

California and Arizona, from May 27th – June 22nd 2015

After Stefanie and I had decided that our wedding would take place in spring 2015, we started looking at destinations for our “honeymoon”. Visiting the U.S.A. had always been high on our wishlist, so the decision was made quite quickly. Since we wanted a sunny destination with lots of mammals and birds, and some of the legendary national parks, we picked California and Arizona as the region to spend our vacation. With so many great national parks to visit, and only 3,5 weeks of time, we had plenty of possibilities to choose from. I read many reports from Mammalwatching and Cloudbirders, bought Vladimir Dinets new book, and after a lot of planning the itinerary took form (some archaeological places were added for Stefanie, these resulted in some nice observations of mammals too):

San Francisco – Point Reyes – Yosemite N.P. – Sequoia N.P. – Mojave N.P. – Seligman – Grand Canyon – Petrified Forest N.P. – Montezuma Castle N.M. – Tuzigoot N.M. – Casa Grande Ruins N.M. – Madera Canyon – Saguaro N.P. – Salton Sea – Anza Borrego – Joshua Tree N.P. – Ventura – Santa Cruz Island – Monterey – San Francisco.

For some of the most common species, like Mule deer and California ground squirrel, I will not mention every sighting, just the first for every location. The exact locations of all my sightings, and more pictures can be found on the following link (since chipmunk identification can be quite difficult, I decided to photograph as many chipmunks as possible):

http://observado.org/user/view/40127?q=&akt=0&g=2&from=2015-05-15&to=2015-06-30&prov=0&z=0&sp=0&gb=0&cdna=0&f=0&m=K&zeker=0&month=0&rows=100&only_hidden=0&zoeke&text=0&tag=0&plum=0&q=&zoeke&text=0&from=2015-05-15&g=0&akt=0&plum=0&to=2015-06-30&f=0&prov=0&z=0&m=K&zeker=0&rows=100&month=0&only_hidden=0

My main targets were Bobcat, Black-footed ferret, Blue Whale, the brown morph of American black bear, most of the special birds of the region, and we wanted to see a rattlesnake, and the small chance of coming across a Mountain Lion was always in the back of our mind ☺. Beside this, I thought that 50 new mammals was a realistic target.

Wednesday May 27th 2015

Our flight arrived on time, and after clearing customs and getting our hire car, we were on our way. Our first stop was near the Golden Gate Bridge, where we saw our first mammals of the trip: a **Common seal**, 10+ **Harbour porpoises** and our first **California sea lion**. After spending some time here we drove north to Point Reyes where I was hoping to see Bobcat. On the way we saw the first of many **Mule deer**, and another **Common seal**. We arrived quite late, and after driving around to find a hotel room or somewhere to eat, we decided to put up our tent on the campground, our first evening meal turned out to be some biscuits we had taken with us. Upon arriving at the campsite, a **Raccoon** was looking for some leftovers, and a **Mule deer** was hanging around too. While putting up our tent, two **Western pipistrelles** flew around. I had planned to do some nightdriving here, but after a very long day I was too tired, and it didn't take long for us to be asleep. At about 2 a.m. however I woke up because something was touching my head from outside the tent (we have a smll tent so my head is always against the side of the tent). I went outside, just in time to find a **Raccoon** running away. That's what they call close contact with wildlife ☺. Since I was awake now, I decided to take

the car and go for a short nightdrive in the hope of finding a Grey fox or a Bobcat. I drove around for about an hour and saw two **Raccoons**, two **Grey foxes** and a **Striped skunk**, most of these were near the Visitor Centre. An **unidentified mouse** crossed to road but I couldn't see any details.

Thursday May 28th 2015

As always when in a new country, I wake up at first light the first morning, with high expectations of what is coming. So at 5.30, I was walking around the campsite, scoring my first birds, and seeing more **Mule deer**, a **Western pipistrelle** finishing it's nightly hunt, and there were signs of the presence of **Broad-footed mole** too.



Mule deer, Point Reyes National Seashore.

Stefanie was awake quite early too, so we drove to the visitor centre to have breakfast. **Western grey squirrels** were very common here, and on a short walk we saw a glimpse of our first **Brush rabbit**. After buying our National Park Pass, we drove towards the lighthouse, hoping to see some more wildlife along the way. Despite what we had expected, it was quite cold and foggy here, not the idea we had of California! On our way to the lighthouse we had great views of our first **Coyote** (we had heard two Coyotes howling in Quebec a few years ago, this was the first time we actually saw one).



Coyote, Point Reyes National Seashore.

Since it was already the end of May, we were too late for seeing Grey Whales, but nonetheless we tried for half an hour from the lighthouse area, seeing only three **Harbour porpoises** and some **California sea lions**. Next stop was the **Northern elephant seal** location, where more than 500 of these giants were present.



Northern elephant seal, Point Reyes National Seashore.

In the afternoon we went to the northern part of Point Reyes, to see if we could find some Tule Elk and maybe a Bobcat. It started off nice with another Coyote, and then suddenly a **Long-tailed weasel** crossed the road, carrying a mouse in its mouth! It disappeared, but by making some squeaky sounds I could lure it onto the road again for another short view. I had seen this species before in Ecuador, but I read about how difficult they can be in the U.S.A., and seeing a mustelid is always nice, so I was very happy with this great sighting! The **Tule elks** were easy to find, we found four herds of 53 animals in total.



Tule elk, Point Reyes National Seashore.

Since the weather was still pretty cold, we decided to drive to Yosemite today, a National Park where we expected to see our first bears and some great scenery too. The drive took us longer than expected (a lot of traffic around San Francisco), and we arrived there by midnight. We hadn't made reservations for a campsite, but just before leaving home we had read that Tamarack Flat Campground was open earlier than in other years, so we tried to find a place there, and luckily there were some free spots (despite a sign at the entrance road saying it was full).

Friday May 29th 2015

After a pretty cold night, I was up early again, finding my first **Douglas' squirrel** and **Lodgepole chipmunks** soon after leaving the tent. During a short walk around the campsite, **Golden-mantled ground squirrel** was added to the list as well. These three species turned out to be very common in this N.P., with lots of sightings each day (**Mule deer** was pretty common as well).



Golden-mantled ground squirrel, Yosemite N.P.

After breakfast we drove to Yosemite Valley, stopping now and then to enjoy the scenery. After getting some maps of the park, the rest of the day was spent hiking and enjoying the scenery and the nice weather. Mammalwise we only added **California ground squirrel** (abundant in the valley) to our list. In the evening we tried for Ringtail along the waterfall trail, but without any luck. At the campsite, an **unidentified bat** was heard later that evening.

Saturday May 30th 2015

Another full day in Yosemite, and still not a single bear seen, despite warning signs everywhere. Today we did a lot of hiking in the Sentinel Dome area, with the same mammals as yesterday, and a few **Western grey squirrels** as well. Despite not seeing any new mammals, it was a great day, and the scenery was just breathtaking in some places, really overwhelming (especially if you live in Belgium where scenic views almost don't exist ☺).

Sunday May 31st 2015

Since the Tioga Pass was open very early this year, we decided to go to Bodie State Historic Park today. Apart from the large numbers of **Mule deer**, on our way to the Tioga Pass we came across our first **Belding's ground squirrels**.



Belding's ground squirrel, Yosemite N.P.

A short stop just past the N.P. exit resulted in our first **Yellow-bellied marmot** and the only **Alpine chipmunk** of the trip. On the way to Bodie, several **Mountain cottontails** were seen too. We spent a few hours in Bodie, seeing 10+ **Least chipmunks**, and several **Belding's** and **Golden-mantled ground squirrels**. After this we drove back to Yosemite, where we wanted to walk the trail towards Mono Pass. It started promising, but after a few 100 meters it became too difficult to continue due to the presence of melting water crossing the trail. We chose another area for an evening walk, and went to Dog Lake. A chipmunk that I photographed here turned out to be our only **Yellow-pine chipmunk** of the trip (it was identified from the pictures by Vladimir Dinets).



