

**Bobcat quest:
Point Reyes National Seashore,
California
14-18 February 2020**



Bobcat

I only had four days to try for what turned out to be my 24th cat species. So given the limited time I opted for hiring a guide (Daniel Dietrich) who lives next to the park and came highly recommended. On the day we targeted the bobcat, Daniel found two different animals and on the last occasion, resulted in a memorable 3 hour “walking with bobcat” experience. In addition, I saw all my other targets (Gray fox, American badger and North American river otter) and recorded 19 mammal species of which 15 were lifers.

On the first evening, Daniel suggested trying for **American badger**. He made it look easy as he spotted one animal within the first hour whilst it was still light. It had just emerged from its burrow and seemed to be waiting for the light to fade before it trotted off across the field. A pair of **coyotes** were also out on the prowl nearby but after a short stand-off they all went on their way. We also spotted **Black-tailed deer**, **Tule elk** and a **Black-tailed jack rabbit**.

The next day we set off at first light to try for **North American river otter**. Looking over a lagoon and waiting for something to break the surface, we didn’t have to wait long. A family of three animals

appeared about 50m away as they hunted and cavorted beneath our vantage point. A great start to the day. We then headed back to the car and as the early sun started to evaporate the overnight dew the search for bobcat began. After a couple of hours, Daniel spotted a **bobcat** on a distant hill at a range that only an experienced guide would have picked up its vaguely feline contours. We drove and walked to within a couple of hundred meters and watched it as it hunted and eventually moved out of sight.

Later in the day we spotted a second **bobcat** very close to the road. We walked to a point where we could watch it hunt. It waited for an hour for a rodent to emerge, pounced but failed and then finally decided to move on. We followed at a distance that allowed us to observe the cat without causing it to change its behavior. Fantastic. That night I drove down to Pierce Point Ranch and saw **Striped skunk**, **Raccoon** and **Gray fox** on the roadside.

The next day I drove to Monterey Bay for a pre-booked whale watching trip. As with any of my whale watching trips, the weather changed, a storm was brewing, yesterday was “the best day” and half the passengers turned green within an hour. Regretting the pancakes for breakfast, I did get distant views of a **Gray whale** but most of the other hoped for cetaceans wisely took the day off. There were also **California sea lions** in the harbor.

On my last day in Point Reyes I spent the morning with Daniel and we visited the beach near Chimney rock to see the **Northern Elephant seals**. Seeing these behemoths (2500 kg and 4 m long) hauled out on the beach conjures up a Jurassic scene. The Northern Elephant seal were almost hunted to extinction by the late 1800’s but 20-30 animals survived and with protection, began to recover.

We spend the rest of the morning staking out an area frequented by **Bottas pocket gopher** and Long-tailed weasel. Daniel spotted the tell-tail signs of fresh soil moving and out popped the head of a gopher for a few seconds before disappearing back down its tunnel. The Long-tailed weasel was the only species I dipped on during the trip.

I spent the afternoon walking the trails around the Bear Valley visitor center and picked up **Sonoma chipmunk** and **Western gray squirrel**.



American badger



Northern elephant seal

Guide:

Daniel is a guide, filmmaker and a conservationist which means he is careful when approaching animals, is informed about local management issues and engages in trying to get the best result for wildlife. He is also great company.

Point Reyes Safaris - <https://www.pointreyessafaris.com/>

Daniel Dietrich daniel@danieldietrichphotography.com

Itinerary

14 Feb - Picked up hire car at San Francisco airport and drove two hours to Inverness, Point Reyes. Daniel has an Airbnb which is reasonably priced and very well appointed. Evening drive with Daniel.

15 Feb - All day in Point Reyes with Daniel visiting a number of sites in search of bobcat. Self- drive from dusk to 10pm.

16 Feb - Drove 3 hours to Monterey bay for a lunchtime whale watching cruise (lasting 3 hours) and then returned to Point Reyes.

17 Feb – Morning with Daniel and then spent afternoon at the Bear Valley visitor center walking trails. Night drive.

18 Feb - Depart to San Francisco airport.

MAMMAL LIST

1	Bobcat <i>Lynx rufus</i>	Two animals seen on the first day. One spotted by Daniel in the morning on a distant hillside and a second animal in the afternoon which we watched hunting for 3 hours. Fantastic
2	American badger <i>Taxidea taxus</i>	One animal seen at dusk on the first night just outside its burrow.
3	North American river otter <i>Lontra canadensis</i>	A family of 3 animals seen at dawn from a hilltop overlooking lagoon.
4	Striped skunk <i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	One animal seen on each night drive on the road to Pierce Point Ranch.

5	Raccoon <i>Procyon lotor</i>	A pair seen on the roadside at night near the Pierce Point Ranch
6	Gray fox <i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>	Several animals seen on night drives crossing the road
7	Coyote <i>Canis latrans</i>	A pair seen hunting on the first night and heard calling on several occasions.
8	Black-tailed jack rabbit <i>Lepus californicus</i>	A couple of animals seen at dusk in fields near the visitor center
9	Californian Brush rabbit <i>Sylvilagus bachmani</i>	Several animals seen at dawn near the boardwalk on the way to the lagoon.
10	Black-tailed deer <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Several seen in the reserve
11	Tule elk <i>Cervus canadensis nannodes</i>	Several impressive looking animals seen in the reserve
12	California ground squirrel <i>Otospermophilus beecheyi</i>	Chance sighting by the roadside on the main highway to San Francisco.
13	Western gray squirrel <i>Sciurus griseus</i>	One seen on the Earthquake trail near the Bear Valley visitor center.
14	Sonoma chipmunk <i>Tamias sonomae</i>	One seen on the Earthquake trail near the visitor center.
15	Bottas pocket gopher <i>Thomomys bottae</i>	One seen emerging from its burrow on the last morning. Daniel picked the perfect spot.
16	Northern elephant seal <i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>	One of the highlights of the trip. These enormous creatures are on the beach near Chimney rock. Even at a distance they are a spectacular sight.
17	California sea lion <i>Zalophus californianus</i>	Large groups around Monterey bay
18	Harbor seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Several animals seen at Point Reyes hunting along the seashore.

19 **Gray whale**
Eschrichtius robustus

A few seen from the boat in Monterey bay despite the swell. Other cetaceans are possible depending on the time of year and the weather (!).

Contact:

Monterey Bay Whale Watch

mbww@gowhales.com

