

Baja California & Sea of Cortez

Naturetrek Tour Report

7th – 21st March 2022



Grey Whale



Whale Shark



Clients with Grey Whale



Brown Pelican

Tour report and images by Sara Frost



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants – Sara Frost (Leader) with 23 Naturetrek clients

Introduction

Every client had booked on this holiday with the dream of seeing whales, and our two weeks in the iconic Baja Peninsula delivered again and again. The experience of being face to face with the Grey Whales of San Ignacio Lagoon, touching them and being immersed in their world, was unforgettable. We also enjoyed a full day watching Humpback Whales at Gorda Bank, almost daily dolphin encounters, a further incredible day surrounded by (we estimate) a whopping 15 Blue Whales and, to our knowledge, a never-before seen spectacle of thousands of Giant Devil Rays feeding in the waters alongside our boat.

Visiting mangroves by boat revealed Mangrove Warblers, American White Ibis, Little Blue Herons, Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Reddish Egrets and more, whilst exploring arid, desert habitats on foot found Northern Cardinal, Hooded Oriole, Black-throated Sparrow, Osprey and the endemic Xantu's Hummingbird to name a few highlights. On-shore walks also provided close-up views of California Sealions and Northern Elephant Seal colonies. Several days provided snorkelling opportunities, and we enjoyed marvelling at the tropical fish on view over the rocky or coral reefs, as well as swimming with a Whale Shark, the largest fish on earth. Combine these daily wildlife experiences with the warm camaraderie of the group, our laughter over wine and beer every evening, and it's safe to say we had an incredibly memorable holiday to a very special wildlife destination, to which many of the group will likely return. But don't take our word for it – go and see it for yourself!

Day 1

Monday 7th March

London to San Diego

We met at Heathrow and boarded our flight to San Diego, going straight to our hotel upon arrival, just a 10 minute taxi ride away. Some went for a drink in the bar, while others went straight to bed.

Day 2

Tuesday 8th March

Free Day in San Diego

Most of the group were wide awake and down at breakfast when the hotel's restaurant doors opened at 7am (thank you jet lag!) and sat chatting over coffee. Today was a free day in San Diego (due to us having to fly out a day early after a flight schedule change) and, after a short welcome briefing from Sara at 9am, folk went off to explore. It was a gloriously sunny day, and some walked to Ocean Beach or other parks and marinas, whilst Sara arranged for two taxis to take several of the group to Balboa Park which was a great base for the day as there were many things to enjoy seeing – it is home to a Science Museum, a Natural History Museum, the world-famous San Diego Zoo, varied botanical gardens and even a free guided walking tour from a local volunteer. The Japanese gardens were a highlight – containing beautiful blossom trees and a stream with enormous Koi Carp.

We reconvened at 6pm in the hotel from where we walked to Mitch's seafood restaurant on the harbour and sat outside eating fresh fish and with a view over the marina. Then we all opted for an early night!

Day 3

Wednesday 9th March

Birding San Diego

Today most of the group were heading out with the Audobon Society for a day's birding. We were due to be picked up by our coach at 9am, but sadly an issue with the coach company meant we weren't picked up until 11am! Our guide, Autumn, arrived at 9am, and so while we waited, we did a spot of birdwatching from the front of the hotel, and saw a Cooper's Hawk flying overhead as well as American Crow in nearby palm trees. We then all went for a stroll along Point Lorma Harbour and looked for waders, although there wasn't much to be seen other than Spotted Sandpipers and Western Gulls.

When the coach arrived, we first visited Lindo Lake, where there were Black-crowned Night Herons perched in the trees next to us. Sara went off for 20 minutes in the coach to pick up the packed lunches for everyone, while the group started to circumnavigate the pond with Autumn. As we wandered around the lake, we also saw House Finches, Grackles, Western Bluebird and Nuttall's Woodpecker in the trees. There were also Great Egrets in the tops of trees and Ground Squirrels scurrying between their burrows and basking in the sun. The highlight of this stop was viewing a gorgeous male Wood Duck with a female on the lake, its crisp plumage looking very smart in the dazzling sunshine.

Then, we drove up in to mountains to Silverwood, an Audobon Reserve, set amidst the oak chaparral-covered hills to the north of the city, where we sat and had lunch on some benches in the shade next to some feeders where Anna's Hummingbirds were flitting around, and two Mourning Doves were on the ground. We went for a walk and saw Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk and Northern Flickers. Then we made our final stop along the San Diego river estuary where waders and herons were abundant. We added Semi-palmated Plover, Bufflehead, Hudsonian Whimbrel (split a couple of years ago from the European Whimbrel), Long-billed Curlew and Marbled Godwit amongst other waders.

