

# Southern California Heteromyid Grandslam Trip Report September 13-22, 2014

**Leaders:** Fiona Reid and Vladimir Dinets

**Participants:** Paul Carter, Steve Davis, Karen Baker, Phil Telfer, Charles Hood, and Steve Linsley

Sea Otter (PT)



**Prequel.** Before the trip, Vladimir and Phil went on a 3-day trip to the Sierra Nevada. We first drove to Lake Tahoe and stopped at Taylor Creek, where we found **Long-eared, Yellow-pine** and **Least Chipmunks, California** and **Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrels**, and **Pine** (formerly **Douglas'**) **Squirrels**. We went a bit up the lakeshore looking for **Allen's Chipmunks**, and eventually saw one crossing the road above Emerald Bay.

After nightfall we drove up to Sonora Pass looking for carnivores (a small population of Red Fox of the very rare Sierra subsp. has recently been discovered there), but saw only a **Coyote** and some **Deer Mice**.

We stayed both nights in Bridgeport, where **Yuma Myotis** can be seen very well as they fly at dusk around Bridgeport Inn. Ten traps set on a rocky slope with piñons and junipers a few miles S of town got 5 **Deer Mice** and 1 **Brush Mouse**. Clearly, small mammal populations on the E side of the Sierra were not affected by the drought that decimated those on the W side. We also saw a roadkill Mink in that area.

We explored N and S sides of Mono Lake well. The boardwalk at the N side had some **Montane Voles** near the end (both day and night), as well as **Mountain Cottontails**. At the southern side, night walks along the boardwalk and drives along a very special side road produced **Pygmy Rabbit** (we also saw another one on a roadside a few miles N of the lake), **Ord's Kangaroo Rat**, **Great Basin Pocket Mouse**,

**Black-tailed Jackrabbit**, and **Desert Cottontail**. During the day we got a **Little Pocket Mouse** (in a trap), an out-of-season **Piute Ground Squirrel**, and a very tame **Coyote**.

We hiked the 3.7-mile Mono Pass Trail in Yosemite National Park, where **Lodgepole Chipmunks**, **Golden-Mantled** and **Belding's Ground Squirrels**, **Pine Squirrels** and **Mule Deer** were easy to see. About 3 miles up the trail we found a nice talus slope, and after a bit of waiting saw an **American Pika** being chased by a Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, another Pika just ten feet away, a pair of **Alpine Chipmunks**, and, surprisingly, a **Panamint Chipmunk** (generally rare in Yosemite area). We checked two places where Yellow-bellied Marmots are usually guaranteed (Saddlebag Lake and Glacier Point), but didn't see a single one. On the way out of the park we saw a **Western Gray Squirrel**.

**Sept 12.** After meeting in Sacramento, Vladimir took Phil, Karen and Steve Davis to look at a Mexican Free-tail colony under a bridge, but the bats were all absent (fortunately, they were present when we tried again on the last day of the trip). An attempt to see Ringtails in Cold Canyon Preserve was unsuccessful; we heard a few **Dusky-footed Woodrats**, and Vladimir briefly saw one, but the only mammal seen by everybody was a **Mule Deer**.

### **The official tour starts now!**

**Sept 13.** After picking up remaining people in the Bay Area, we had a quick stop at Palo Alto Baylands Reserve where we saw our first mammal, the ubiquitous **California Ground Squirrel** (seen every day and not noted for remainder of report) along with a variety of ducks and waders. We went south to Moss Landing, stopping on the way at the Forest of Nisene Marks, where we saw some Townsend's Warblers and nice redwood forest but no mammals. Passing through Santa Cruz we saw an introduced **Eastern Fox Squirrel**.



At Moss Landing we had great views of **Sea Otters** and **Harbor Seals**. We crossed the sand dunes to the beach where we could see the spouts of distant **Humpback Whales**, a good indicator for our trip the next day. We headed to the northern side of Elkhorn Slough Hwy 1 bridge, where **California Sea Lions** were lolling on rocks and **Sea Otters** could be seen close up. We had amazingly close views of a **Brush Rabbit** that ventured onto the grass near Sea Harvest Restaurant.

Brush Rabbit (FAR)

After a meal at the same restaurant we went to Monterey to confirm our boat trip the next day. A friendly **Common Raccoon** appeared on the rocks at the entrance to the pier, giving good views for our UK contingent in particular.

