



California

Desert and Mountains San Diego Bird Festival Post-Trip

Tour Leader: Rob Ripma

February 22-25, 2027

Itinerary Overview:

February 22: Depart San Diego and Transfer to Borrego Springs

February 23: Borrego Springs and Salton Sea

February 24: Salton Sea - Transfer to Idyllwild

February 25: Birding Idyllwild and Transfer to San Diego

Detailed Itinerary:

February 22: Depart San Diego and Transfer to Borrego Springs

After we meet at the Marina Village Conference Center, we will start our drive to Borrego Springs. As we head northeast out of San Diego, we will start to climb into the mountains. Our first stop will be at Inaja Memorial Park where a short loop trail provides access through a mixture of oak woodland and chaparral. A stroll along the trail typically yields California Scrub-Jay, Wrentit, Oak Titmouse, and the chance at Mountain Quail. This quail can be quite difficult to spot, but we'll listen for its whistled song and hope we get lucky with views.

After lunch in Julian, we will continue driving east, where we will drop into the Anza-Borrego Desert. Along the way, we will be driving through the Sentenac Canyon. A couple of roadside stops in this canyon could provide us with views of Black-throated Sparrow, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Verdin, and Cactus, Rock, and Canyon Wrens. As we continue east, we will make another stop at a nearby campground. The Tamarisk stand here typically hosts several roosting Long-eared Owls throughout the winter. By the late afternoon, we'll make it to our hotel where we'll be staying for the next two nights.

Overnight: Borrego Springs

February 23: Borrego Springs and Salton Sea

After an early departure, we'll spend the early morning east of Borrego Springs. This barren, sandy landscape is home to one of the specialties of the southwestern US, the LeConte's Thrasher. This pale thrasher can be difficult to see well as it runs between patches of brush but is well worth the effort. We will base our exact birding location for the morning on recent reports. Surprisingly, there are other species that also use this habitat. We hope to see Sagebrush and Brewer's Sparrows, Sage Thrasher, Say's Phoebe, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher among others. By the late morning, we will make a stop at the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Visitor Center. This is another spot to look for many of the typical desert species such as Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Cactus Wren, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. This is also a good spot to see Costa's Hummingbirds where we could see it performing its breeding display flight.

After lunch in Borrego Springs, we will make our way to the Salton Sea. This sea was formed in the early 1900s when floodwaters from the Colorado River breached an irrigation canal and filled a vast expanse of dry ground. Since then, the Salton Sea has been a birding hotspot. With little available wa-



Cactus Wren

ter in the area, birds literally flock to this oasis in the desert. This afternoon, we'll focus on birding the northwest section of the lake. Several access points will give us a good opportunity to scan for a large selection of waterbirds. Many species of ducks and shorebirds are possible here and there are typically a good number of Eared Grebes present. In the surrounding habitat, we will look for Gambel's Quail and Abert's Towhees. In the late afternoon, we'll make our way back to Borrego Springs.

Overnight: Borrego Springs

February 24: Salton Sea - Transfer to Idyllwild

Throughout the morning, we will focus on birding the southern and eastern sections of the Salton Sea. We are sure to see some impressive congregations of waterbirds on the lake while we visit a number of access points. We are likely to see some large congregations of geese – Snow Geese are numerous and we'll scan the flocks to look for Greater White-fronted, Ross's, and possibly a Cackling. We'll spend time scanning through the flocks of ducks that winter here and are likely to see Blue-winged, Cinnamon, and Green-winged Teals, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Redhead, Bufflehead, and Ruddy Duck. In the shorebird flocks, we are likely to see Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, and Stilt, Western, and Least Sandpipers. On land, we'll be looking for a different suite of birds. Burrowing Owls can be quite numerous and we should see many. Common Ground Doves, Abert's Towhee, and White-crowned Sparrows are among the many species we'll keep an eye out for. In addition to all of the expected birds, there is a reasonably high chance of a rarity, hopefully we'll get lucky!

After lunch, we will start our drive back into the mountains to Idyllwild, where we will be staying for the night. On the way in, we will make a stop at Quinn Flats. Our main target here is Pinyon Jay. Typically, there is a large flock in this area, and we are able to get some great views of this uncommon species. Other birds we may see include Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy and Red-breasted Nuthatches,

and Red Crossbill. This general area is also a regular wintering spot for a Lewis's Woodpecker or two, and if any are around, we'll make sure to look for them. By the early evening, we'll arrive in the quaint town of Idyllwild.

Overnight: Idyllwild

February 25: Birding Idyllwild and Transfer to San Diego

We'll spend this morning birding at the nearby Idyllwild Regional Park. This park is home to the striking White-headed Woodpecker which will be one of our main targets for the day. We'll slowly walk the trails and park roads in search of this woodpecker as well as Acorn, Nuttall's, and Hairy Woodpeckers, Mountain Quail, and Band-tailed Pigeons among other more common species. We'll also spend some time watching the feeders where we should have great views of Mountain Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, and Steller's Jays.



White-headed Woodpecker

After lunch in Idyllwild, we'll make the 2.5-hour drive back to Marina Village Conference Center. We plan to arrive back by mid-afternoon.

Trip Details:

Cost:

Price per person (double occupancy), from San Diego, California: \$1,799

Single Supplement: \$300

Min Participants: 6

Max Participants: 8

Price Includes:

Expert Guide

Ground Transportation

All Lodging

All Meals

Park Entrance Fees

Portion of Proceeds Donated to SDBA

Price Does Not Include:

Airfare

Airport Taxes

Passport and Visa Fees

Alcoholic Beverages

Personal Items

Travel Insurance

Tips

Deposit:

A deposit of \$500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (November 24, 2026).

If you have any questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact us at info@sabrewingnaturetours.com, by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at sabrewingnaturetours.com.

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