east of Balconies Cave and at least six seen, over two days, along Bear Gulch trail.

Eastern Fox Squirrel

Sciurus niger

Introduced to California. Small numbers seen at: Lynn 'Rip' Van Winkle Park, Pacific Grove, Monterey; Pinnacles NP (West and East).

Western Grey Squirrel

Sciurus griseus

Common. Seen at Point Reyes; Los Lobos State Park; Pacific Grove, Monterey, Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

Botta's Pocket Gopher

Thomomys bottae

One seen sticking its head and shoulders out of a hole and another becoming lunch for a Great Blue Heron. Both seen by the picnic tables at Point Reyes Bear Valley Visitor Centre.

Heermann's Kangaroo Rat*Dipodomys heermanni*

Pinnacles NP (West). One on the Prewett Point Trail from the visitor centre, and one just outside the park gate on the entrance road.

Carrizo Plains. Good numbers seen on two nights, most seen once the moon had set.

Giant Kangaroo Rat*Dipodomys ingens*

Carrizo Plains. About five seen the first night and about 10 on the second night, most seen once the moon had set.

Dusky-footed Woodrat*Neotoma fuscipes*

Three or four seen at Point Reyes.

California Vole*Microtis californicus*

Los Lobos State Park. At least six seen crossing and feeding by the side of the track late afternoon. One seen briefly in Elkhorn Slough Reserve.

American Pika*Ochotona princeps*

Four on scree slope, Nunatak Trail, east of the east gate, Yosemite.

Brush Rabbit*Sylvilagus bachmani*

Seen in small numbers at Point Reyes; Los Lobos State Park; Pinnacles NP (West); Elkhorn Slough Reserve.

Desert Cottontail*Sylvilagus audubonii*

A few seen in Pinnacle's NP (West) and Carrizo Plains.

Black-tailed Jackrabbit*Lepus californicus*

One seen at Point Reyes, common Carrizo Plains for example 15 seen one night.

California Myotis*Myotis californicus*

Detected and seen at Pinnacle's NP (West & East) including one resting at night under the roof overhang of the toilet block in Pinnacle's NP (West).

Townsend's Big-eared Bat*Corynorhinus townsendii*

Pinnacle's NP (West) – a maximum count of 27 roosting in Balconies Cave.

Pinnacle's NP (East) – maximum of 5 roosting in Bear Gulch trail 'Bat' Cave.

Canyon Bat*Pipistrellus hesperus*

Pinnacle's NP (East) - a few detected and seen flitting about at dusk along Bear Gulch trail. A small pale bat flitting about mid-morning over Bear Gulch reservoir was probably this species.

Hoary Bat*Antrozous pallidus*

Carrizo Plains – at least 15 showed well feeding adjacent to the main track one evening.

Western Bonneted Bat*Eumops perotis*

Pinnacles NP (West). One roosting in Balconies Cave, others detected and seen flying around at dusk.

Mule Deer (Black-tailed Deer)*Odocoileus hemionus*

Common, seen at nearly all sites visited.

Elk (Tule Elk)*Cervus elaphus*

Seen at Point Reyes in and outside of the Tule Elk Reserve. Good numbers seen at the Carrizo Plains including a herd of over 300.

Wild Boar*Sus Scrofa*

An introduced species from Europe. A couple of sounders seen as we drove the Carmel Valley, and a few seen on ranchland not far from the entrance gate to Pinnacle's NP (West).

Bobcat*Lynx rufus*

Point Reyes. Four seen – one Pierce Point Road area, two east of Olema, and one along Limantour Road.

Coyote*Canis latrans*

The best views were in Point Reyes, with at least ten seen, also seen in Pinnacle's NP (West), Carrizo Plains and from the car on route to Ventura.

Kit Fox*Vulpes macrotis*

Carrizo Plains. Eight seen over two days - two brief daytime sightings, the rest at night.

Grey Fox*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

Point Reyes. Four seen over two nights, the best views being a pair around the picnic tables by the Bear Valley visitor centre. Pinnacle's NP (West) – one seen along the entrance road at night.

Island Grey Fox*Urocyon littoralis*

Santa Cruz Island (Channel Islands NP) – 12 of these diminutive foxes seen. Two in the ranch house garden, nine around the two campsites and one in the grassland past the campsites.

We got the 08:00 boat from Ventura Harbour to Scorpion Cove with Island Packers Cruises.

Black Bear*Ursus americanus*

Yosemite. Seven found feeding on a steep slope along Tamarack Flat Trail, six cinnamon, one black. There were three on the same slope the following morning – all cinnamon coloured.

Northern Raccoon*Procyon lotor*

Two seen briefly at night on the side of the road, Bear Valley, Point Reyes. One seen briefly one morning along Highway 1, Big Sur.

American Badger*Taxidea taxus*

One showed well digging a hole in the horse field adjacent to the Bear Valley Visitor Centre car park, Point Reyes.

Northern River Otter*Lontra Canadensis*

Two on the shore and in the sea below the Elephant Seal overlook, Point Reyes.

Sea Otter*Enhydra lutris*

The best views were around Monterey Bay Harbour but we also saw them at Ano Nuevo, Moss Landing, Los Lobos and Elkhorn Slough.

California Sea Lion*Zalophus californianus*

Easy to find at: Point Reyes (Sea Lion overlook), Ano Nuevo, Big Sur headlands, Monterey Bay Harbour (c400), Monterey Bay Whale Watch trip (a feeding group of c500), Ventura Harbour.

Harbour Seal*Phoca vitulina*

Point Reyes. Four just offshore viewed from the Elephant Seal overlook. Six at Ano Nuevo. Monterey Bay Harbour area – at least 30 loafing on rocks and in the shallows.

Northern Elephant Seal*Mirounga angustirostris*

Point Reyes Elephant Seal overlook – at least 32 immature males. Ano Nuevo – at least 200 immature males.

Pacific White-sided Dolphin*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*

Monterey Bay Whale Watch. Up to six in a large pod of Risso's Dolphins on our 8-hour boat trip.

Common Dolphin*Delphinus delphis*

Monterey Bay Whale Watch. Around 300 were seen on the 4-hour boat trip, around 500 on the 8-hour trip. Around 350 were seen on our return trip to Ventura from Santa Maria Channel Island. All appeared to be the Long-beaked form.

Bottlenose Dolphin*Tursiops truncatus*

Five, close inshore, from a Big Sur headland. Six just before Monterey Bay Harbour as we ended our 8-hour boat trip.

Risso's Dolphin*Grampus griseus*

Monterey Bay Whale Watch. A pod of c250 on our 8-hour trip.

Orca*Orcinus orca*

Monterey Bay Whale Watch. After nearly three hours searching, we finally encountered a pod of five Orca on our 8-hour boat trip. In the end we were out at sea for nearly 10 hours - hats off to Captain Nancy.

Humpback Whale*Megaptera novaeangliae*

Point Reyes. Eight seen from Sea Lion overlook, 20+ from Limantour Beach.

Monterey Bay Whale Watch - 21 on the 4-hour trip, 10 on the 8-hour trip.



California Sea Lions



Sea Otters



Eastern Fox Squirrel



Harbour Seals above, Humpback Whale below



The End