

WINTER IN
CENTRAL CALIFORNIA
9–13 January 2013



Join us this coming winter for our annual pilgrimage to the San Francisco Bay Area. We'll show you an abundance of wintering and California specialty birds while visiting the best habitat oases in this major metropolitan area. Come share some of our favorite winter birding hotspots.

Your Host and Guide, Stephen Shunk

TRIP SUMMARY

This extended weekend adventure will take us from San Francisco Bay to Monterey Bay in search of an abundance of wintering and resident avifauna. The region's mild climate and broad habitat diversity contribute to outstanding winter birding, and depending on the weather, we could easily tally up to 200 species. Each day will include plenty of birding, with the bonus of returning to the same lodging each evening in San Jose.



East San Francisco Bay Area

We will meet on Wednesday afternoon, January 10, at the San Jose International Airport, with a couple hours of birding time in local parks before sunset. Some of the resident birds we can expect may include Western Scrub-Jay, Wrentit, California Towhee, Oak Titmouse, California Quail, and Nuttall's Woodpecker. We will then check into our motel and enjoy our first dinner together in San Jose.

Our first full day, Thursday, will take us north to Alameda County, where we will scour Arrowhead Marsh and Alameda Island during the highest tide of the year. Arrowhead supports one of the highest concentrations of Clapper Rails in the San Francisco Bay, and the rising tide will force the rails out of hiding. We could see dozens of Clappers, as well as Sora and Virginia Rail, with a chance for the very rare Yellow Rail. The tide also forces skulking songbirds up to easy viewing heights in the marsh vegetation, and we could see Nelson's or Swamp sparrow among the resident Song Sparrows and Marsh Wrens. The uplands of this regional shoreline can also host Cackling and Greater White-fronted geese, as well as Eurasian Wigeon or the rare Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal. Alameda Island serves as an excellent high-tide roost for wintering shorebirds, and we will sort through many species of sandpipers, with a good chance for Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone.



After we explore the shorelines we will enjoy lunch in Alameda followed by a visit to Oakland's Lake Merritt, which hosts an amazing diversity of wintering waterfowl. A few of the expected species will include Canvasback, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Greater Scaup, and the Tufted Duck is all but annual at this urban park. Ornamental trees around the lake may host Red-breasted and possible Williamson's or Red-naped Sapsuckers. If Mountain Plovers are being reported in Solano County, we will make a detour to the north-bay agricultural fields to search for this enigmatic "shorebird", along with Ferruginous Hawk and flocks of Horned Larks. Otherwise, we will spend the afternoon in southwestern Contra Costa County, birding the wildland oasis at Coyote Hills Park.

Red-shouldered Hawk and White-tailed Kite should be conspicuous here, and we could easily find a Peregrine Falcon patrolling the ponds. In addition, we will sort through the many songbirds for wintering warblers and resident specialties of the region, before returning to San Jose for the evening.

Monterey Bay Area

We will spend all day Friday exploring the tidal estuaries, open waters, and protected harbors of Monterey Bay. We will time our visit to Pt. Lobos for the extreme low tide so that we can explore some of the Pacific Coast's most productive tidepools. While wandering through gardens of anemones, urchins, and sea palms, we will enjoy "rockpipers" galore, with good chances for Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, and Black Turnstone. Egrets will join us for their low-tide fishing rituals, and we should have excellent looks at both harbor seals and California sea lions on the offshore rocks. Monterey Harbor always hosts the charismatic California sea otter, and the open bay could produce all three scoter species, Harlequin and Long-tailed ducks, numerous loons and grebes, and an abundance of gulls, including Mew and Glaucous-winged gulls. Our final stop in the region will take us to Moss Landing, at the mouth of Elkhorn Slough, where we will sort through a plethora of waterbirds while enjoying rafts of otters loafing in the harbor. The day will culminate with dinner at the world-famous Phil's Fish Market, where we will savor the seafood bounty of the Pacific Ocean. *NOTE: If time allows, we may sneak in a visit to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, with its world class sealife exhibits that include diving common murrelets, bat ray petting pool, sea otter habitat, and shorebird aviary; this would incur additional expense.*



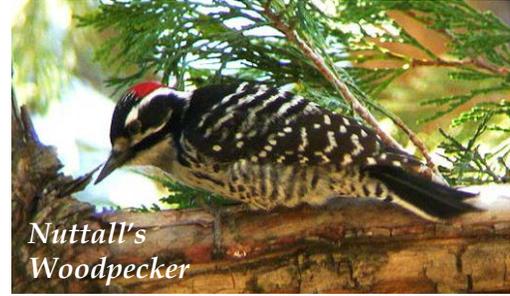
Diablo Mountains and Panoche Valley

On Saturday, we will head south of San Jose through the Coyote Valley, farther south along Tres Pinos Creek, and into the gorgeous Panoche Valley. This very rural region is one of the best places to "clean-up" on most of the Central California passerines, without the roar of traffic and honking of horns that haunt you while birding in the city or suburbs. Some of the many highlights will include: the song of the California Thrasher; up to 5 woodpecker species; the comical Greater Roadrunner; the sleek Phainopepla; and gregarious flocks of Yellow-billed Magpies. Paicines Reservoir usually hosts wintering Bald Eagles and sometimes a Tundra Swan, as well as the occasional Cassin's Kingbird. Panoche Valley itself is famous for its wintering Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon, with Golden Eagle along the ridgelines, hordes of Lark Sparrow on the fencerows, and on rare occasions, flocks of Mountain Plover in the dirt fields. We will also cross into the Panoche Hills to look for Mountain Bluebirds, before returning to San Jose for our final evening.