We headed back to the hotel at 5pm to collect our luggage and board the Searcher which was just a two minute walk away. The group then went off for dinner, choosing one of the nearby restaurants, and boarded the boat for 8pm where Celia, the boat owner, gave us a warm welcome briefing and we settled into our cabins. We then lifted anchor and set sail for Mexico!

Day 4

Thursday 10th March

Ensenada and the Pacific Ocean

We arrived into the port of Ensenada at 6am while having breakfast, and immigration officials came on board to clear us for entry into Mexico. Four Surf Scoters – three females and a male in stunning full breeding plumage – were in the harbour. We were soon setting sail again, and 20 minutes later Sara saw a blow on the horizon – our first whales! Closer inspection revealed that they were Grey Whales. We watched them for 20 minutes before continuing on our way. We then saw a few more Grey Whales, and Sara saw a big blow on the horizon, far away on the starboard side, and a large whale surface – likely a Blue or a Fin Whale. However, it was travelling north, the opposite direction to us, and we couldn't find it again, so we continued on our way south. We continued to see occasional blows from Grey Whales on the horizon which was very exciting; we certainly were in a fabulous

part of the world for whale watching! We also saw our first albatrosses; Laysan and Black-footed, and we enjoyed watching them gracefully glide over the waves around the boat.

Typically, just as lunch was called, Short-beaked Common Dolphins turned up and rode on the bow-wave. Fabulous! We greeted them with cheers of joy, and leaned over the bow to watch them roll and turn in our bow wave below. Then, after lunch, another pod joined us. At first we thought it was just more Common Dolphins, but closer inspection from Sara and Andrea revealed this was a mixed group – there were Pacific White-sided Dolphins here too! These are particularly attractive dolphins, with beautiful white, grey and black markings down their flanks, and lacking the distinct beak of the Common Dolphins.

Later in the day, as the sun was going down, we saw a blow off the starboard side. Captain Mike turned the boat quickly. Another blow, and we saw its back. It was long, smooth and dark – no barnacles on it – this wasn't a Grey Whale, this was a roqual (a group of baleen whales which have throat grooves). We eagerly followed the whale and enjoyed exhilarating bursts of excitement as it blew, and surfaced, before submerging again. General consensus was that it was a Fin Whale, although the water was too choppy to get a clear view of its lower right jaw (which on a Fin Whale is always white). Then there were two blows at the same time – two whales! A distinctly smaller one surfaced after the larger one – we presumed a mother and perhaps year-old calf. The sea was very rough (a three metre swell or so!) and the group laughed hysterically as we stood on the bow holding on as we were launched up and down to follow the whale (the less adventurous guests staying further back, or inside!). The whales were moving at a rapid speed – also indicative of Fin Whales, which are fast swimmers and also known as the 'greyhounds' of the sea – and so we left them to it as the sun was going down and light fading, and we had already enjoyed the thrill of seeing them despite the difficult conditions. We retreated inside for pre-dinner wine and continued our way south.

Sara did the checklist after dinner and then gave a presentation introducing the group on the different whales and dolphins of the world, with particular focus on the ones that could be seen on our journey, and a little information about their evolution. Then, by 8:30pm, everyone had gone to bed. What a day!

Day 5

Friday 11th March

San Benitos Islands

After a choppy night's sailing, we arrived at the San Benitos islands. After another hearty breakfast we took a packed lunch for the day and disembarked at 8am, walking past several empty fishing huts to a colony of female Northern Elephant Seals. They were extremely obliging and lay still, silently looking up at us and giving a few non-plussed, wide-eyed blinks before closing their eyes again and snorting to excrete salt from their noses. We couldn't help but laugh as we watched them. Next to us was a bay where there was a group of females hauled out and laying on the beach with their 'Beach Master'; the dominant male in charge of the hareem. He was enormous, and laying next to the females looked positively gargantuan at four or five times their size. We watched another male in the sea slowly approach the beach and cautiously come onto the beach. He eyed up the other male who was still fast asleep with his back to him, totally unaware of his presence. We all held our breath in anticipation, wondering if we were in for viewing a BBC Planet Earth-style fight.

The challenging male came onto the beach, and rose up on his magnificent chest and opened his mouth and started roaring, his trunk-like nose rippling as he bellowed. The sleeping male was shocked awake, but to our amusement (and slight disappointment), without even looking to see the other male, he frantically started worming his heavy body up the beach in panic. He then turned around, and saw the challenging male was smaller than he was, and calmly stood his ground, not responding. The challenging male thought better of it, and retreated back into the sea. We'd all been holding our breath, and breathed out with a chortle, and continued on.

