

November 9-17, 2026

California Coastal Road Trip



Explore the Pacific Flyway with ASWP

Hit the open road for an unforgettable birding adventure along California's spectacular coast! This nine-day tour begins in San José and winds along the iconic Highway 1 to Los Angeles. Along the way we will explore some of the state's most breathtaking landscapes and birding destinations. From rugged cliffs and coastal estuaries to oak woodlands and productive wetlands, each stop offers the opportunity to encounter California's remarkable diversity of birds and wildlife.



The road trip includes an offshore detour to the Santa Cruz Island in Channel Islands National Park, where participants will search for endemic island species. Whether you're hoping to add new life birds, experience world class coastal scenery, or simply enjoy the journey with fellow bird enthusiasts, this road trip promises an incredible blend of birding, natural history, and unforgettable California landscapes.



Island of Endemics

Often called the "Galápagos of North America," California's Channel Islands are renowned for their exceptional biodiversity and endemic wildlife.

Isolated from the mainland for thousands of years, Santa Cruz Island is home to unique species found nowhere else, including the Island Scrub-Jay and the diminutive Island Fox. The sea cliffs and pristine coastline provide vital habitat for seabirds and abundant marine life.

The island's human history is equally remarkable. The Chumash people lived here for more than 12,000 years before European colonization altered the landscape. Today, Santa Cruz Island is protected as part of Channel Islands National Park, where decades of restoration have made it one of America's greatest conservation successes.

Register at aswp.org

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Target Birds



Cinnamon Teal
Mountain & California Quail
Band-tailed Pigeon
White-throated Swift
Anna's & Allen's Hummingbird
Ridgeway's Rail
Black Oystercatcher
Snowy Plover
Long-billed Curlew
Black Turnstone
Surfbird
Common Murre
Heermann's & Short-billed Gull
Western & Clark's Grebe
Red-throated & Pacific Loon
Black-vented Shearwater
Brandt's & Pelagic Cormorant
White-faced Ibis
California Condor
White-tailed Kite
Burrowing Owl
Red-breasted Sapsucker
Acorn & Nuttall's Woodpecker
White-headed Woodpecker
Steller's Jay
Island & California Scrub-Jay
Yellow-billed Magpie
Mountain Chickadee
Oak Titmouse
Bushtit & Wren
Pygmy Nuthatch
California Gnatcatcher
Canyon & Rock Wren
California Thrasher
Lawrence's Goldfinch
Golden-crowned Sparrow
California Towhee
Tricolored Blackbird
Black-throated Gray Warbler

Trip Description

Our road trip begins after arriving at San José Mineta International Airport. This experience will focus on exploring the stunning California coast in search of the regions diverse birds and unique habitats. Destinations will include Pinnacles National Park, Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz Island, Big Sur, Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, and Angeles National Forest. The road trip concludes with over 20 hours scenic driving, as we board our flight home from Los Angeles.

This trip has been designed to accommodate anyone's birding and hiking preferences. The best birding locations will be planned for the mornings. We will visit these as a group. On some days, afternoon options will exist for those that wish to step away from birds or hiking. Choose to explore local shops or exhibits, or take in the beauty of the surroundings with a stroll down the beach. For those that can't get enough birds, we've got you covered with afternoon destinations.

As always, this is an all-inclusive trip from Pittsburgh. The trip cost includes round-trip airfare, 8-nights accommodations, all meals beginning with lunch on Nov 9 and ending with breakfast on Nov 17, ground & sea transportation, and entrance fees. Alcohol and items of personal nature are not included.



What to Expect

HIKING DIFFICULTY..... Moderate

BIRDING DIFFICULTY..... Moderate

ACTIVITY LEVEL Low to Moderate

This trip contains hiking near the coast on sandy and rocky terrain. Some destinations require hiking up and down steep inclines. A significant portion of the trip will involve driving for extended periods of time. We'll make frequent stops to explore, stretch our legs, and take in the sights.

Trip Cost

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY..... \$4,995

SINGLE OCCUPANCY..... \$5,795

A non-refundable 50% deposit is due upon registration. The remaining balance of the trip will be due by October 31st.

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Meet Your Guides



Nick Stahlman

Nick is the Community Conservation Coordinator at ASWP. You may have attended one of his guided walks or interacted with him through the Certified Backyard Habitat program. With a background in Wildlife Habitat Management, Nick has developed a knack for finding birds by understanding the habitats they depend on. Having birded California's coast on three previous trips, he is excited to return and share its incredible diversity of birds, breathtaking scenery, and unique natural history with fellow travelers.