Yellow-pine chipmunk, Yosemite N.P.

Other species seen in this area were the now already familiar species (**Mule deer**, **Lodgepole chipmunk**, **Douglas' squirrel** and **Golden-mantled ground squirrel**). Back at the campsite two **Deer mice** were present in the toilet blocks.



Mule deer, Yosemite N.P.

Monday June 1st 2016

Initially we had planned to leave Yosemite today, but since there was so much more to see, we decided to stay another night. This gave me the chance to try for some of the chipmunks that had eluded me so far. The first trail we tried was the Tuolumne Grove Trail, where **Long-eared chipmunks** proved to be very common. Apart from these, we also saw many **Douglas' squirrels**, some **California ground squirrels**, a **Western grey squirrel** and a **Mule deer**.



Long-eared chipmunk, Yosemite N.P.



California ground squirrel, Yosemite N.P.

After admiring the giant sequoias, we went to the Merced Grove trailhead to try for Allen's Chipmunk. After only a few minutes on this trail, a promising-looking chipmunk appeared, but is vanished before I could make a proper ID... We then continued along this trail, seeing only **Long-eared chipmunks** and one **California ground squirrel**. When we returned however, at almost the same location as earlier, another chipmunk appeared, and now I had good enough views to call it an **Allen's chipmunk!** I took some record shots, which I deleted unfortunately while I was cleaning up my memory cards to make space for more pictures... In the afternoon we walked the Mirror Lake Trail, with more of the same mammals. Another attempt for Ringtail in the evening didn't result in any mammals at all.



Western grey squirrel, Yosemite N.P.

So we finished our last full day in Yosemite N.P. without any bears or other larger mammals seen here, which was a bit disappointing. The amazing scenery and great observations of the other species however certainly made up for this!

Tuesday June 2nd 2015

Our final morning in Yosemite, with more of the same species. We left quite early to head towards Kings Canyon/Sequoia N.P. The only mammal seen on the road was a dead **Striped skunk**. We drove into Kings Canyon just after midday, where **Douglas'**, **Western grey** and **California ground squirrels** proved to be very common. Upon arriving at the visitor centre, we saw our first **American black bear** of the trip, one of the brown morph, followed a few minutes later by a brown mother with her black cub.

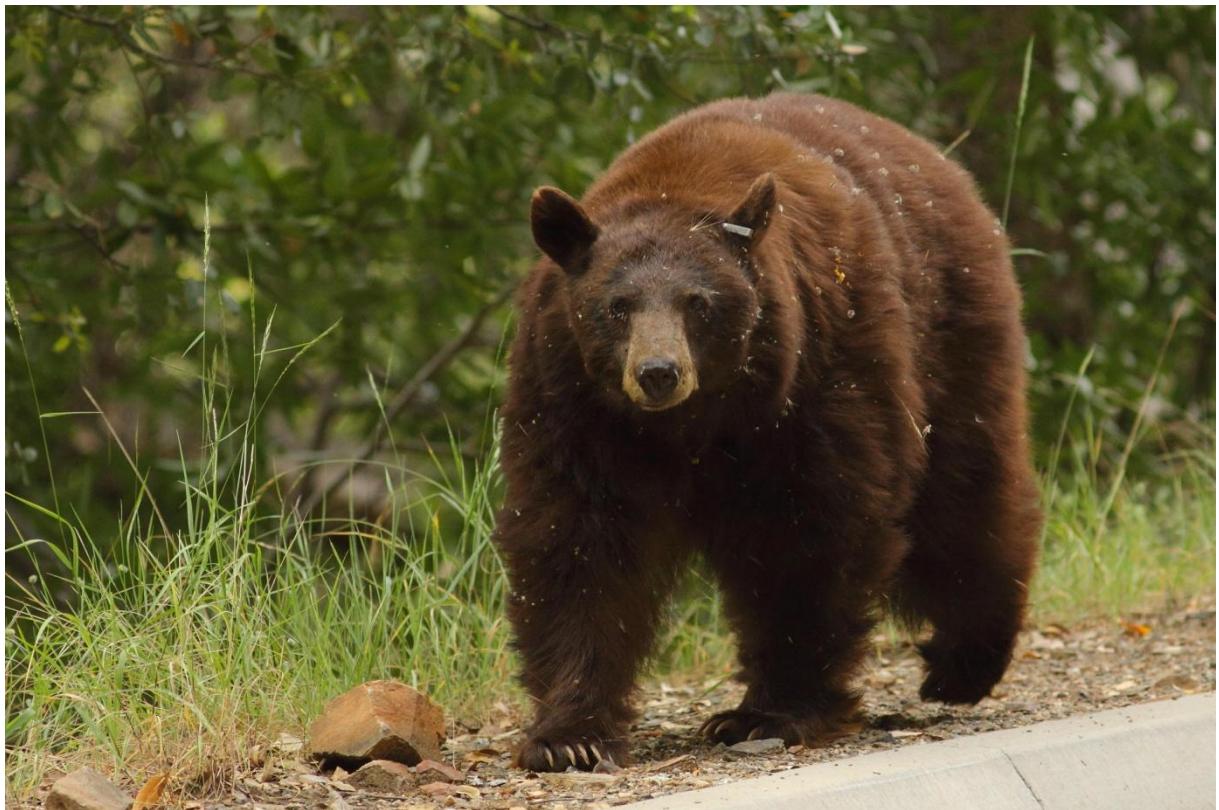


American black bear, Sequoia N.P.

This proved to be the start of a real bear-fest, which would end 45 hours later with our 24th and final bear! After getting some maps and information about the trails we headed for Potwisha Campground in Sequoia N.P., seeing another **American black bear** en route. At the campsite, **California ground squirrels** were abundant, and could be found in all sizes. At dusk, some **Western pipistrelles** flew around, and another bat which I think was a **California myotis**. After dinner, we went for a short evening walk, and when we turned right as we left the campsite, Stefanie noted something in the light of her headlamp. I took my torch and we immediately saw the shape of a cat, which turned out to be a nice **Bobcat**! This was one of my targets, so I was very happy with this one (any sighting of a wild cat is an everlasting memory)! It stayed in the bushes the whole time, allowing both of us great views, and although this is probably one of the easiest cats to see in the world, it was definitely one of the highlights of the trip. I tried to take some pictures with our compact camera, but this didn't really work out, and as we didn't want to bother it too much, we left. After this, we only saw some **Mule deer**, but when we returned about 30 minutes later, the cat was still there, giving us the opportunity to have another look. Back on the campsite, a **Grey fox** was looking for scraps and was seen quite well too.

Wednesday June 3rd 2015

Up early again, our first destination today was the trail towards Moro Rock, followed by some trails around the meadows near Crescent Meadow Road. The common species were all present (including many **Lodgepole chipmunks**), and the view from Moro Rock was very nice!



American black bear, Sequoia N.P.

In the area of the meadows, **American black bears** were everywhere, and present in all shapes and colours we could wish for (black, brown, cinnamon and blond). Sometimes, up to four different bears could be seen grazing in one of the larger meadows. We had great views of a sleeping young bear close to the path, it woke up from time to time to have a look at its admirers, but got to sleep again soon. We stayed with it for about an hour, taking lots of pictures and enjoying this beautiful animal.



American black bear, Sequoia N.P.

After we finally left, we were walking one of the trails, when we suddenly heard a sound, after which we saw two small bear cubs racing up a tree. We had great views, but immediately realized the mother would be nearby too... And indeed, we heard a grunt in front of us and saw a big angry mother bear appearing from behind a tree. Luckily she didn't charge, but just stood there watching us from about 15-20 meters. We slowly retraced our steps and watched from a distance how the cubs descended and the family left towards one of the meadows.



American black bear cub, Sequoia N.P.

The rest of the day was spent in this area, where two **Yellow-bellied marmots** were seen too. At the end of the day, we had seen an amazing total of 18 different **American black bears!** Back at the campsite in the evening, the **Grey fox** was present again too.