We walked further along the coast to see a colony of Guadalupe Fur Seals which were very noisy, sounding like bleating lambs as they cried from the rocks. We also saw several pairs of Osprey which provided great photographic opportunities as they regularly circled low over our heads, keeping the photographers entertained. We also saw a Peregrine Falcon and several Ravens. We had our packed lunch along the coastline, binoculars in one hand, sandwich in the other. Most went back onto the boat at 1:30pm and enjoyed beers on back deck or in the saloon. A few others stayed on the island until 2:30pm for a longer leg stretch.

Once we were all back on board we set off back to sea, making our way to the famous San Iguacio Lagoon! After dinner, Andrea (the local guide) did a short talk on Fin Whales and we all went to bed by 8:30pm.

Day 6

Saturday 12th March

San Iguacio Lagoon

This morning we arrived into San Ignacio lagoon. The crew carefully sailed us slowly over the shallow sandbar at the entrance and we made our way towards the heart of the observation area in the lagoon. The blows from Grey Whales surrounded us as we motored slowly to our anchorage – what a jaw dropping welcome!

Captain Mike gave us a briefing for how our excursions would run, and then we eagerly boarded the pangas (local wooden boats, brought over by experienced drivers) for our first close-up introduction to the whales. The local panga drivers skilfully manoeuvred into position so we could get the best look at some of the whales, allowing for some sensational observation and close interactions for everyone in the group, both with solitary animals as well as cow-calf pairs. During the course of our day, we enjoyed two 90-minute panga trips before lunch (coming back for a 15 minutes in between for a quick cup of tea and loo break).

Over lunch we all looked at each other, completely speechless with what we'd all just experienced, and recharged our camera batteries before heading back out again for an extended trip in the afternoon. This time we were just surrounded by whales, none of them came to the boat for a tickle, but they swam next to us, in between our boats, a calf frequently coming to the surface and rolling on its side looking at us before rolling over and showing us its belly. Some calves in the distance were practicing breaching and several adults 'spyhopped' (rising their head out from the water vertically to look at us) to whoops and cheers from the group.

By the end of the day, we had observed whales fluking, breaching and spy-hopping, and almost everyone had managed to actually touch a Grey Whale. It's difficult to find the words to describe what a moving experience this is. Reaching a hand out to feel the cold, rubbery faces of the Grey Whales as they actually approached our boats to investigate us was incredible, and an experience like none of us had ever encountered. Touching a wild animal goes against the ethos of what many of us, as passionate naturalists, stand for, and indeed not all the

whales actively sought out physical contact, choosing to stay just out of arms reach (which we should all respect); but watching a mother put her nose under her baby to offer it up to us, allowing us all to rush to give it a scratch (and on a couple of occasions, opening its mouth to have a tongue rub) must be one of the most unique wildlife experiences in the world. Everyone was elated, several people were very emotional. We got back on board the boat at 3:30pm and all sat in the saloon with a beer, our salty faces grinning and immediately comparing photos and experiences that we'd had from the different boats. What a day!

Andrea gave a talk on Grey Whales and Steven sang a couple of songs for us – and what an accomplished singer he is! We listened to him perform two songs at the dinner tables before heading outside to watch the stars. We switched the engines and lights off and enjoyed star gazing, where he performed another song for us, and the keener ears could even hear the blows of the Grey Whales coming from somewhere in the darkness. At 8:30pm, we all went to bed, although it will have taken some of us a while for the adrenaline to subside and get to sleep!

Day 7

Sunday 13th March

San Ignacio Lagoon

This morning we woke up to another morning in San Ignacio lagoon. Two groups opted for a morning excursion to the mangroves, whilst one group went to see the whales again. Once in the sheltered channels of the mangroves, we had a wonderful time spotting birds such as Great Blue Heron, Little Blue Heron, Reddish Egret, Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Herons and Great and Snowy Egrets. In addition, we saw Marbled Godwit, Willet, Short-billed Dowitcher, Long-billed Curlew and White Ibis. A couple of Mangrove Warblers were singing, which caught the attention of the birders, and we were delighted to see one of them for half a minute or so, some of the group even managing to capture a photograph of this small attractive bird.

