



Mexico Pelagic Systematic List

29th November – 8th December 2015

The taxonomy and English names used in this checklist generally follows the recommendations of the *International Ornithologists' Union's World Bird List* with revisions made where an alternative name/taxonomy is considered more appropriate.

This systematic list was compiled by Chris Collins (based on the figures agreed at the nightly logs) and includes all species recorded between departing San Diego on 29 November and arriving at Cabo San Lucas on the morning of 8 December.

Accurately counting seabirds at sea is extremely difficult (eg as one can never be sure which birds are following or revisiting the ship), so the system outlined below was adopted, with this also used for the more numerous land birds:

1-10 = actual number seen

11-100 = A

101-1,000 = B

1,001-10,000 = C

BIRDS

Brent Goose [Brant] *Branta bernicla*

A low A was logged at Ensenada (29 November).

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

Seen in good numbers whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada (29 November) with B logged.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*

A lone bird at Ensenada was the only record on the expedition (29 November).

Red-throated Diver [Loon] *Gavia stellata*

Two birds were seen on 29 November (San Diego-Ensenada).

Pacific Diver [Loon] *Gavia pacifica*

A low A was logged whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada (29 November).

Great Northern Diver [Loon] *Gavia immer*

The only record was a lone individual whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada (29 November).

Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*

Seen on three dates (30 November-2 December) with the highest count on 2 December when A was logged.

Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*

A lone bird on 7 December was the only sighting on the expedition.

Least Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma microsoma*

Seen on four dates with A logged on 30 November and 1 December and single figure counts on two other dates.

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

The Leach's Storm-petrel complex occurring in the Mexican Pacific can, at best, be described as extremely challenging, with multiple taxa seemingly occurring alongside each other. During the expedition, the most numerous form/species appeared to be migrant birds which had come from higher latitudes in the Pacific and became known aboard as "Northern Leach's". Adults were typically in moult, with the juveniles in fresh plumage.

Birds were seen on an almost daily basis (sightings on seven dates) with the highest count, a high A, logged on 4 December a day north of Socorro.

Ainley's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma [leucorhoa] cheimomnestes*

This extremely poorly known bird was described in 1980 and is only known to breed on the stacks at the southern end of Guadalupe Island and was one of the principle targets of the expedition.

Whilst we were anchored near the breeding stacks on the evening of 30 November, three birds landed on *Searcher* and everyone was able to get some good looks before the birds were released. As well as showing 'raspberry ripple' rumps, some of these individuals also had brood patches, leaving little doubt we were indeed looking at a bird which has seemingly never been previously recorded on a bird tour.

The following day, three birds with an identical rump pattern were photographed and given our location and their moult state, it seems almost certain that these were also Ainley's Storm-petrels.

Townsend's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma [leucorhoa] socorroensis*

The smallest form/species within the “Leach’s complex” to occur off the Pacific coast of Mexico with a total of twelve birds showing characteristics of this taxa logged across four dates.

Chapman's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma [leucorhoa] chapmani*

Another localised Pacific form/species within the “Leach’s complex” with birds believed to be this taxa seen on a daily basis between 1-4 December, with the highest count being on 4 December when a low A was logged. Unlike other forms/species within this complex, these birds are consistently dark-rumped.

It is worth noting that when this form/species was seen on the same chum slick as “Northern Leach’s”, it could be readily picked out by the smaller size and distinctly different flight over the oil. Given our experiences, it is difficult to understand why Chapman’s Storm-petrel is not considered a different species from, for example, “Northern Leach’s”.

Black Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma melania*

Seen on three dates, although all sightings were either at the beginning (30 November-1 December) or end (7 December) of the expedition. The highest count was whilst chumming at 50 mile reef, to the north-east of Guadalupe Island, where A was logged on 30 November.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Seen on a daily basis for the first four days of the expedition (29 November-2 December) with the highest count being on the first of these dates when A was logged.

Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*

A total of eight birds were recorded between 1-4 December inclusive (day south of Guadalupe – day north of Socorro).

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

Ten individuals were recorded across the last four days of the expedition (4-7 December). All the birds seen were pale morph birds.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Seen on seven dates with the highest count being on 2 December (at sea and Alijos Rocks) when A was logged.

Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus*

Lone individuals were seen on 1, 3 and 4 December.

Black-vented Shearwater *Puffinus opisthomelas*

Good numbers were seen whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada with B logged (29 November). The only other sighting was a lone bird on 1 December, a day south of Guadalupe.

Townsend's Shearwater *Puffinus auricularis*

Along with Ainley's Storm-petrel, this species was the second major target of the expedition. Birds were seen on both days we were offshore of Socorro with between 15-30 individuals logged on 5 December and up to four individuals the following day.