Lodgepole chipmunk, Sequoia N.P.



Western grey squirrel, Sequoia N.P.

Thursday June 4th 2015

Today was already our final half day in Sequoia, and the Tokopah Falls Trail was our destination. While heading there, we saw a **Coyote** crossing the road. The trail itself was really nice, and there were very few visitors early in the morning. Highlights were some **Yellow-bellied marmots**, another **Coyote**, and also the species I was hoping for, an **American pika**. Stefanie was the first to spot one as we returned, about hundred meters back from the waterfall, and we had great views.



Yellow-bellied marmot, Sequoia N.P.



American pika, Sequoia N.P.

After seeing our final **American black bears**, we left this beautiful N.P. and headed for the desert, towards Mojave Desert National Preserve. The drive was uneventful, with only another dead **Striped skunk** somewhere along the road. We arrived in Mojave just as the sun was setting, and had great views of the sunset. We headed for Mid Hills Campground, and saw lots of **Black-tailed jackrabbits** and **Audubon's cottontails**, and a few **Mule deer** as well. While setting up the tent, we almost stepped onto a scorpion, luckily we saw it just in time ☺. Despite the strong wind, I went out after dinner, and found some **unidentified mice** and a **Deer mouse**, but had good views of several **Merriam's kangaroo rats** too.



Merriam's kangaroo rat, Mojave Desert National Preserve.

Friday June 5th 2015

During the night, we were treated to the magical sound of howling **Coyotes**, truly wonderful! Early in the morning I saw some **Black-tailed jackrabbits** and an **Audubon's cottontail**, and my first **White-tailed antelope squirrels** as well. After breakfast we walked the trail towards Cima Dome, seeing more lagomorphs, and several **White-tailed antelope squirrels** too.



Black-tailed jackrabbit, Mojave Desert National Preserve.

A **California ground squirrel** came as a surprise at this location, and our first **Rock squirrel** was spotted too. Around midday we went to the Hole-in-the-Wall Visitor Centre (which was closed), and walked the short Ring Loop Trail. The highlight here was a **Desert bighorn sheep** walking along the edge of the hill.



Desert bighorn sheep, Mojave Desert National Preserve.

In the afternoon we left California and drove into Arizona, to arrive in Seligman just before sunset. After dinner I went for a nightdrive, on which I hoped to see Black-footed Ferret (I had send an email to the ferret project staff to let them know I would be spotlighting that evening). It started promising, with a **Bushy-tailed woodrat** crossing the road as I arrived near the best spots (near mile marker 127), followed by decent views of an **Ord's kangaroo rat**. Several **Audubon's cottontails** were present too. After about 30 minutes, I saw a small mammal sitting at the roadside, which turned out to be a **Botta's pocket gopher** giving great views. I continued my search until, at about 23.30h, I had a brief but good sighting of a **Black-footed ferret!** I was very happy to see this beautiful but very rare animal, mission accomplished. Despite trying to find another one, this sighting would be my only sighting of this species.



White-tailed antelope squirrel, Mojave Desert National Preserve.

Saturday June 6th 2015

Before heading towards the Grand Canyon, we went back to the Black-footed Ferret spot, to see if we could find some **Gunnison's prairie dogs**. This turned out to be easy, with several animals seen on a short visit.

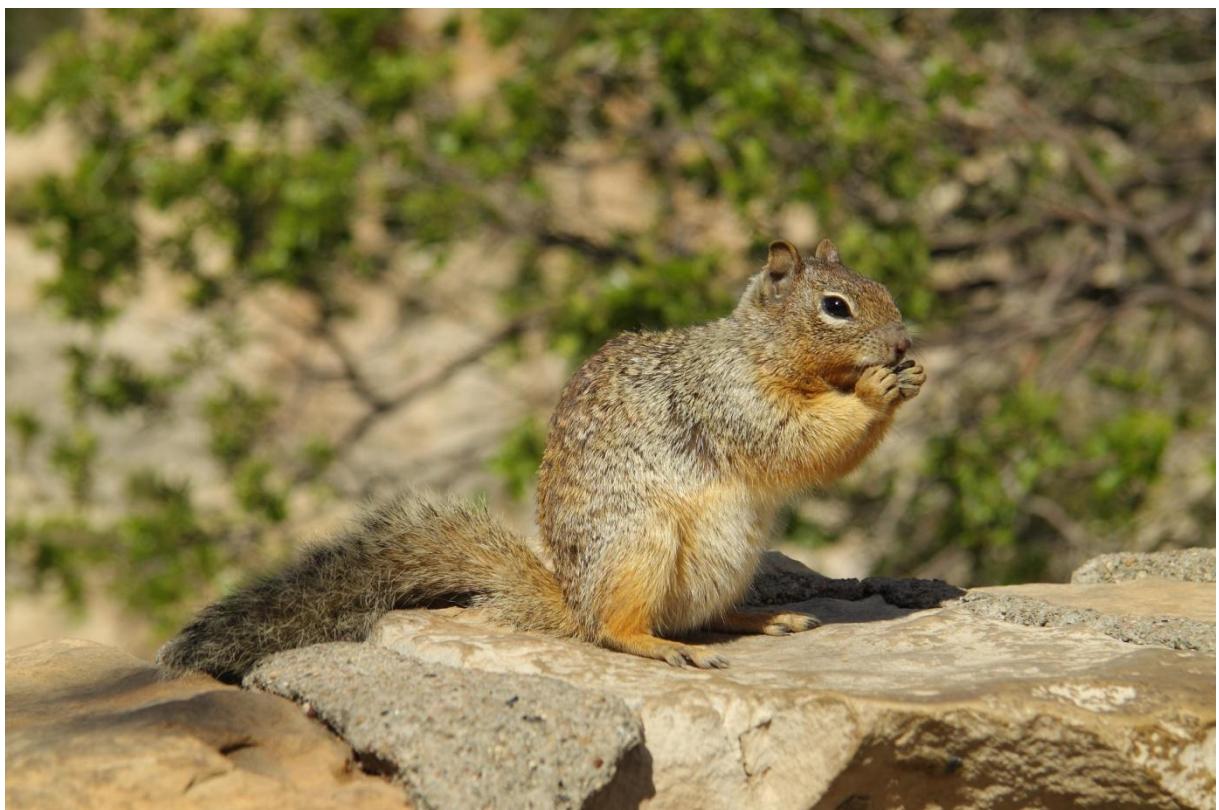


Gunnison's prairie dog, near Seligman.

Time to head a bit more to the east now, and during the drive we saw several more **Gunnison's prairie dogs**, a small herd of six **Pronghorns** was a nice bonus too, although it was a very brief sighting as we were driving on the highway. As we headed towards the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, we saw more **Gunnison's prairie dogs**, some **Mule deer**, and a dead **Rocky Mountain elk** too. We hadn't made reservations to sleep, so we were very happy to find a few free spots left (on a Saturday) at the Ten X Campground a few miles south from Tusayan. After a few minutes here, I had already seen two new species: an **Abert's squirrel** without ear tufts, and a **Cliff chipmunk**. After putting up our tent and having something to eat, we headed towards the Grand Canyon, where I saw an **Uinta chipmunk**, and many **Cliff chipmunks** and **Rock squirrels**.



Uinta chipmunk, Grand Canyon South Rim.