Favorite Bird: Belted Kingfisher

Trip Target: Tricolored Blackbird

Favorite Bird Sound: Hermit Thrush's Ethereal Flute Song

Go-To Birding Snack: Dill Pickle Flavored Sunflower Seeds



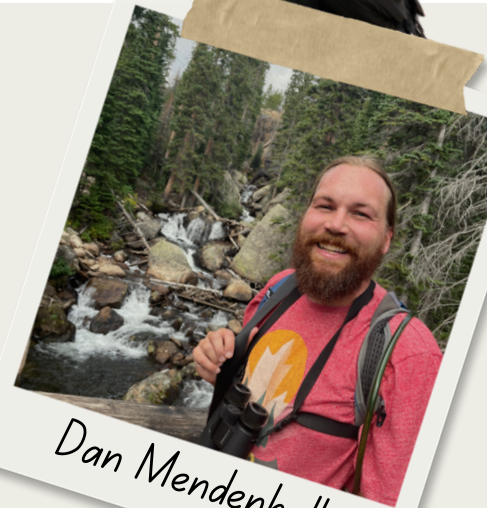
Dan is a Naturalist at ASWP, where he manages trails and facilities. He is a former science teacher and came to Audubon in 2021 to pursue his passion for birds. Dan leads weekly walks at Beechwood Farms, national Eco Tours, and has recently led outings for the Biggest Week in Birding in Ohio. Dan is a highly skilled birder and nature photographer who is now building experience in videography. Having birded in Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico, he is excited to now explore California and share his expertise.

Favorite Bird: Any Woodpecker or Sparrow

Trip Target: California Condor

Favorite Bird Sound: Mourning Dove cooing

Go-To Birding Snack: Dried Mango



Dan Mendenhall



Dear Pennsylvania,
Road Trip Sites So Far:
-Sea Otters at Monterey Bay
-Lone Cypress on 17-Mile Drive
-California Condor at Big Sur
-Bixby Bridge Crossing
-So much guano on Morro Rock
-Sunset on Ventura Beach
-Island Fox on Santa Cruz
(I didn't get seasick!)
-Pine cones as big as my head!
-Sunset view of Hollywood
-So many cool birds!!!

Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve
614 Dorseyville Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15238

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Daily Itinerary*

Monday, November 9

6:00AM (EST) Flight departs PIT
10:30AM (PST) Flight arrives SJC
11:30AM Lunch in San José
2:00PM Wilder Ranch State Park
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Watsonville

Tuesday, November 10

6:00AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart for Pinnacles Nat'l Park
1:00PM Lunch in Hollister
2:30PM Hotel Break
3:00PM Beach Birding
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Watsonville

Wednesday, November 11

6:00AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart for Monterey Bay
1:00PM Lunch in Monterey
2:00PM Depart for Elkhorn Slough Reserve
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Watsonville

Thursday, November 12

6:00AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart to Explore Big Sur
12:30PM Lunch & Explore Morro Bay
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in San Luis Obispo

Friday, November 13

7:00AM Breakfast @ Hotel
8:00AM Depart for Cachuma Lake
12:00PM Lunch in Santa Barbara
1:30PM Depart for Ventura
3:00PM Arrive at Hotel in Ventura
4:00PM Optional Beach Birding
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Ventura

Saturday, November 14

6:30AM Breakfast @ Hotel
8:00AM Depart for Channel Islands cruise
10:30AM Dock at Prisoner's Harbor
12:00PM Pack Lunches
3:30PM Depart Santa Cruz Island
5:00PM Dock at Ventura Harbor
7:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Ventura

Sunday, November 15

6:30AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart for Angeles Nat'l Forest
12:00PM Pack Lunches at Chilao Center
2:00PM Depart for L.A.
4:00PM Sunset at Griffith Observatory
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Glendale

Monday, November 16

6:30AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart for Bolsa Chica Eco Reserve
12:00PM Lunch in Huntington Beach
1:30PM Find Remaining Targets
6:00PM Dinner & Hotel in Glendale

Tuesday, November 17

6:30AM Breakfast @ Hotel
7:00AM Depart for LAX
8:15AM Arrive at LAX
11:00AM (PST) Flight Departs LAX
8:30PM (EST) Flight Arrives PIT

A Note About the Journey: California is a big state, and this adventure covers more than 800 scenic miles from San Jose to Los Angeles. While a significant portion of the trip will be spent traveling by van, the drive is an essential part of the experience, offering breathtaking coastal vistas and birding opportunities along one of America's most iconic highways. We'll make frequent stops to explore, observe local birds, stretch our legs, and take in the spectacular landscapes that make this journey so memorable.

*Daily Itinerary Subject to Change

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