**Sept 14.** We set off early for a whale-watching outing from Monterey organized and captained by Nancy Black. It was a great day with calm seas and good visibility. On our way out we saw large groups of **California Sea Lions**, **Harbor Seals**, and **Sea Otters**. Later we saw a number of seabirds including Pink-footed, Black-vented, Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets, and Pomarine and

Parasitic Jaegers. The highlight of the trip was numerous close encounters with **Humpback Whales** that were feeding in small to large groups. Some were seen to breach and spy-hop. On the way back we encountered a group of **Long-beaked Common Dolphins** and had close views as they swam alongside our boat.



Humpbacks (FAR)

From Monterey we headed south along Highway 1 to the Cone Peak Trailhead. Shortly before we reached the trailhead we saw a **Western Gray Squirrel**. After admiring the rare Bristlecone Fir, we hiked up the trail. Part of the group made it to the top for the sunset, while another group stopped partway. As Vladimir expected from previous visits, a tame **Intermediate Woodrat** put in an appearance at the summit; another one was seen along the trail. Also seen (by some) on the hike were **California Pocket Mouse**, **California Myotis**, and two free-tailed bats, most likely **Mexican Freetail** and **Big Free-tail** (based on size and habitat FAR was fairly sure of these IDs). Back in the parking area of the trailhead we glimpsed a **Big-eared Woodrat** (*Neotoma intermedia*). Some of the group had good views of **Yuma Myotis** circling low behind the van, and as we drove out along a rock wall we saw a number of **Canyon Bats** flying past. During the drive down from the trailhead we saw two **Narrow-faced Kangaroo Rats** and two mice crossing the road – a **California Mouse** and a young **Brush Mouse** that was very close to the road in leaf litter. We continued via the Nacimiento Road where we had good views of a **Striped Skunk** (new for some of the group). We also saw a few **Mule Deer** on our way to the Mission. We arrived very late at the Mission San Antonio de Padua, only to find the lock boxes didn't have sufficient keys and all the rooms had single beds... fortunately everyone was too tired to even worry and we all found cushions, benches or floor space to curl up for a few hours.

**Sept 15.** In the morning lots of **Brush Rabbits** and **Desert Cottontails** were grazing around the mission. We set off a bit earlier than originally planned and headed to Paso Robles, seeing a few Yellow-billed Magpies on our way. We decided to make a side trip to San Simeon to have a close look at **Northern Elephant Seals**; on the way back we saw a **Harbor Seal**, a **Sea Otter** and an immense flock of migrating Sooty Shearwater.



Nelson's Antelope Squirrel (PT)

After lunch we continued on to Carrizo Plain NM. One of our target species here was **Nelson's Antelope Squirrel**, which we were fortunate to locate quite near the southern entrance. Vladimir spotted it on the road but it dashed off. Fiona relocated it near a burrow where it obligingly remained above-ground until everyone had seen it. A little further along, Fiona spotted a large male **Kit Fox** by a low fence. It was great to see this small canid in daylight as it loped with a floating gait up the hill behind us, stopping and sitting under the shade of a small bush. We checked the campsite and other areas for possible bat night roosts and rodent activity, and as darkness fell we concentrated on finding the usually-common kangaroo rats. Tarantulas and **Desert Cottontails** were abundant but the drought had taken its toll, and rodents were scarce. Eventually we did get very good views of a **Heerman's Kangaroo Rat**, getting a positive ID based on the hind toe count from one of Paul's photos (thanks to the rat for lifting himself up at the right time!). Vladimir found a **San Joaquin Pocket Mouse** but it disappeared before anyone else could get a good look. As we eventually headed out of the NM we saw a couple of **Giant Kangaroo Rats**, notably bigger than the one seen earlier.



Giant Kangaroo Rat (VD)

We drove on to Munz Road near Lake Hughes where we stopped to walk the roadsides. Vladimir saw a couple of **Little Pocket Mice**; one was also seen by Charles but not by the rest of the group. We located a **Northern Baja Mouse**, and saw **Black-tailed Jackrabbits, Coyote,** and an **Agile Kangaroo Rat** on surrounding roads. Fiona noticed a coiled, resting Mojave Rattlesnake which allowed everyone to get its picture (and thankfully did not bite Paul when he groomed the vegetation all around it!). We finally collapsed in a motel in Palmdale.