Although the decline of this species is well known, our visit graphically demonstrated how rare it now appears to be, with only a handful of birds being seen compared with the thousands which were recorded only a few decades ago. Without rapid action (to solve the feral cat problem on the island), the future of this species looks extremely bleak.

Black-necked [Eared] Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Only seen on 29 November with A logged.

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*

Good numbers were seen around San Diego and Ensenada (29 November) with B logged.

Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus clarkii*

Four Clark's Grebes were found with the Westerns in Ensenada Harbour (29 November).

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*

Seen on four dates with fifteen individuals recorded.

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

A lone bird gave some fantastic views and photographic opportunities whilst the clearance procedures were being undertaken at Ensenada on 29 November.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

Seen around San Diego and Ensenada on 29 November.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Seen around San Diego and Ensenada (29 November) with a further two birds found on Socorro on 5 December.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

A low A was logged on 29 November.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Seen in good numbers around San Diego and Ensenada on 29 November (B logged) with more at Cabo San Lucas on 8 December.

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

The commoner frigatebird with daily sightings between 1-6 December. On three dates A was logged with single figure counts on all other occasions.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

Only recorded around Socorro with two birds on 4 December and three individuals the following day.

Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebouxii*

This species is seemingly relatively rare along the route of this expedition with the only confirmed sighting being a lone bird near the Alijos Rocks on 2 December.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Seen on a daily basis from 2-7 December (Alijos Rocks and southwards). On three dates A was logged with single figure counts on all other occasions.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*

This species was seen each day from 3 December onwards, although it was only on 4 and 5 December (day north of Socorro and around the island) that counts were higher than single figures.

Most of the birds were brown, with only a handful of adult white morph birds being recorded.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

The only species which was recorded on a daily basis during the expedition with the highest counts being around Socorro (5-6 December) where B was logged on both dates.

The birds around Socorro were Brewster's Brown Boobies which look very different with the males having pale heads.

Brandt's Cormorant *Phalacrocorax penicillatus*

This species was only recorded on 29 November (sailing from San Diego to Ensenada) with A being logged.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Six birds were logged on the journey between San Diego and Ensenada (29 November).

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Another cormorant species which was only recorded on 29 November with two individuals recorded.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

A lone individual was seen at Ensenada whilst we waited for the conclusion of the Mexican clearance (29 November).

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

At least two individuals were seen on both days around Socorro (5-6 December) with the only other record being a nesting bird on 29 November in Ensenada harbour.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

Only recorded at Socorro with two individuals on both dates (5-6 December).

American Coot *Fulca americana*

Two individuals were seen in Ensenada Harbour (29 November) whilst we awaited clearance from the Mexican authorities.

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Six birds were seen at Ensenada Harbour (29 November).

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*

This species was only found during the brief stop at Ensenada with a low A logged.

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana*

Only recorded at Socorro with five birds on 5 December and a lone individual the following day.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*

Four individuals were seen in Ensenada harbour (29 November).

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

A single bird was seen on Socorro on 5 December.

Surfbird *Aphriza virgata*

Three individuals were seen in Ensenada Harbour (29 November).

Grey [Red] Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Seen in small numbers on eight days although all counts were in low single figures except on 5 December (off Socorro) when a low A was logged.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

Only recorded around Socorro with a low A logged on 5 December and nine birds the following day.

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

Six birds were seen on 29 November (San Diego to Ensenada).

Heermann's Gull *Larus heermanni*

Good numbers of this handsome and reasonably localised gull were logged whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada (29 November).

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Another species which was only seen on the 'travel day' between San Diego and Ensenada (29 November) with two individuals being recorded.

California Gull *Larus californicus*

Seen on the first three days of the expedition with the highest number being on 29 November (San Diego-Ensenada) when a high A was logged.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

A total of five individuals were recorded between 29 November-2 December with the most surprising sighting being a lone individual at Alijos Rocks, a location Captain Art has visited multiple times but one where he had previously never seen any gull species.

Western Gull *Larus occidentalis*

Seen on a daily basis for the first three days of the expedition (29 November-1 December) with B logged on the first two dates.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*

A total of nine individuals were recorded across the first three days (29 November-1 December).

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*

Seen in reasonable numbers on 29 November whilst travelling from San Diego-Ensenada with A logged.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*

Recorded on two dates with A logged on 5 December (off Socorro) and a lone bird a couple of days later.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A small flock containing seven birds was seen offshore from Socorro on 6 December, with the only other record being a lone individual the previous day.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

A single bird was seen on 6 December off Socorro.

Pomarine Skua [Jaeger] *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Seen on a daily basis for the last three days of the expedition (5-7 December) with a total of nine individuals being recorded. The best views were on 7 December when two birds spent a considerable time on and around our final chum slick (c.100 nautical miles off Cabo San Lucas) giving great looks and fantastic photographic opportunities.