We then had a quick 15-minute turn around before all of us headed back out looking for whales, which quite simply can be summarised by: WOW! Again we were treated to close views, faces and binoculars sprayed with blows (and whale snot). We then had burgers back on the boat for an early lunch and had a prolonged afternoon looking for whales again. Some opted to go to the beach for a walk where there was an amazing variety of colourful shells and bones of different marine animals. An interesting 'highlight' (depending on your interpretation of the word!) was seeing a dead adult Grey Whale. It was sad, but also interesting to see the animal up close, although it was several weeks old. Sara pointed out that it was a female, and we also saw the skeleton of a dead dolphin. Birding highlights included a Least Sandpiper, Surf Scoters, Black-necked and Clark's Grebes, Snowy Plover, Red Phalarope and Heerman's Gull to name a few.

We set off from the lagoon at 4:30pm, watching the blows of the Grey Whales in the lagoon fade into the distance and we sailed through the night.

Day 8

Monday 14th March

Sea Day – Sailing south to the Bay of Magdelana

Today was a 'sea day', and after breakfast we set up vigil at the front of the boat on the look out for whales. Our first sighting was a Humpback Whale on the horizon, and then, the call everyone had been hoping for... 'BLUE

WHALE!'. The blow was enormous, and there was a mad scramble to the front of the boat to watch it. We tried to track it, and there were blows in different directions, making it hard to decide which way to sail! We followed the one we were certain was a Blue Whale –it was swimming round in a very big circle (half a mile or so wide) feeding. Our first Magnificent Frigatebird flew overhead, as well as a Masked Booby. We decided to leave the Blue Whale after 25 minutes, and saw two more whales blowing in the distance. What a great start to the day!

After a mid-morning snack (highly unnecessary after our cooked breakfast, but still devoured without hesitation) we found ANOTHER Blue Whale. This one came closer, and closer... until it was parallel to the boat, only about 60 metres away. A huge topaz-coloured patch of water, the size of a small aeroplane, was slowly moving just below the surface by our boat. Then, as we all held our breath, the whale surfaced with an almighty blow. We all took lots of photos as it surfaced several times next to us. We couldn't believe our luck, incredible! A pod of Common Dolphins then came along too and surrounded our boat – we didn't know where to point the cameras! The group had their jaws on the floor. We watched the whale for an hour or so before continuing on.

Late in the afternoon we saw a Humpback Whale in the distance, clearly slapping its pectoral fins (which are huge – a third of the size of their body, so around five metres long). We also passed a large patch of krill on the surface, which had a whopping 61 Sabine's Gulls feeding on it! All dinner conversation was excited chatter about the day's sightings, and what tomorrow could possibly do to beat it. Sara ran through the day's events and checklist and, after a short talk from Andrea on Humpback Whales, we went to bed.

Day 9

Tuesday 15th March

Gorda Bank (AKA: The Day of the Humpback Whales!)

Today we arrived into Gorda Bank, an area known for being frequented by Humpback Whales. We saw several groups of them, with blows nearby and also in the distance, and eventually didn't know where to look – after an hour or so we were surrounded by whales both near and far. The most entertaining aspect was a young calf which repeatedly kept breaching, seemingly determined to show off to the adults that it was perfectly capable of doing impressive jumps. On two occasions, the adults breached, to loud gasps from us all on board. Magnificent Frigatebirds flew overhead and we were glued to the spot. Barely anyone moved when lunch was announced as we were so transfixed.

The afternoon was spent sailing north up the east coast of the peninsula – it got windy and quite rough, but we didn't care, for we'd just spent two hours watching Humpback Whales! Once we'd anchored we got the group in the water to do a practise snorkel, requiring the group to swim around the boat once to prepare us for swimming with the Whale Sharks. It was a bit chilly! So once back on board we had a cup of tea or hot chocolate and then went onto the nearby beach for a walk. Highlights included California Quail, Northern Mockingbird, Loggerhead Shrike and Snowy Plover.

Day 10

Wednesday 16th March

La Paz

This morning we entered La Paz bay. The ocean was calm, the water looked green with plankton but certainly clear enough to see the largest fish in the world, and there was considerable excitement as we got ourselves ready and waited for our local guides to arrive and take us out to see Whale Sharks. We went off in two groups on two boats, with both folk who wanted to snorkel with Whale Sharks, plus those who wanted to stay dry and view them from the surface. Our local guides were very enthusiastic when briefing us and we had two truly EXHILARATING hours getting in and out of the water with these amazing animals – we probably saw three or four individuals, some ‘small’ (three metres) and some considerably bigger; six metres or so (although they can grow up to 12 metres).