Mojave Rattlesnake (PT)



Little Pocket Mouse (VD)

**Sept 16.** We made a quick birding stop at Big Morongo Canyon Reserve and drove to Joshua Tree NP. This is a wonderfully scenic area and there were very few tourists around. We arrived a bit late due to an out-of-season flash flood that washed away a few roads. We celebrated Steve Davis seeing his 4,500<sup>th</sup> bird, a Hermit Warbler (it wasn't a hard core birding trip but we did look at what was around. We spent late afternoon and dusk at the dam in the middle of the park where we saw **Canyon Bats** foraging and also heard the audible calls of **Western Bonneted Bat**.



Common Kingsnake (PT)

The highlights of our night drives were mostly reptilian, finding Common Kingsnake and Glossy Snake on the road (and later a Sidewinder), but in the same area as the Kingsnake (east of Skull Rock) we saw several **Merriam's Kangaroo Rats**, one **Chisel-Toothed Kangaroo Rat**, and an unusually small, dark color phase of **Desert Kangaroo Rat**, recognized by its white tail tip. Some **Big Free-tails** were also noted flying by. We set a few traps outside

the park area to check early the next morning and tried to get to a known bat roost, but the trail was closed due to the flash floods. We walked a shorter trail and briefly saw a **San Diego Pocket Mouse**. We spent two nights in a motel in Indio, about 30 min away.

**Sept 17.** We went to check our traps and were happy to find the rather uncommon **Long-tailed Pocket Mouse** had been caught. Took pictures and released it on-site. We then drove through the park again, and had one very surprising sighting – a **Southern Grasshopper Mouse** dashed across the road and was located again, briefly, on the far side. Very odd for 10 a.m. in full sun, but good to see. Several interesting lizards were seen during the day. We hiked to Pine City area in search of California Chipmunks, but didn't see them, probably because of extreme heat. Some of the group spotted several **White-tailed Antelope Squirrels** diving across the road and into burrows, but Karen in particular had a hard time seeing this species. Eventually, though, she did get a look at one at a different location. We had a break in the afternoon then headed to dry canyons in Mecca Hills Wilderness in search of a small waterhole for bats. Sadly the waterhole was dry, and another canyon was inaccessible after the flash floods. We almost caught one **Canyon Bat**, but it escaped. We saw very nice **Dulzura Kangaroo Rats**, and some people saw a **Spiny Pocket Mouse**. We did have very good views of **Desert Pocket Mouse**. One youngster was caught by hand by Vladimir, but it bit him so he let it go and Fiona caught it! Tough being a little mouse with mammalogists around! We also set up some traps while we were exploring the canyon and when we returned had a good catch of adult Desert Pocket Mice. In this same area some of the group had a good view of a **Western Yellow Bat** flying fairly low, possibly on its way to the palms growing at the waterhole.



Desert Bighorn (VD)

**Sept 18.** We headed over to Salton Sea, a place not recommended unless you have no sense of smell! After a short stop here for birding we continued on toward Anza-Borrego SP. On arrival at the Borrego Palm Canyon trailhead where there is a largish water hole, we were fortunate to see a group of about 15 **Desert Bighorn Sheep** coming to drink. One of the large rams came within a few feet of us. It was incredible. Two fellows were

set up to photograph bats at night over the water hole. They were a bit too close to this prized resource in our opinion, but some of the sheep were bold enough to come right over. We also saw some very tame **White-tailed Antelope Squirrels** there. We had lunch at Borrego Springs and even allowed a little shopping to take place.

In the evening we split up, Fiona setting a net over the motel swimming pool (sadly it was unsuccessful), while everyone else did some night driving/walking and visited the photo set-up in the park. They were able to see **Townsend's Big-eared Bat** and **Canyon Bats** coming to drink. The group also saw a **Baja Pocket Mouse** and a number of **Desert Cottontails** and **Black-tailed Jackrabbits**.