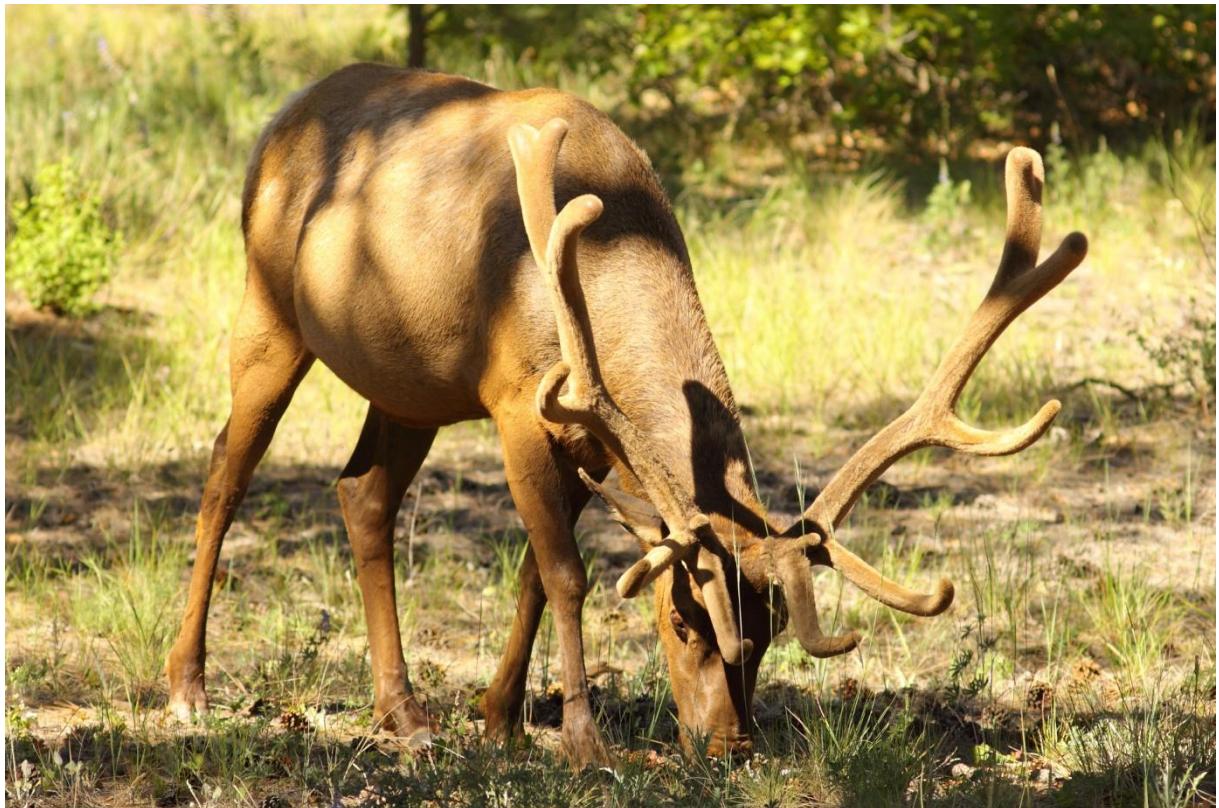


Rock squirrel, Grand Canyon South Rim.

The scenery here was overwhelming, it was a great experience to stand here and just look at the landscape, to see how the light changed the colours all the time, ... simply stunning, and one of the most beautiful views I have ever seen. We walked a short part of the Bright Angel Trail, seeing more of the same two common rodents, and some **Mule deer** as well. We would love to come back here one day, and then walk all the way down to spend the night at the bottom of the canyon. On the drive back to the campsite, two **Rocky Mountain elk** crossed the road in front of our car.

Sunday June 7th 2015

After a very chilly night, we visited the Desert View Watchtower area before noon, and returned to the Visitor Centre Area in the afternoon. **Abert's squirrels** were seen again on the campsite, and along the way towards Desert View as well. A nice male **Rocky Mountain elk** was seen here too.



Rocky Mountain elk, Grand Canyon South Rim.

The common sciurids were present too off course, and I found at least one **Uinta chipmunk** among all the **Cliff chipmunks**. In the evening some bats were seen flying over the South Rim, with at least one **Pallid bat** and a **Western pipistrelle** as well. After sunset we admired the sky with millions of stars, and five **Rocky Mountain elk** were walking along the boardwalk too. A short spotlighting tour around the campsite resulted in a **Deer mouse**, some **Audubon's cottontails** and a **Coyote**.



Cliff chipmunk, Grand Canyon South Rim.

Monday June 8th 2015

At night we were treated again to the sound of howling **Coyotes**. During an early walk on the campsite I saw two **Abert's squirrels**, a **Black-tailed jackrabbit** and an **Audubon's cottontail**.

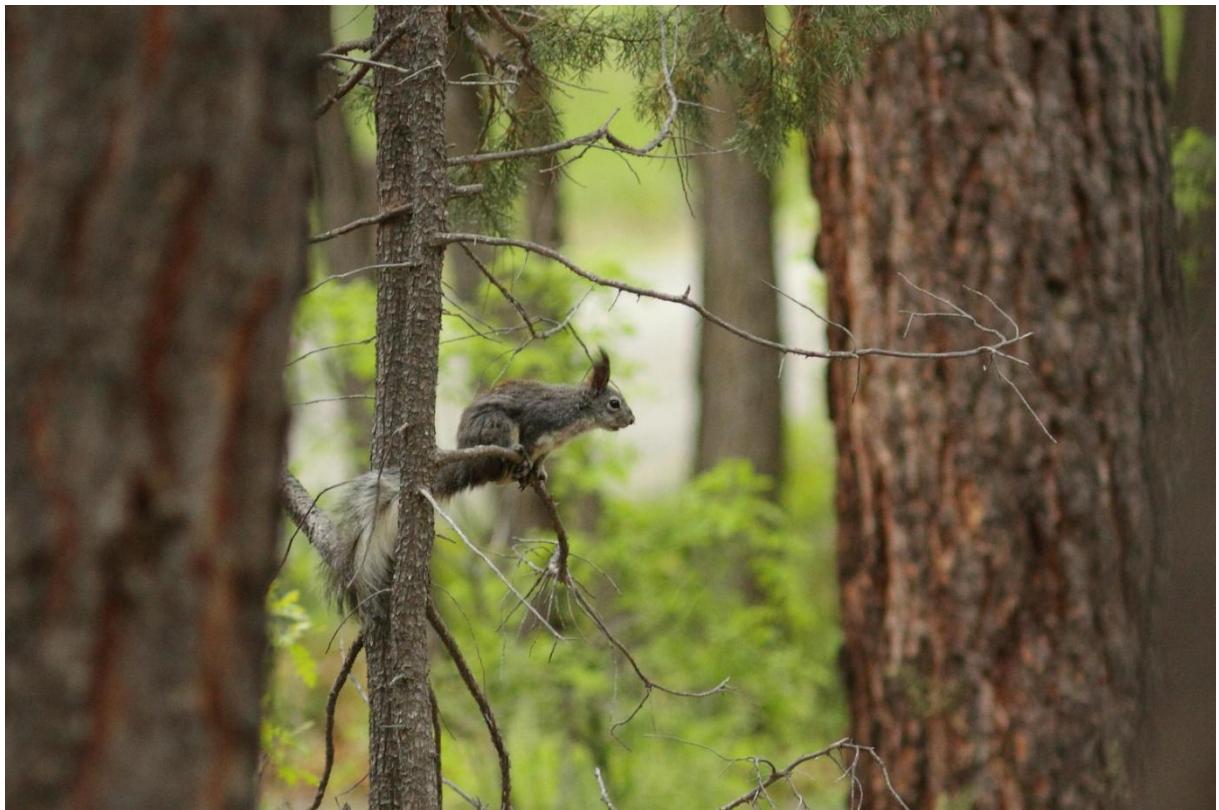


Abert's squirrel, Ten X Campground.

We soon were on the road again, this time we were heading towards Petrified Forest N.P., a place Stefanie was very eager to visit. A dead **American badger** east of Winona was the only mammal we saw during the drive (and the only sighting of the trip). In the N.P. I checked all the building for bats, but apart from a lot of droppings, I could not find anything, and the only mammal we saw there was a **Gunnison's prairie dog**. After visiting this wonderful place, we headed south, seeing a **Coyote** and a **Rocky Mountain elk** along the road. We continued until Blue Ridge Campground in Coconino National Forest, where we arrived late in the evening.