Then, at 10:30am we got back on board to have hot showers and hot chocolate to warm up. We continued sailing and, after lunch, went to a lovely secluded bay with mangroves, where we had superb views of Brown Pelicans fishing, watching them as they did their comical dive-bombs (face first) into the water to catch mouthfuls of fish. From the skiffs we saw Guineafowl Pufferfish and Reef Cornetfish swimming around the turquoise shallows, and a (sadly very dead!) Moray Eel.

Once back on board we then set off north to Los Islotes. For those who had been to the Galapagos, this was an experience very reminiscent of that wonderful, wildlife-rich archipelago. We circumnavigated the islands in the skiffs, with hundreds of California Sea Lions hauled out on the rocks making a racket, along with a Wandering Tattler, a wader, which was seen walking on the rocks, frequently getting hit by waves but it seemed totally unphased.

Most of the group then hopped in for a snorkel with the sealions, whilst some of the group sat and had a beer on the back of the deck and watched. Snorkelling highlights were King Angelfish, Sergeant Majors, juvenile Cortez Rainbow Wrasse, Yellow-tail Surgeonfish, along with, of course, the playful sealions, which swam around us, some even coming to give us a playful ‘nose’ to see what we were about.

Later that evening Sara gave a talk on marine conservation issues, and showed a video she had made of marine wildlife.

Day 11

Thursday 17th March

Punta Colorado, Isla San Jose (AKA The Day of the Blues!)

A new day dawned and we all got up early to watch the sun creep over the eastern horizon and illuminate the beautiful sandstone cliffs adjacent to our anchorage at Punta Colorado. As the sun rose, Magnificent Frigatebirds drifted across the cliff face and cast sinister looking shadows on the illuminated orange walls of the cliff. It was another amazing start to a beautiful day in Baja.

After breakfast we went onto the island for walk. It got hot very quickly, but it was nice and comfortable in the shade. We admired the incredible layered rock formations on the cliffs (which were full of shells) and went to see

a fossilised turtle. Plus we admired all the shells and seafans washed up on the beach. We walked up a dried river bed and saw White-throated Swifts, Verdins, Costa's Hummingbird, Gila Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Mockingbird, Black-throated Sparrow and Ash-throated Flycatchers. Half the group wanted to go snorkelling after a couple of hours on shore, so left at 9:45am and the rest stayed either birding or walking until the second pick up at 11am.

Once all back on board we continued our quest for whales. At lunch time the call came... 'BLOW!' and we all fixed eyes on a spout a mile away. We confirmed it was a Blue Whale – yippie! We moved closer to it, and saw another huge blow about half a mile away from the first whale. Then another enormous blow behind that one. Blimey! Three?! We enjoyed views of the two closer Blue Whales as they surfaced not far from us, and we tried to keep track of where they were. We then had a mother and calf Blue Whale surface – it was extraordinary seeing the baby Blue Whale, still about the size of an adult Minke Whale, swimming alongside its enormous mother! Then we found another adult Blue Whale and saw it from about a quarter of a mile away. It dived, and we bobbed around on the surface, scanning 360 degrees around us waiting for it to come back up. Suddenly a combination of squeals, gasps and expletives were yelled, as the water in front of the boat rapidly turned from deep-sea blue to bright topaz, and a huge column of water erupted from the sea as the Blue Whale surfaced barely 50 metres from our boat. It did this four times, and then dove. We stood, open mouthed, on the deck not believing how close we had seen the largest animal on Earth. Then 10 minutes later, the whale surfaced a matter of metres away from us again, to more shrieks of delight. This happened an astonishing four times, with blows from other Blue Whales still being seen around us – we estimated there were about 15 individuals here. Incredible!

The afternoon was just as hectic. There was clearly lots of krill in the water (upon which the Blue Whales feed) as there were also lots of jumping Mobula, which feed upon plankton, including krill. A Hammerhead Shark was seen by a couple of members of the group as it swam past the side of the boat.

We stopped at 5pm at Timbobechei where the group sat outside enjoying a beer and watching the sunset as Brown Pelicans bobbed peacefully around our boat. There wasn't another boat or person in sight (indeed there hadn't been for a couple of days!). This felt like a truly exclusive wildlife experience – the joy of a private boat charter!

That evening Tabata (a local Mexican guide) gave a talk about her research with Bryde's Whales.

Day 12

Friday 18th March

Timbobechei to Napolo

This morning we disembarked after breakfast at 7:30am and went on shore to Timbobechei for a walk. Here, we walked across an amazing dried salt flat, encrusted with salt, and reached a large lagoon with Great Egret and an Osprey fishing. The group enjoyed pottering for 2 hours, taking photos with the enormous Organ Pipe and Elephant Cacti. Sara found some Coyote tracks and poo, and dissected it to show people the bones of small rodents within it – plus lots of fur!

