

WINTER IN
CENTRAL CALIFORNIA
16–22 January 2011



Join me this January for our annual pilgrimage to the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas, and let me show you the very best birding in my old stomping grounds. In addition to the abundance of winter birds, I will show you my favorite restaurants and 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 week-long birding adventure will take us from Point Reyes to Monterey Bay and inland to the oak-studded Diablo Mountains in search of an abundance of wintering and resident avifauna. The region's mild climate and broad habitat diversity harbor a huge variety of resident specialty birds, from Yellow-billed Magpie to California Thrasher, and Nuttall's Woodpecker to Wrentit. As the days grow shorter in the northern hemisphere, many thousands of migrants from the north also make this region their winter home. Depending on the weather, we could easily tally up to 200 species.

San José to Panoche Valley

We will meet on Sunday afternoon, January 16, at the San José 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 José.

Our first full day will take us into the Diablo Mountains, south of San José 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 Hawks and Prairie Falcons, with Golden Eagle along the ridgelines, hordes of Lark Sparrows on the fencerows, and on rare occasions, flocks of Mountain Plovers in the dirt fields. We will also cross into the Panoche Hills to look for Mountain Bluebirds. Dinner and night in San José

San Francisco Peninsula and Pt Reyes

We will spend our next couple of nights in Marin County, where we will explore some of the most beautiful open spaces in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. On our route northward, we will stop at Palo Alto Baylands and Charleston Slough, where we will check for Barrow's Goldeneye and Surf Scoter on Shoreline Lake, plus nearby Black Skimmer, American Bittern, and an abundance of duck and shorebird species. A stop farther up the San Francisco Peninsula will put us on a small harbor at Coyote Point, where we will enjoy our first "rock-pipers" on the jetties and gravel bars exposed by the tides. We should also find Clark's Grebe, Common Loon, and possibly a Harlequin Duck.

Depending on local bird reports, we may stop in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park for a rare warbler or vireo, or at Ocean Beach for resident Snowy Plover. After crossing the Golden Gate Bridge we will make our final planned stop of the day at Las Gallinas, where rarities are regular each winter, including Greater White-fronted and Cackling Geese.

From inland Marin County, we will bird our way to the coast, with brief stops here and there for Red-breasted Sapsucker or Hooded Merganser. Our big day at Point Reyes may begin at Bolinas Lagoon, where Eurasian Wigeons can occur by the dozen. Tufted Duck and Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal are almost annual on the lagoon, and we could see Osprey and multiple falcon species patrolling the shoreline. We will also bird the parklands adjacent to the lagoon, searching for the first Allen's Hummingbird of the season, along with wintering songbird flocks that may include Townsend's and Hermit Warblers, Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, and Spotted Towhee. Deeper into the Pt. Reyes woodlands, we will visit specialized habitats for Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Duck, Varied Thrush, and Tricolored Blackbird.

East Bay and return to San José

From Pt. Reyes, we head around the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay, first making a stop in Solano County to follow up on raptor reports and possible Mountain Plovers. We will time the tides this day to see the flood at Oakland's Arrowhead Marsh, where dozens of Clapper Rails will rest on the pier and shoreline waiting for the water to recede. Yellow Rail has also occurred here, as have Swamp and Nelson's Sharp-tailed sparrows. Another Oakland stop at Lake Merritt may produce a Tufted Duck or Barrow's Goldeneye, with a good chance for Red-breasted and possible Williamson's or Red-naped Sapsuckers in the ornamental trees. Afternoon birding will take us into the Coyote Hills in search of White-tailed Kite, Wrentit, Virginia Rail, and Sora. We should also see Hutton's Vireo, California and Spotted Towhees, and resident Red-shouldered Hawk.

Monterey Bay Area

Our final full day will take us birding along the spectacular coastlines of Monterey County. We will start our day at Moss Landing, where we will see our first California Sea Otters, along with possible Pacific Loon and Long-tailed Duck. Nearby shorebirds may include Snowy Plover, Marbled Godwit, and Lesser Yellowlegs. Our proximity to the ocean should also bring us Mew, Western, Thayer's, and Glaucous-winged Gulls. From here we will head to Pt. Lobos State Reserve to explore some of the region's most productive tide pools at the extreme low tide. A rainbow of marine invertebrates is painted across the rocks and crevices of the park, while Black Oystercatcher, Surfbird, and possibly a Wandering Tattler observe us crawling around on the rocks. We will make our final stop of the day at Monterey Harbor, which regularly hosts a wintering Harlequin Duck, and beyond the jetties we may see Red-throated Loon, Black Scoter, or Ancient Murrelet.