Tuesday June 9th 2015

I had chosen this campsite in the hope of adding another chipmunk to the list here (and as a back-up plan for Abert's squirrel), so I woke up early and started to search the area. It started promising with an **Abert's squirrel** (I saw at least two animals near this campsite, both with eartufts this time), and about 30 minutes later I finally located my target: a **Grey-collared chipmunk**.



Abert's squirrel, Blue Ridge Campground.

A female **Rocky Mountain elk** was the final mammal here, after which we headed towards Montezuma Castle National Monument, where **Rock squirrels** and **Cliff chipmunks** were very easy to see. A short stop at Tuzigoot N.M. only resulted in bat droppings, but no mammals. Our next destination was another historic site: Casa Grande Ruins N.M. I knew from other reports and from Vladimir Dinets' book that **Round-tailed ground squirrel** should be easy here, and this proved to be the case, with several already seen on the parking lot.



Round-tailed ground squirrel, Casa Grande Ruins National Monument.

The monument itself was quite small, but there was a pair of Great Horned Owls nesting under the roof, and the **Round-tailed ground squirrels** were really fun to watch. We saw two **Audubon's cottontails** here too. Now it was time to head towards Madera Canyon, and along the road we encountered a dead **Coyote** and a dead **Collared peccary** (south of Tucson). Our arrival was timed so that we would drive the road past Continental at dusk, and this proved to be a good decision, as we saw four **Antelope jackrabbits** here. Very nice animals, with really huge ears! On our way towards Bog Springs Campground we also saw two **Coues white-tailed deer** and several **Audubon's cottontails** (they were common on the campground).



Antelope jackrabbit, near Continental.

Wednesday June 10th 2015

The whole day was spent in the canyon, starting early with a visit to the area near Santa Rita Lodge to watch the feeders they put out to attract wildlife. This was a great location, with lots of hummingbirds, but also **Rock squirrel**, **Yellow-nosed cotton rats** and, best of all, **Arizona grey squirrels**. A few of these were present every time we stopped by, and the highest number I counted at one moment was 10!



Arizona grey squirrel, Madera Canyon (Santa Rita Lodge).

During the day we walked several trails, seeing more **Yellow-nosed cotton rats** (easy to see in the Proctor Road area), **Coues white-tailed deer** and **Audubon's cottontails**. In the evening, a visit to the feeders resulted in a **Mexican long-tongued bat**, and on a spotlighting walk along Proctor Road we saw more **Coues white-tailed deer** and a **Desert pocket mouse**. Madera Canyon was a great location (for both mammals and birds), and I would have loved to stay a little bit longer here, but since we were on a tight schedule, we only had time for one full day here, as we would be heading towards California again the next day.



Yellow-nosed cotton rat, Madera Canyon (Santa Rita Lodge).

Thursday June 11th 2015

We woke up early, because today would be a day with a lot of driving. The same species as the previous day were seen, and while driving towards Continental, we saw two more **Antelope jakrabbits** (at 8.00 a.m.). We made a brief stop at Saguaro N.P., where we drove the short loop, seeing many **Harris' antelope squirrels**. Around midday we headed west again, with a few **Round-tailed ground squirrels** seen along the road before leaving Arizona. We drove to the Salton Sea, where we visited the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge. This was great for birds, mammalwise we saw many **Audubon's cottontails** and a pair of **Coyotes** with a cub. Our final destination today was Anza Borrego State Park, where we stayed on the Borrego Palm Canyon Campground (with very few other people around). An evening walk here resulted in several **Dulzura kangaroo rats**, and one **Merriam's kangaroo rat** too. The showers here came as a nice surprise, this was one of the very few campgrounds we stayed on that had showers ☺.

Friday June 12th 2015

Early morning at the campsite I saw a few **Black-tailed jackrabbits** and **Audubon's cottontails**, a **California ground squirrel** and a **White-tailed antelope squirrel**.



White-tailed antelope squirrel, Anza Borrego State Park

We walked the Palm Canyon Trail, seeing six **Desert bighorn sheep** coming down to drink. It soon became pretty hot on the trail, so we took a break near the oasis at the end of it before going back. We saw a few more **White-tailed antelope squirrels**, and two big males **Desert bighorn sheep** from very close by as they came up the trail.



Male **Desert bighorn sheep**, Anza Borrego State Park.

After another cooling shower we headed for Joshua Tree N.P., where we encountered some **Audubon's cottontails** and **California ground squirrels**.



Audubon's cottontail, Joshua Tree N.P.

We put up our tent at the Hidden Valley Campground, where in the evening, several bats emerged from the rocks, mainly **Western pipistrelles**, but also at least one **Western yellow** and a **Big free-tailed bat**. Later in the evening, Stefanie saw a **Coyote**, and we spotlighted two **Agile kangaroo rats**.



Agile kangaroo rat, Joshua Tree N.P.

Saturday June 13th 2015

We slept very little because of a group of people arriving late and partying close to our tent all night long... Two howling **Coyotes** were heard during the night (the party-people joined the howling...). During the day we walked several trails, seeing many **Black-tailed jackrabbits**, **Audubon's cottontails** and **White-tailed antelope squirrels**. During the hottest hours we took some rest at the campsite, and as we were leaving again, at about 16.00h, a **California chipmunk** showed up close to our tent! I had great views of it trying to steal some food from some of our neighbours ☺. An evening walk only resulted in a few **Agile kangaroo rats**.



California chipmunk, Joshua Tree N.P. (Hidden Valley Campground)

Sunday June 14th 2015

Two **Coyotes** were heard again during the night (luckily no party-people around this time!), and in the morning the regular mammals were all present. We left this nice N.P. to head for the coast, where we would spend the final days of the trip. Our first stop was at Crystal Cove State Park, where we saw a few **California sea lions**, as well as a group of five **Bottlenose dolphins** swimming close to the shore. More inland in the State Park we saw two **Brush rabbits** as well. In the evening we drove on to Ventura, from where we were going to make a day-trip to Santa Cruz Island the following day.

Monday June 15th 2015

In Ventura harbour several **California sea lions** were present, as well as a **California ground squirrel**, and a **Bottlenose dolphin** was hanging around too. The boattrip (with Island Packers) to the island (we would land at the eastern side, at Scorpion Ranch) was a very nice one, with a huge pod of 100's **Long-beaked common dolphins** as the highlight.



Long-beaked common dolphin, between Ventura and Santa Cruz Island.

On Santa Cruz Island I had two targets: the fox and the jay. We first walked towards the campground, where the **Santa Cruz Island foxes** proved to be very easy to find, as several were walking around looking for scraps. Very beautiful animals, and again another highlight of the trip! In total, we saw at least five different individuals in the few hours we were on the island.



Santa Cruz Island fox, Santa Cruz Island.

After watching them for a while, we hiked to the canyon to find the jay, in which we succeeded too. We had lunch on a high vantage point, from where we saw several **Common seals**, but unfortunately no whales. On the way back to the mainland however, we had great views of two **Humpback whales**, and the crew really did their best to allow everyone to have a look. All in all a really nice day, and a nice warming-up for the whale-watching trip of tomorrow. I would love to come back here and visit some of the other Channel Islands as well.



California sea lion, Ventura.

Tuesday June 16th 2015

For today we had booked a whale-watching trip with Island Packers. The weather was quite good, not a flat ocean as we wished, but not too rough either. Near the coast we saw many **California sea lions**, and once we were a bit further off the coast, an even bigger pod **of Long-beaked common dolphins** than yesterday appeared. There were dolphins everywhere, a real spectacle to watch 1000+ of these animals swim and jump near the boat! Equally great was a pod of 50+ **Bottlenose dolphins**, probably of the offshore-morph, the largest gathering of this species I have seen yet. The final marine mammal of the day were the **Humpback whales**, we saw about 18 in total, most of them quite distant, but a few gave good views and came pretty close to the boat.



Humpback whales, near Ventura.