Then those who wanted went for a snorkel at 10am, some went back on the boat for a cup of tea whilst others stayed wandering on the island until 11:30am. Highlights of the snorkel included Blue-spotted Cornetfish and

lots of porcupinefish. As we got into the skiff to take us back from the snorkel to the boat about 15 Bottlenose Dolphins came to join us and swam with our boat for a few minutes which was a lovely way to end the swim!

Once back on board we set off and saw a rafting group of 600+ Black-necked Grebes which bobbed on the surface just metres from the boat – we were astonished! The day of super wildlife was far from over, and shortly after this we were struck by an incredible spectacle that neither Sara, Andrea nor the crew of the Searcher had ever seen. Hundreds upon hundreds (more likely thousands) of what we thought were Manta Rays were passing our boat. We slowed down to about 4 knots and had them passing us every few seconds for 4 miles, on all sides of the vessel. They were near and far – and could be seen jumping several miles away. We were utterly astonished! And as the water was so clear we could see them very easily. The boat fell silent as we stood on deck for well over an hour watching them gracefully gliding past us, not quite knowing what to make of this amazing sight. After inspecting photographs afterwards, we discovered that the rays were Giant Devil Rays, which are endangered. What a privilege to see them in such huge numbers as this! The crew on board, some of which had been working in these waters for 30 years, had never seen anything like it. The memory of this ethereal afternoon will stay with all guests, leaders and crew, forever.

At 4pm, we arrived at Napolo, a small bay with a little (seemingly uninhabited) shack and went for a walk. There was a small lagoon, surrounded by trees and then a little scrub land which led into a tree-filled valley and dried riverbed. And what great birding this was! We saw a Gila Woodpecker on a cactus, and then a Northern Cardinal made an appearance amongst the scrub. After a little patience on our part, this delightful bird hopped out into the sunlight and we could appreciate its lovely ruby colouration. We continued, and only minutes later found a Hooded Oriole! Then, the cherry on top of an already well-iced cake, was finding the endemic Xantu's Hummingbird (well done Andrew and Steven!). We stood watching as at least four of them flitted around the tops of bushes and trees catching flies, and one even hovered at a bush just two metres in front of us before settling on a branch nearby for us to photograph it – what a result!

After a fantastic day, we hopped back on board and showered and freshened up for a superb BBQ on the back deck which the crew did for us, complete with freshly-prepared Margarita cocktails made by Shane, which we enjoyed as the sun went down over the islands. Chef Dan gave a fantastic performance with his harmonica and Steven, back by popular demand, gave another singing performance, and even did an impromptu song with Dan! It was a lovely evening on board as we sat chatting over our drinks and food under the stars. At 9pm we lifted anchor and sailed through the night to Isles San Fransisco.

Day 13

Saturday 19th March

Isles San Francisco

This morning after breakfast we went on shore to explore Isles San Francisco. We landed on the beach at 7:45am and it was already getting very warm. Within the first few minutes of scanning the scrub we saw Black-throated Sparrows hopping about, and their calls could easily be heard in the hot morning air. We also saw a dead (likely Green) Turtle on the beach. The group split, several people following Andrea across the saltflats, some going up a ridge with Sara for a spectacular view over the islands and some going for a wander on their own. There were many different cacti to marvel at, plus those walking on the ridge had (extremely!) close views of Turkey Vultures, Yellow-footed Gulls, Magnificent Frigatebirds and a Peregrine Falcon which flew past our

heads. Three Osprey nests were also visible on a short peninsula branching off from the cliffs, one of which was occupied by two adults. Whilst watching the nests, we also saw a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins in the bay.

Then, at 10am, those who wished to have a welcome refreshing dip in the sea and a snorkel went back to the boat, whilst those who wished to stay on the island explored until 11:30am. On our snorkel we enjoyed views of a Yellow Boxfish, a huge Porcupinefish and a great 'lawn' of Garden Eels in the sand.

Once back on board, we set sail, with several guests joining Sara and the Searcher crew up on the top deck to look out for wildlife. We saw a pod of Long-beaked Common Dolphins, which bounded over to the boat to 'say hello'. They rode on the bow for 10 minutes or so, one of them accompanied by a truly tiny calf, which could only have been a couple of days old. It was about 12 inches long(!) and shadowing its mother's every move. Several of them also had large remoras on them, which they were trying to shake off. We also had a good number of Mobula Rays jumping in the distance across the afternoon, but other than that the sea was quiet.