San José's Alum Rock Park

The last morning will take us into San José's Alum Rock Park, where Paradise Birding's Steve Shunk first began his birding career. This gorgeous city park is a true oasis tucked into a steep canyon that is just minutes from downtown San José. Western Screech-Owl can sometimes be found roosting in the park and Northern Pygmy-Owl is resident here. Canyon Wren and American Dipper often overwinter in the bottom of the canyon, and we should get excellent looks at a number of the Central California's other specialty songbirds. Alum Rock also can rarely host wintering Lawrence's Goldfinch and Hammond's Flycatcher. Our easy walk through the park will take us through the historic hot springs, where turn-of-the-20th-century San José residents arrived via electric train for a real spa vacation. After an early lunch, we will return to San José airport by noon for 2 p.m. departures.

More on Bay Area Birds

One of the highlights of birding in the Bay Area is the regularity of rarities that visit the region, especially in winter. We will closely watch the various bird reports and the tallies of local Christmas Bird Counts and 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 and Rough-legged Hawks; Rock Sandpiper; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Black-throated Blue Warbler; Blue Jay; Green-tailed Towhee; Gray Catbird, Grasshopper Sparrow; and Rusty Blackbird.

Common birds expected on most days include: Western Scrub-Jay; Oak Titmouse; California and Spotted Towhees; Acorn and Nuttall's Woodpeckers; Wren-tit; Red-shouldered Hawk; California Quail; Anna's Hummingbird; Black Phoebe; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; and "Sooty" Fox and Golden-crowned Sparrows.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

This tour will appeal to birders at a broad range of experience levels. Those 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 guide, Stephen Shunk, is a patient, experienced educator, and he will work diligently to help each participant learn bird identification, as well as general natural and cultural history 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.

The group will travel in a large 12-passenger van, 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. 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 fog, rain, or extended periods of sun, all in one 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

In order to plan our destinations around the highest and lowest tides, we will split our stay in San José in two, spending our first two nights there, then two in Novato, and then returning to San José for our last two nights. 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 Sunday, January 16, through lunch on Saturday, January 22. 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 some lunches in restaurants and some in the field. Dinners will usually be eaten together at casual local eateries, often at dusk. In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide foods and beverages for snacks and meals 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 José. Please arrive at San José International Airport by 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 16, to allow time for some afternoon birding in San José. We will return to San José by noon Saturday, January 22, for 2:00 p.m. or later departures. If you plan to drive to San José, 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 of Colorado: <http://www.dtrtravel.com/>.

Our daily route will follow the itinerary below. However, we may adjust some of 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.

Sunday, January 16: South San Francisco Bay Area

Arrive in San José by 2 p.m. Birding local parks; dinner and night in San José.

Monday, January 17: Panoche Valley–Diablo Range

Birding rural San Benito County; dinner and night in San José.

Tuesday, January 18: San Francisco Peninsula–Marin County

Birding bayshore preserves; dinner and night in Novato.

Wednesday, January 19: Pt. Reyes & Marin County

Birding Pt. Reyes birding hotspots; dinner and night in Novato.

Thursday, January 20: North Bay Area & East Bayshore
Birding Solano County and western bayshore; dinner and night in San José.

Friday, January 21: Monterey Bay Area
Birding Monterey County south to Pt. Lobos; dinner and night in San José.

Saturday, January 22: Alum Rock Park
Birding in east San José; depart San José after 2 p.m.

TOUR FEE

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

SINGLE TOUR FEE:	\$2,145 single/\$1,815 double
NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT:	\$95
BALANCE AFTER DEPOSIT:	\$2,050 single/\$1,720 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. For more information, please call 541-408-1753 or e-mail steve@paradisebirding.com.
We look forward to seeing you in California this winter!

CONTACT INFORMATION

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