South San Francisco Bay Area

We will reserve our final morning for explorations of the most productive birding hot spots in the South Bay area. Depending on local bird reports we may visit Shoreline Lake and Charleston Slough for an abundance of waterbird species, including possible Black Skimmer and American Bittern (along with the resident Burrowing Owls). We may also head into Alum Rock Park for more California specialties, such as Acorn and Nuttall's woodpeckers, Hutton's Vireo, California Thrasher, Band-tailed Pigeon, and possible Canyon Wren or Northern Pygmy-Owl. We will return to San Jose airport by 2 p.m. for 4 p.m. or later departures. Depending on your travel plans, you may wish to stay in San Jose on Sunday night for a Monday morning return flight.



Bay Area Rarities

One of the highlights of birding in the Bay Area is the expectation of rarities that visit the region, especially in winter. We will closely watch local bird reports and the tallies of local Christmas Bird Counts, and we may divert our route depending on our success at finding our primary target species. Just a few of the rare birds we have seen on past trips include: Emperor Goose; Brown Booby; Black Rail; Lesser Black-backed and Slaty-backed gulls; Broad-winged Hawk; Rock Sandpiper; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Black-throated Blue Warbler; Blue Jay; Grasshopper Sparrow; and Rusty Blackbird.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

This tour will appeal to birders at a broad range of experience levels. Birders with more advanced skills may be able to identify more of the anticipated species, while less experienced birders can be guaranteed excellent looks at many potential life-birds. Your guides, Stephen Shunk and Christine Elder, are patient, experienced educators, and they will work diligently to help each participant learn bird identification, as well as general natural history and ecology of the region.



This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Each day will involve plenty of light walking, although the weather may force us to do some birding from the vehicle. We will occasionally walk over rugged terrain, but individual walks will be short and at a “birdwatcher’s pace,” allowing each participant equal chance to view birds from all angles. We will eat breakfast at about 7:00 a.m. each morning, and we will often bird until sunset (about 5:15 p.m.), although the short winter days will allow us plenty of evening time for relaxation and a review of our day.

Depending on the group size, we will either travel in a large 12-passenger van or a minivan, and we will take a *maximum of seven participants*, allowing everyone their own window-seat. We will repeatedly enter and exit the vehicle from an entrance that is high off the ground, although a step-stool will be provided if we use the large van. This is a non-smoking tour. We will stay in non-smoking hotels and eat in non-smoking restaurants.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Cool to mild temperatures predominate in winter in Central California, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience dense fog, pouring rain, or extended periods of sun, all in the same day. You should be prepared to be outside for short periods in rainy weather. Please pack conservatively, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.



We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and field guide. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we will have at least one spotting scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning. We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photographs.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend all four nights in a San Jose-area Best Western hotel. The tour fees below include lodging at both single and double occupancy. If you are traveling with a birding partner and wish to share a room, we should be able to accommodate you. If we are unable to place you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages from dinner on Wednesday, January 9, through lunch on Sunday, January 13. We will eat most meals in restaurants that appeal to a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or even in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your personal preferences.



We will eat breakfast out on most mornings, though coffee and tea will be available for early risers in the hotel lobbies. We will eat lunches in local restaurants or rural cafes. Dinners will be eaten together at casual local eateries, often at dusk. In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide foods and beverages for snacks in the field. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of your birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks for your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

Your trip fee includes transportation from San Jose. Please arrive at San Jose International Airport by 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 9, to allow time for some afternoon birding in San Jose. We will return to San Jose airport by 2 p.m. Sunday, January 13, for evening departures or a layover night before Monday morning flights.

If you plan to drive to San Jose, we will send you directions to the hotel as the trip date approaches. If this schedule is difficult for you, let us know and we will do our best to help with your travel plans. If you need assistance with travel, we recommend DTR Travel: www.dtrtravel.com/.

Our daily route will follow the itinerary below. However, please note that we may adjust our specific birding destinations depending on a number of factors, including tides, local bird reports, weather, and our success at finding certain species. If you have additional questions about the route or certain birding spots, please contact us at your convenience.

Wednesday, January 9: South San Francisco Bay Area
Arrive in San Jose by 2 p.m.; birding local parks.

Thursday, January 10: East San Francisco Bay Area
Bayshore and urban parks in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Friday, January 11: Monterey Bay Area
Moss Landing, Monterey Bay and Harbor, and Pt. Lobos.

Saturday, January 12: Diablo Range & Panoche Valley
San Benito County's most productive birding spots.

Sunday, January 13: South San Francisco Bay Area
Bayshore, uplands, and urban oases; return to San Jose by 2 p.m.



TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and beverages from Wednesday afternoon through Sunday afternoon; lodging at single or double occupancy; transportation from San Jose; facility, permit, and license fees; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guides. The fee does not include guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

TOUR FEE: \$1,585 single/\$1,365 double
NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT: \$95
BALANCE AFTER DEPOSIT: \$1,490 single/\$1,270 double

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a maximum of 7 participants on this tour.

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 60 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 60 and 30 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 30 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future.

You may send your non-refundable \$95 deposit to the address below to hold your spot, with the balance due 60 days prior to trip date. *We look forward to seeing you in California this winter!*

CONTACT INFORMATION

Paradise Birding
P.O. Box 547
Sisters, OR 97759

Phone: 541-408-1753
E-mail: steve@paradisebirding.com