We were back in the harbour at about 16.30h, and drove towards Carrizo Plain National Monument, where I hoped to add a few other mammals to the list. A **Coyote**, and a few **California ground squirrels**, **Black-tailed jackrabbits** and **Audubon's cottontails** were seen during the drive towards the

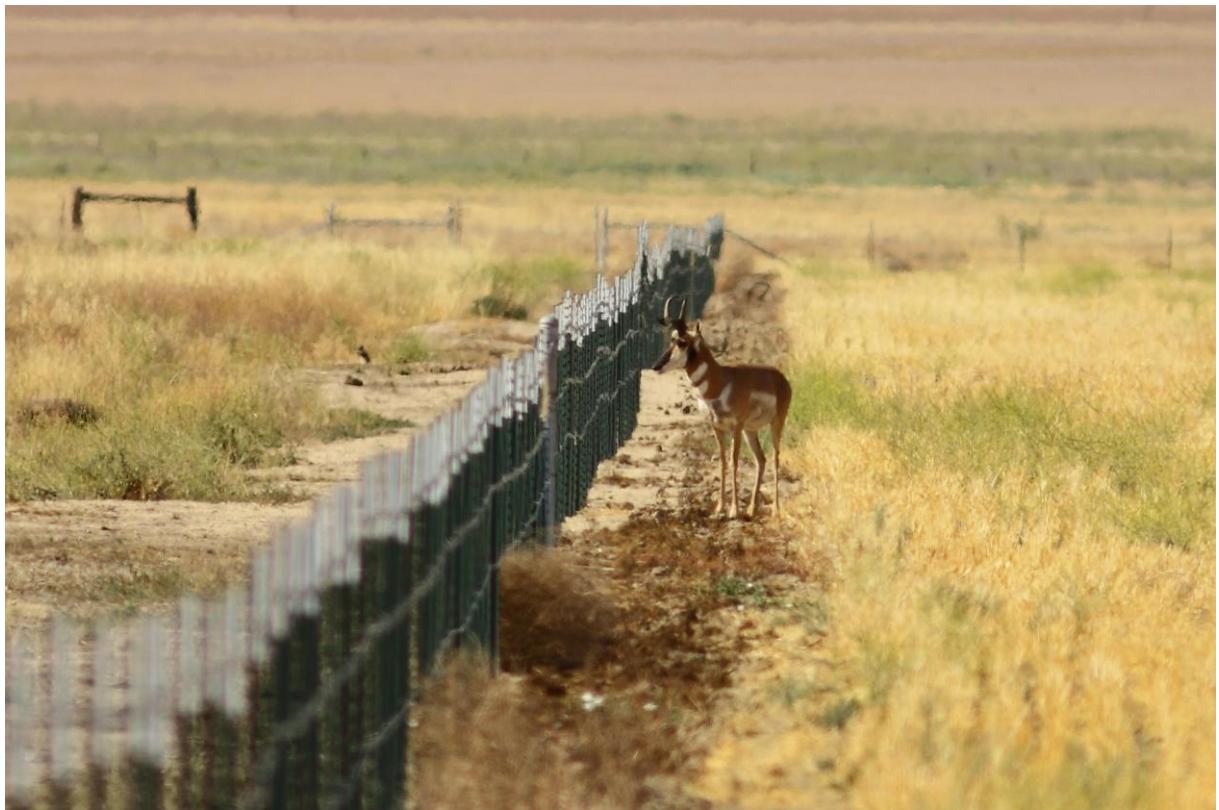
N.M., where we arrived around sunset. We drove towards Selby Campground, seeing more lagomorphs and also the first **Giant** and **San Joaquin kangaroo rats**, and a **San Joaquin pocket mouse** as well. There was only one other couple on the campsite, and we were the first people they met in the past few days. After dinner I went for a nightdrive, but the hoped for Kit fox unfortunately eluded me. Kangaroo rats were present in good numbers however, I saw at least 16 **Giant**, two **San Joaquin** and three **Heermann's kangaroo rats** (and several unidentified K-rats), most of them on the entrance road towards the campsite.



Giant kangaroo rat, Carrizo Plain National Monument.

Wednesday June 17th 2015

Early morning on the campsite had more of the same mammals (apart from the K-rats), and two howling **Coyotes** as well. We left pretty early, and saw a distant group of 10 **Pronghorns** soon after leaving the campsite, and another one an hour later.



Pronghorn, Carrizo Plain National Monument.

Our first destination was the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery, where about 400 **Northern elephant seals** were present. They are easily seen here, and you get the smell for free ☺.

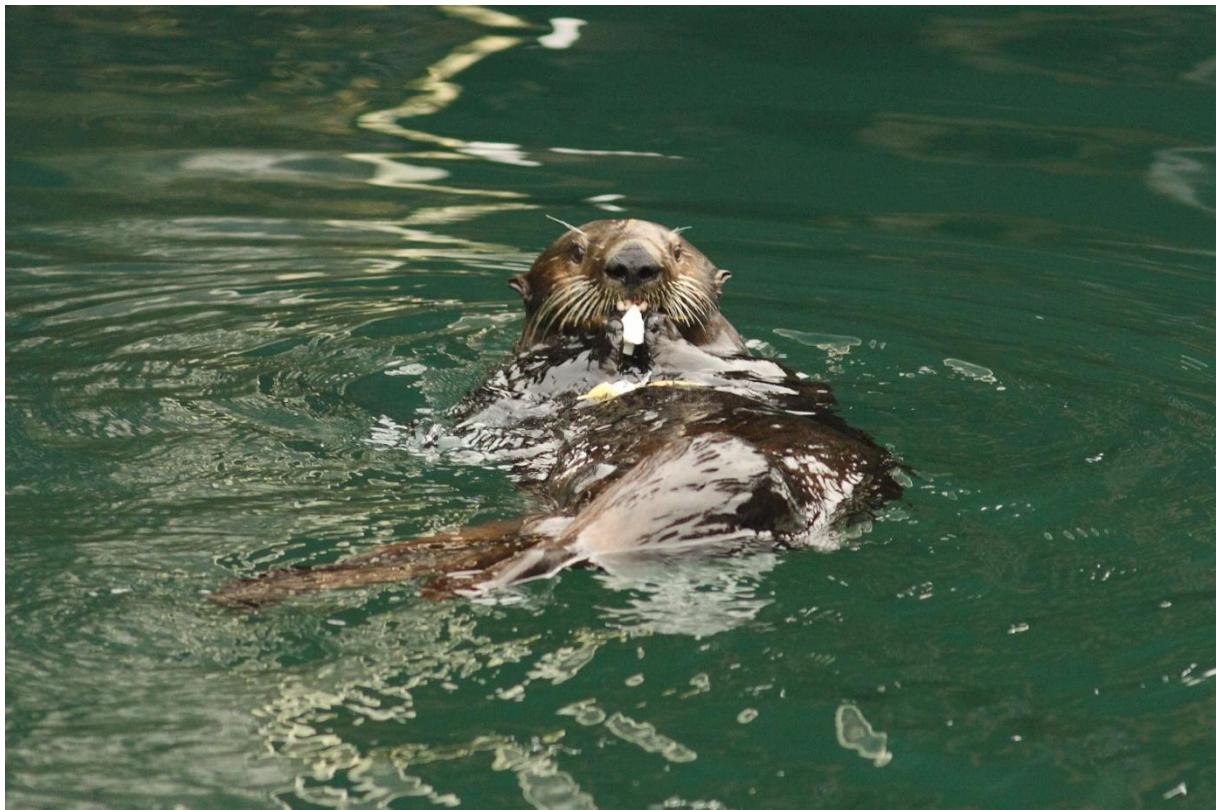


Northern elephant seals, Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery

Big numbers of fat **California ground squirrels** were present too, with lots of people feeding them. We saw our first **Sea otters** here as well. The rest of the day was spent driving north along the coast, unfortunately the weather was not that good, with a lot wind and also fog from time to time. **Sea otters** were seen from almost every stop we made. We drove to Bottchers Gap Campground, at the end of a long road, and although we expected to be alone here, there were in fact quite a few people around. We had time for an evening walk in the forests around the campground, and saw our final chipmunk species of the trip: **Merriam's chipmunk** (two animals in the forest above the campground).

