

Southern California: Fall Coastal Birding Species List | October 3-10, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guide Robert Petty. Our clients included Vicki, Meredith, and Chuck.

The southern coast of California stretches from Point Conception to San Diego, forming a striking meeting of rugged headlands, sandy beaches, and coastal wetlands shaped by the Pacific Ocean. The coastline bends eastward below Point Conception, giving rise to sheltered bays and estuaries such as Bolsa Chica and the San Diego River mouth, while offshore lie the Channel Islands—isolated remnants of the region’s complex geologic past.

Mediterranean in climate, the region experiences mild winters, dry summers, and the cool influence of the California Current, which sustains rich marine ecosystems. Coastal sage scrub and chaparral cloak the hills, giving way to tidal marshes and mudflats that serve as vital stopovers for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. Brown Pelicans glide low over the surf, Elegant Terns and Heermann’s Gulls gather along the coast, and Western Snowy Plovers inhabit protected beaches. Wetlands host egrets, herons, and Ridgway’s Rails, while rocky points such as La Jolla and Point Loma attract cormorants, Black Oystercatchers, and migrating shorebirds. Inland oak woodlands, riparian corridors, and coastal sage scrub shelter such California specialties as Oak Titmouse, Nuttall’s Woodpecker, Wrentit, and California Gnatcatcher.

Offshore, nutrient-rich waters support an extraordinary diversity of marine life and seabirds, from shearwaters and storm-petrels to phalaropes, gulls, and terns. Together, the interplay of ocean currents, arid uplands, wetlands, islands, and remarkably diverse habitats makes the Southern California coast one of the most ecologically varied and bird-rich regions in North America. Our week included a trip to the Channel Island National Park, Coal Oil Point Reserve, Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Cabrillo National Monument, and many other remarkably bird-rich areas. Each of our clients counted at least 20 new life birds during the tour.

BIRDS 137 species were recorded of which 1 was heard only, 2 were endemic and 6 were introduced. Details are included below.

The eBird link below details the 137 species of birds our group observed during the tour.

[Southern California Fall Coastal Birding | Oct 2026 | eBird Trip Report](#)

MAMMALS: — (10)

California Ground Squirrel *Otospermophilus beecheyi* — We saw numerous California Ground Squirrels throughout the week, and was the first mammal of the tour, spotted at Mugu Rock on our way north to Santa Barbara

Fox Squirrel (I) *Sciurus niger* — Like the ground squirrel, we spotted many fox squirrels during our tour.

Desert Cottontail *Sylvilagus audubonii* — We saw two Desert Cottontails, one on our short walk inland from Coal Oil Point Reserve beach, and another at the Tujuana River Valley Bird and Butterfly Garden

Island Fox *Urocyon littoralis* — we only saw one Island Fox in the campground area at Scorpion Cove. It was a brutally hot day (above 100 degrees) and the fox looked weary.

Coyote *Canis latrans* — One coyote was seen on our tour during the unplanned trip out to Ramona Grasslands County Reserve.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina* — Harbor seals were found on our first full day of the tour during our boat ride to Santa Cruz Island. They were also seen during our whale watch tour.

California Sea Lion *Zalophus californianus* — In addition to being seen on both pelagic trips, we got great looks at this species sunning themselves at La Jolla Cove.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* — Only one whale was seen during our tour, the Humpback, and it was seen during our trip out to the Channel Islands, not on the whale watching tour.

Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* — We encounter a tremendously large pod of Common Bottlenose Dolphins, well over 200 individuals, during our boat trip out to Santa Cruz Island.

Short-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis* — Just like the Bottlenose, we encounter a huge pod of Short-beaked Common Dolphins, easily 200 individuals, during our Santa Cruz boat trip.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: — (1)

Western Fence Lizard *Sceloporus occidentalis* — We saw a Western Fence Lizard on several days, first in a dry creek bed on our walk in Scorpion Cove on Santa Cruz Island

Fish: — (2)

California Flying Fish *Cheilopogon pinnatibarbus* — Many of these fish were seen breaching the surface of the ocean and gliding just above the surface for perhaps 50 or more feet before dropping back into the water.

Round stingray *Urobatis helleri* — A Round Stingray was seen cruising below the boardwalk at Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve.

Insects: — (1)

Channel Island Jerusalem Cricket *Ammopelmatus islander* — During our lunch in the campground at Scorpion Cove, we spotted this large insect crawling through the dry leaves and duff just a dozen feet or so from our picnic table.