At 6pm a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins powered over to the boat to swim with us for a few minutes, as if to say farewell to all of us! We then retired indoors for dinner, and Captain Mike thanked us all for a good trip and we went round the group to each list our highlights from the trip. Sara gave a few final notices for the end of the evening, and then we finished off packing and went to bed, sailing our way back to Cabo San Lucas.

Day 14

Sunday 20th March

Cabo San Lucas – London

This morning we arrived in the harbour of Cabo San Lucas at 4am and rose for an early breakfast at 5am. At 6am a pharmacist came on board to carry out covid tests on all the group (required for our return journey) and then we got taxis to the airport and boarded our flights home via Los Angeles! The talk at the airport was still of whales, the snorkelling and the amazing rays... this was undoubtedly a holiday that will never be forgotten. We boarded our plane and said goodbye to the arid desert landscape and turquoise seas of the Baja Peninsula below.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays

Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced			March 2022												
	Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	Brant Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓							
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓											
3	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>		✓											
4	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>		4											
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓											
6	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>		✓											
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓											
8	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	✓	✓	4		✓	✓							
9	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>		✓											
10	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓				✓							
11	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>		✓				✓							
12	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>		H						✓					
13	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>										✓			
14	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		✓									✓		
15	Costa's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte costae</i>										✓		✓	
16	Xantus's Hummingbird - E	<i>Basilinna xantusii</i>											✓		
17	Allen's Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus sasin</i>		✓											
18	Red-billed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas flavirostris</i>								prob					
19	Eurasian Collared Dove - I	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓		✓									
20	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		✓											
21	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>								✓			✓		
22	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>						✓							
23	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>		✓											
24	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		✓											
25	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>		✓		✓		✓		2	✓		600+		
26	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>					✓								
27	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>						✓							
28	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>											✓		

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced			March 2022												
	Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
29	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>			✓		✓	✓							
30	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>		✓						✓					
31	Wilson's Plover	<i>Charadrius wilsonia</i>						✓							
32	Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>						✓		✓			✓		
33	Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>					✓	✓							
34	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>		✓			✓	✓							
35	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓							
36	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>						✓		✓					
37	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓						✓					
38	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>						✓					✓		
39	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>		✓				✓		✓			✓		
40	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>						✓							
41	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>				✓	✓	✓							
42	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>			2	✓			✓	✓					
43	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	✓	✓									✓		
44	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>									✓				
45	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>											✓		
46	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>		✓			✓	✓					✓		
47	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>						✓					✓		
48	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>							61						
49	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>								Prob					
50	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>								Poss					
51	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>									✓	✓			
52	Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>									✓				
53	Heermann's Gull - N	<i>Larus heermanni</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>		✓				✓	✓						
55	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓						
56	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>						✓							
57	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
58	Yellow-footed Gull - N	<i>Larus livens</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓	
59	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>				✓									
60	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>						✓							

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced			March 2022												
	Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
61	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>		1		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		
62	Elegant Tern	<i>Thalasseus elegans</i>				✓	✓								
63	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>			prob		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
64	Craveri's Murrelet - N	<i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i>			Poss	Poss			✓			✓			
65	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>				✓									
66	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>													4
67	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>					✓	✓							
68	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓							
69	Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>			✓	✓									
70	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>			✓	✓			✓						
71	Black Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates melania</i>										✓	✓	✓	
72	Least Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates microsoma</i>				✓						✓		✓	
73	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓				✓						
74	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>			✓	✓									
75	Pink-footed Shearwater	<i>Ardenna creatopus</i>			✓	✓			✓						
76	Black-vented Shearwater - N	<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		
77	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Blue-footed Booby	<i>Sula nebouxii</i>									✓		✓		
79	Masked Booby	<i>Sula dactylatra</i>							✓						
80	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>				✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	
81	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Urile penicillatus</i>						✓			✓	✓	✓		
82	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
83	American White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>					✓	✓							
84	Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>						✓							
85	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓				✓							
86	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>						✓					✓		
87	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>													✓
88	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		✓			✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	
89	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>									✓		✓		
90	Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>						✓					✓		
91	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>						✓							
92	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>		✓			✓	✓					✓		