Thursday June 18th 2015

Our final day in the U.S.A. (for now that is ☺), and we had booked our places with Monterey Bay Whale Watch for the a.m. trip. It was a short drive north, and we arrived well in advance of the start of the trip. The sea would be a little bit rough, but we were happy the boat was going out, because the previous days some trips had to be cancelled due to the wind. In the harbour some **Sea otters** gave good views, as well as several **California sea lions**, and about 20 **Common seals**.



Sea otter, Monterey.

We left the dock at 9.00h , passing by the pier to have a look at the 100's **California sea lions** present, before heading out into the open sea. I was hoping to finally see a Blue whale, a species which keeps on eluding me everywhere I go, or maybe even a pod of Killer whales. It started pretty good, with short views of a **Minke whale** (I think apart from the crew and myself nobody saw it though, it was a typical Minke whale-sighting...), and a pod of 60 **Long-beaked common dolphins**. The rest of the trip the sea became a bit more rough, making viewing whales quite difficult. We ended up seeing seven **Humpback whales**, but nearly all of them were pretty far off.



Humpback whale, near Monterey.

As we returned to port, we were happy having seen the whales and dolphins, but the fact that we didn't see anything new was a very little bit disappointing (especially since we knew what is possible here, expectations are always high ☺). This soon changed however, as suddenly the captain spotted some dorsal fins, and a few minutes later everyone got decent views of a pod of 10 **Risso's dolphins**. This was another species I had never seen before, although I had been to places where they are regularly seen. A nice ending for this trip!



Risso's dolphins, near Monterey.

We had hoped to be able to join the p.m. trip as well, but unfortunately this one was cancelled due to the weather... (so now we were even happier that our boat did go out!). We would love to come back here one day, and take a few other trips from Monterey, as there is a lot more to see here! The end of the boat trip also meant that our holiday was almost over, but as we had the afternoon left, we decided to go to Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Reserve for a final walk. A few **California ground squirrels** were present, as well as some **Sea otters**, and we also saw a **Dusky-footed woodrat**, the final new mammal of the trip. After this, we drove back to the coast, and started to drive north towards San Francisco, from where our flight would leave the next morning. The final mammals to be seen alive were some **Common seals**, followed 30 minutes later by a dead **Raccoon** (we saw very few of these, probably because we spent a lot of time in the desert I guess). We hadn't made a reservation for a hotel for our final night, and it took us quite some time before we found something affordable (although it was still quite expensive) where we could spend our final night.

Conclusion

This was a really great trip, on which we didn't sleep much, but with some really great sightings of common and rare species. Personal highlights were the Bobcat, the high numbers of American black bears in Sequoia N.P., the Black-footed Ferret, the diversity in sciurids, the whales and dolphins, the Santa Cruz Island foxes, ... and of course the incredible scenery in the areas we visited. I hope to come back to California and Arizona one day, there is still so much to see! With 74 species of mammals seen, of which 64 were new ones I can only be very very happy ☺. A big thank you also to everyone who puts up trip reports on Jon's website, they were really helpful, and certainly helped us seeing so many mammals!

Mammal list

1. **Mexican long-tongued bat:** seen once, at the hummingbird feeders at Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon.
2. **Big free-tailed bat:** seen once in Joshua Tree N.P., identified later from pictures by V. Dinets.
3. **Pallid bat:** seen once flying over the South Rim of the Grand Canyon at dusk.
4. **Western yellow bat:** seen one evening in Joshua Tree N.P.
5. **California myotis:** seen at dusk near Potwisha Campground in Sequoia N.P.
6. **Western pipistrelle:** the most common bat, seen at various locations.
7. **Bobcat:** an animal seen while spotlighting close to Potwisha Campground in Sequoia N.P. gave good views, one of the highlights of the trip.
8. **Coyote:** seen and heard on several occasions, the sound of howling Coyotes is something I will always associate with the desert from now on.
9. **Grey fox:** I saw two animals during my nightdrive in Point Reyes, and one animal was present both evenings at Potwisha Campground in Sequoia N.P.
10. **Santa Cruz Island fox:** easily seen during daytime at the campground on Santa Cruz Island.



11. **American black bear:** only seen in Sequoia N.P., where we saw 24 animals in less than 48 hours. Most of our sightings were on or near the meadows in the Crescent Meadow Road area.



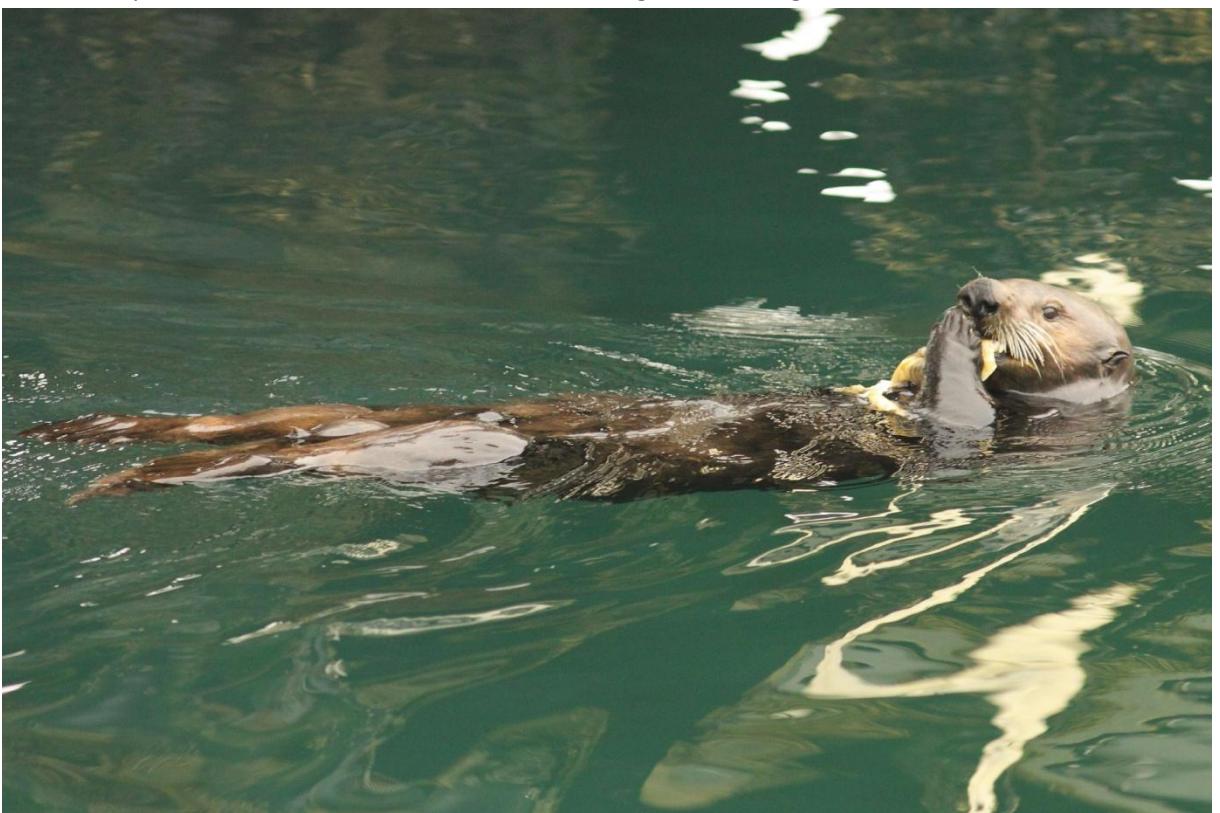
12. **California sea lion:** these were seen at almost every coastal site we stopped.