Arctic Skua [Parasitic Jaeger] *Stercorarius parasiticus*

A total of five individuals were seen with two on 29 November and 4 December and a single individual on 5 December.

Long-tailed Skua [Jaeger] *Stercorarius longicaudus*

The only record was a lone bird on 4 December a day north of Socorro Island.

Common Guillemot [Murre] *Uria aalge*

This species is rarely recorded in Mexican waters but one was seen on 29 November shortly after leaving Ensenada.

Cassin's Auklet *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*

This species was seen in good numbers whilst sailing from San Diego to Ensenada on 29 November with B logged. The only other sightings were three individuals the following day off the southern end of Guadalupe Island and two individuals not far from Alijos Rocks (2 December).

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

A lone bird in Ensenada Harbour (29 November) was the only record on the trip.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

The sole record of the expedition was a single individual seen on Guadalupe (30 November).

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Two singletons were seen with a bird noted at Ensenada (29 November) and another at Socorro on 5 December.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Reasonably numerous in Ensenada with a low A logged.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Two birds in Ensenada Harbour (29 November).

Socorro Wren *Troglodytes sissonii*

This Socorro endemic was seen on both our skiff rides with three birds in Grayson Cove on 5 December and six the following day at Playa Blanca.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

One of the more unexpected sightings of the expedition was the mockingbird which landed on the ship as we sailed towards Socorro on 4 December.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Only seen in San Diego and Ensenada (29 November) with B logged.

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*

Three individuals were seen on 29 November.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*

Somewhat unexpectedly there were two at sea records of this species with one on 3 December and another on 7 December.

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*

A low A was logged in Ensenada Harbour (29 November).

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*

A lone bird was seen by one of the skiffs during our ride in Grayson Cove (5 December). It is worth noting that some authorities have proposed treating the towhees on Socorro as an endemic species given their smaller size and plumage differences.

CETACEANS

Bryde's Whale *Balaenoptera brydei*

The only record was a brief sighting on 7 December whilst travelling from Socorro towards Cabo San Lucas.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Two individuals were seen whilst travelling from San Diego to Ensenada on 29 November.

Cuvier's Beaked Whale *Ziphius cavirostris*

Two individuals were seen offshore from Socorro on 5 December.

Short-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis*

A pod (A logged) was seen on 3 December, a day south of Alijos Rocks.

Long-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus capensis*

A good sized pod (B logged) was seen on 29 November.

Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

Seen on three dates (29 November, 5-6 December). The highest count was off Socorro on 5 December when a small pod (low A) came over to investigate the skiffs allowing us some great views.

Rough-toothed Dolphin *Steno bredanensis*

This widespread species was seen a day north of Socorro (4 December) where a reasonable sized pod (A logged) was found.

Pacific White-sided Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*

The most localised of the dolphin species encountered on the expedition with three individuals seen whilst cruising from San Diego to Ensenada (29 November).

PINNIPEDS

Harbour Seal *Phoca vitulina*

The only sighting was a lone individual seen on 29 November (San Diego-Ensenada).

California Sealion *Zalophus californianus*

Good numbers were seen between San Diego and Ensenada (29 November) with two individuals then seen on 2 December (at sea near Alijos Rocks). The final sighting was a lone male in the harbour at Cabo San Lucas on the morning of 8 December.

Northern Elephant Seal *Mirounga angustirostris*

At least a hundred individuals were seen ashore on Guadalupe Island (30 November).

Guadalupe Fur Seal *Arctocephalus townsendi*

Seen in very small numbers on each of the first three days of the expedition (29 November-1 December) with the highest number being on Guadalupe where five individuals were found.

SHARKS, RAYS AND LARGER FISH

Blue Shark *Prionace glauca*

The only sighting was a lone individual on 4 December.

Bull Shark *Carcharhinus leucas*

At least seven Bull Sharks were seen around the vessel on the evening of 5 December with these giving us some great views as the crew fed them fish scraps.

Hammerhead Shark sp. *Sphyma sp.*

Single individuals were seen on a daily basis between 2-4 December, although none of these was identified to species.

Manta Ray *Manta birostris*

A large ray, thought probably to be a Manta, was seen a few miles offshore from Socorro on 6 December.

Ocean Sunfish *Mola mola*

Two of these somewhat bizarrely shaped fish were seen whilst cruising from San Diego to Ensenada on 29 November.

Remora *Echeneidae sp.*

A number of these suckerfish were seen with the sharks off Socorro on 5 December.

Striped Marlin *Tetrapturus audax*

This species was seen on three dates with the first being sighted near Alijos Rocks on 2 December. Two more were then spotted the following day, with the final sighting being a breaching individual on our final afternoon aboard *Searcher* (7 December).

NB: Some of the group spent November 28th birding around the city of San Diego, on an optional WildWings Birding Excursion, led by David Wimpfheimer, with nearly a further 100 bird species being recorded.

Compiled by Chris Collins.