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced			March 2022												
	Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
93	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>				✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		
94	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>						✓							
95	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
96	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
97	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
98	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>		✓											
99	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	✓	✓											
100	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>						Prob		✓					
101	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>		✓		✓									
102	Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>		✓											
103	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	✓					✓					✓		
104	Gila Woodpecker - N	<i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i>										✓	✓		
105	Nuttall's Woodpecker - N	<i>Dryobates nuttallii</i>		✓											
106	Ladder-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates scalaris</i>											✓		
107	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		✓						✓					
108	Gilded Flicker - N	<i>Colaptes chrysoides</i>											✓		
109	Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>								✓					
110	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓		✓						✓		✓	
111	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>		✓											
112	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>				✓									
113	American Grey Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax wrightii</i>											✓		
114	Ash-throated Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>				✓						✓	✓	✓	
115	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>								✓		✓	✓	✓	
116	California Scrub Jay	<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>		✓									✓		
117	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓											
118	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓						✓	✓		
119	Phainopepla - N	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>											✓		
120	Oak Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus inornatus</i>		✓											
121	Verdin - N	<i>Auriparus flaviceps</i>										✓	✓	✓	
122	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>											✓		
123	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>		✓											
124	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓											

	E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic I=Introduced		March 2022												
	Common name	Scientific name	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
125	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>		✓											
126	Cactus Wren - N	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>											✓		
127	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>												✓	
128	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>		✓											
129	Blue-grey Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>										Prob	✓		
130	California Gnatcatcher - N	<i>Polioptila californica</i>											✓		
131	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>		✓											
132	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	✓							✓		✓	✓	✓	
133	Grey Thrasher - E	<i>Toxostoma cinereum</i>											✓		
134	California Thrasher - N	<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>								✓					
135	Common Starling - I	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓											
136	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>		✓											
137	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>		✓											
138	House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓											
139	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>		✓								✓	✓		
140	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>		✓											
141	Black-throated Sparrow - N	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>										✓	✓	✓	
142	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>		✓											
143	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>		✓											
144	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>				✓									
145	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		✓											
146	California Towhee - N	<i>Melospiza crissalis</i>		✓											
147	Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>											✓		
148	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>		✓											
149	Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>		✓	✓										
150	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>											✓		
151	American Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>		✓											
152	Audobon's Warbler	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>		✓											
153	Mangrove Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>						✓							
154	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>		✓											
155	Black-headed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>										Poss			
156	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>											✓		

Others

	Common name	Scientific name	March 2022												
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	Mammals														
1	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>							✓						
2	Guadalupe Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus townsendi</i>				✓									
3	Californian Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
4	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>				✓									
5	Gray Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>			✓		✓	✓							
6	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>							8			15			
7	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>			poss										
8	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>			4	✓	poss		✓	✓					
9	Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>													Prob
10	Long-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>				✓			✓						✓
11	Short-beaked Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>			✓	✓			✓						
12	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Sagmatias obliquidens</i>			✓										
13	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓	Prob	✓	✓	
14	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>								✓			✓		
15	White-tailed Antelope Squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i>											✓		
16	California Ground Squirrel	<i>Otospermophilus beecheyi</i>	✓	✓											
17	Chipmunk sp	<i>Neotamias sp</i>								✓					
	Reptiles														
1	Loggerhead Sea Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>											✓		
2	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>						✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
3	Baja California Rock Lizard	<i>Petrosaurus thalassinus</i>											✓		
4	Western Fence Lizard	<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>		✓											
5	Common Side-blotched Lizard	<i>Uta stansburiana</i>				✓					✓	✓			
	Fish														
1	Long-spine Porcupinefish	<i>Diodon holocanthus</i>									✓				
2	Ocean Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>			✓										

	Common name	Scientific name	March 2022												
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
3	Yellow Boxfish	<i>Ostracion cubicus</i>												✓	
4	Guineafowl Pufferfish	<i>Arothron meleagris</i>									✓				
5	Spotted Sharpnosed Puffer	<i>Canthigaster punctatissima</i>											✓		
6	King Angelfish	<i>Holacanthus passer</i>									✓		✓	✓	
7	Yellowtail Surgeonfish	<i>Prionurus punctatus</i>									✓				
8	Cortez Rainbow Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma lucasanum</i>									✓				
9	Panamic Sergeant Major	<i>Abudefduf troschelii</i>									✓				
10	Striped Marlin	<i>Kajikia audax</i>									Prob				
11	Common Remora	<i>Remora remora</i>												✓	
12	Blue-spotted Cornetfish	<i>Fistularia commersonii</i>									✓			✓	
13	Scalloped Hammerhead	<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>										✓			
14	Giant Devil Ray	<i>Mobula mobular</i>											1000's		
15	Smoothtail Mobula	<i>Mobula thurstoni</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Swordfish	<i>Xiphias gladius</i>			✓										
17	Whale shark	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>									✓				