13. **Northern elephant seal**: good numbers were present at the well-known sites at Point Reyes and at Piedras Blancas.
14. **Common seal**: seen on several occasions, i.e. at the Golden Gate Bridge, from Santa Cruz Island and in Monterey.



15. **Sea otter**: quite common between San Simeon and Pigeon Point Lighthouse.



16. **Long-tailed weasel**: we had a great sighting of one carrying a mouse in Point Reyes along Pearce Point Road.
17. **Black-footed ferret**: one was seen while spotlighting near Seligman.
18. **Striped skunk**: only once seen alive at night in Point Reyes, and three times a dead one was seen along the road.
19. **Common raccoon**: I thought we would see this species very often, but we only saw live ones at Point Reyes on our first evening/night.
20. **Desert bighorn sheep**: I really wanted to see this subspecies, so I was very happy with our first distant sighting at Mojave National Preserve. We eventually got better views of several animals along the Palm Canyon Trail in Anza Borrego S.P.



21. **American elk**: in Point Reyes N.S. four groups with 53 animals in total were seen (**Tule elk**), and in the Grand Canyon area we encountered several **Rocky Mountain elks**.

22. **Mule deer:** one of the most commonly encountered mammals, they were especially common in the California-part of the trip, in Arizona we only saw Mule deer in the Grand Canyon area. In total, three subspecies were seen (Columbian, California and Desert mule deer).



23. **Coues white-tailed deer:** only seen in Madera Canyon, where we had six sightings of 11 animals.

24. **Pronghorn**: a herd of six was seen between Seligman and the Grand Canyon; and we saw 10 + 1 in Carrizo Plain N.M.



25. **Minke whale**: I saw one during our whale-watching trip from Monterey.
26. **Humpback whale**: on both boat trips from Ventura we saw several Humpback whales, a few were also seen during our Monterey whale-watching trip.



27. **Harbour porpoise**: 10 were present at the Golden Gate Bridge, and we saw three from the lighthouse in Point Reyes.
28. **Long-beaked common dolphin**: large pods were seen on both Ventura-trips (1000+), a smaller pod of 60 animals was seen during the trip from Monterey.

29. **Risso's dolphin**: a pod of 10 animals was a nice bonus on our way back to the harbour on the Monterey trip.
30. **Bottlenose dolphin**: a small pod of five was swimming close to the shore at Crystal Cave S.P.; one was present in Ventura-harbour before we would board the boat; and a large pod of 50 was seen on the Ventura whale-watching trip (these were probably of the offshore form).
31. **American pika**: we saw a single one near the Tokopah Falls in Sequoia N.P.
32. **Antelope jackrabbit**: on our way from Continental to Madera Canyon, four were seen at dusk; on our way out another two were present early in the morning.
33. **Black-tailed jackrabbit**: one of the most commonly encountered mammals in the deserts, seen both during the day and night.
34. **Audubon's cottontail**: another very common species, seen at several places.
35. **Brush rabbit**: only seen at Point Reyes (1), and along the coast in Orange County.
36. **Mountain cottontail**: the only two of the trip were seen on our way from Yosemite N.P. to Bodie S.H.P.
37. **Harris' antelope squirrel**: despite being already quite hot when we arrived, we saw four of these in the area of Saguaro N.P.
38. **White-tailed antelope squirrel**: quite common in Mojave National Preserve, Joshua Tree N.P. and Anza Borrego S.P.
39. **Gunnison's prairie dog**: quite common just west of Seligman, also seen several times along the road between Seligman and the Grand Canyon, a single one was present in Petrified Forest N.P. too.
40. **Yellow-bellied marmot**: the first one was seen just outside the Tioga Pass entrance of Yosemite N.P. In Sequoia N.P., several were seen near the meadows and close to the Tokopah Falls.



41. **Abert's squirrel:** a few without eartuffs were present on the Ten X Campground just south of the Grand Canyon. Some animals with eartuffs were seen on Blue Ridge Campground in Coconino National Forest.
42. **Arizona grey squirrel:** very common at the feeders of Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon, a few were always present, my highest count was 10 together.



43. **Western grey squirrel:** easily seen in Point Reyes, Yosemite N.P. and Sequoia N.P.

44. **California ground squirrel**: very common, seen almost everywhere in California.



45. **Belding's ground squirrel**: several were seen along the Tioga Pass Road in Yosemite, a few also near Bodie S.H.P.

46. **Golden-mantled ground squirrel**: common in Yosemite and Sequoia N.P.'s, also seen in Bodie S.H.P.

47. **Round-tailed ground squirrel**: easily seen at Casa Grande Ruins N.M. A few were also seen from the car along Hw. 8 on our way from Madera Canyon towards Salton Sea.



48. **Rock squirrel:** two in Mojave N.P. were the first ones, this species was very common at all sites we visited in northern Arizona.



49. **Alpine chipmunk:** a single animal was seen just outside the Tioga Pass entrance to Yosemite N.P.
50. **Yellow-pine chipmunk:** one seen near Dog Lake along the Tioga Road was identified from pictures when I got home.
51. **Grey-collared chipmunk:** I was very happy to find one at Blue Ridge Campground in Coconino N.F.
52. **Cliff chipmunk:** very common at and near the Grand Canyon, also seen at Montezuma Castle N.M.
53. **Merriam's chipmunk:** two in the forest above Bottchers Gap gave decent views.
54. **Least chipmunk:** several were present in Bodie S.H.P.
55. **California chipmunk:** a single animal was seen twice at Hidden Valley Campground in Joshua Tree N.P.
56. **Long-eared chipmunk:** abundant along the trails towards Tuolumne Grove and Merced Grove in Yosemite N.P.
57. **Allen's chipmunk:** a single one was seen at the start of the Merced grove trailhead.
58. **Lodgepole chipmunk:** the commonest chipmunk in Yosemite N.P., and the only chipmunk we saw in Sequoia N.P.
59. **Uinta chipmunk:** at least two were spotted among the much more common Cliff chipmunks at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

60. **Douglas' squirrel**: very common in both Yosemite and Sequoia N.P., once we knew the call they were heard everywhere.



61. **Botta's pocket gopher**: one sat by the roadside at night while I was spotlighting for Black-footed ferret.



62. **Desert pocket mouse**: one was spotlighted at Proctor Road in Madera Canyon.

63. **Agile kangaroo rat**: a few were seen at night in Joshua Tree N.P.

64. **Heermann's kangaroo rat**: three were seen at night in Carrizo Plain N.M.

65. **Giant kangaroo rat**: at least 16 were spotlighted in Carrizo Plain N.M., most of these were present on the road towards Selby Campground.

66. **Merriam's kangaroo rat**: I saw 10 near the Mid Hills Campground in Mojave N.P., and one at Borrego Palm Canyon Campground in Anza Borrego.

67. **San Joaquin kangaroo rat**: at least two were spotlighted on the road towards Selby Campground in Carrizo Plain N.M.
68. **Ord's kangaroo rat**: a single one was seen while looking for Black-footed ferrets.
69. **Dulzura kangaroo rat**: I saw three while spotlighting at Borrego Palm Canyon Campground in Anza Borrego.
70. **San Joaquin pocket mouse**: two were spotlighted on the road towards Selby Campground in Carrizo Plain N.M.
71. **Bushy-tailed woodrat**: one crossed the road while I was looking for Black-footed ferrets.
72. **Dusky-footed woodrat**: the one at Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Reserve was the final new mammal we saw on this trip.
73. **Deer mouse**: seen at several locations.
74. **Yellow-nosed cotton rat**: only seen in Madera Canyon, I saw several along the trail near Proctor Road, and a few were present at the feeders at Santa Rita Lodge too.

Species not seen alive

1. **Collared peccary**: one dead animal was seen along the Highway when driving towards Madera Canyon.
2. **American badger**: a dead animal along Route 66 just east of Winona.
3. **Broad-footed mole**: I think mole hills at the campsite at Point Reyes were from this species.