**Sept 19.** We assumed the bat photographers would have left by early morning, so we started at 4 a.m. in hopes of finding elusive mammals at the water hole, but unfortunately they were still there. We did see at least a dozen **Merriam's** and **Dulzura Kangaroo Rats** in the park area. We headed toward the coast, stopping at Cuyamaco Rancho State Park on our way. There were several recent sightings of Bobcat here but we didn't find one. We did however finally start seeing some chipmunks, the first being **California Chipmunk** in the state park. From here we headed to the coast and stopped briefly at Torrey Pines State Park for a swim. After a rather long lunch break we moved on to the Lake Perris area and San Jacinto Wildlife Refuge where we hoped to pick up the very rare Stephen's Kangaroo rat. Unfortunately habitat change and drought made this area unproductive for us. Paul found a **Deer Mouse**, we saw a few **Striped Skunks**, and a **Virginia Opossum**. Fiona couldn't resist the urge to outrun the poor opossum so that Karen and Steve could get some photos of it. We drove on through the night to Gorman.



Lodgepole Chipmunk (VD)

**Sept 20.** We slept in after a series of late nights. In the late morning we drove the long, twisty road to Sequoia National Park, where our first mammal was a **Western Gray Squirrel**. Stopping near General Sherman, the largest of the redwoods, we had very good views of chipmunks which were later identified (after much discussion) as **Lodgepole Chipmunks**. Charles sneaked off for a few minutes of privacy but ended up being closely watched by a **Black Bear!** We all got to

see it, a radio-collared individual. We then went back down the mountain and up another long, twisty road to Mineral King. This high valley is incredibly beautiful, even with a light rain, as we found it. A walk along the valley allowed views of a lone **Yellow-bellied Marmot**, **Yellow-pine Chipmunks** (near parking area and up the trail) and **Alpine Chipmunk** in a more open area. We also saw **Douglas's Squirrel** around the small houses in the parking area. After darkness fell, we started the drive back down so we could spotlight on our way. At higher elevations we saw a few **Deer Mice**, while at lower elevations we had excellent views of a **Piñon Mouse** on a steep cliff, and also saw a **California Mouse**. Numerous **Mexican Free-tails** were circling near a rock wall. We had a very late dinner and then drove on across the Central Valley. We stopped in the early hours of the next morning on Little Panoche Road where we tracked down a couple of **Fresno Kangaroo Rats**. We had excellent looks at **Giant** and a few **Heerman's Kangaroo Rats** in Panoche Hills, and caught a glimpse at a **Kit Fox**. Eventually we wound up at Mercey Hot Springs for what was left of the night. Vladimir saw a **San Joaquin Pocket Mouse** in the hills above the springs and set traps trying to catch it, but it didn't work.



Piñon Mouse (VD)

**Sept 21.** We headed over to Pinnacles NP in the early afternoon. This is a great spot where one could spend a few days. After much trial, we finally located a couple of **Merriam's Chipmunks** at the base of the trailhead to the caves. We spoke to a park ranger who said he very often saw Bobcat on his drive home around 5 p.m. so we decided to try that route. We left Paul in the campground. Unfortunately we didn't see anything new on our drive, but Paul was lucky enough to find a **Bobcat** hunting quail in the campground, and he got some great photos. We all tried to find the same animal later, but had no luck. Our drive that night didn't produce any new species. We overnighted in Marina, near Monterey.

**Sept 22.** Nancy Black invited us on a long whale-watching trip, so we set off at about 7:30 a.m. and did not return to land until after 4 p.m. This trip was really good – first we saw a few **Harbor Porpoises** quite well, as well as all the species we had seen on our first trip. Then we located a pod of 4 **Killer Whales**. We ended up watching this group on and off for the next 3 hours. They appeared to be trying to hunt a nearby group of California Sea Lions. However, when they circled in preparation to attack, three **Humpback Whales** intercepted them, rising to the surface and trumpeting quite loudly with each exhale. The Killer Whales moved off and we soon found them. A similar event took place, with a group of 4 different humpbacks again interfering with the hunt, getting between the Orcas and their prey. We also spotted a lone **Elephant Seal**, which was flirting danger. The same type of interaction happened twice more and was fascinating to see. Later we saw a large herd of **Long-beaked Common Dolphins** mixed up with California Sea Lions and followed by numerous seabirds; we moved with this herd for a few minutes.





Humpbacks (FAR)

We tried to look for California Vole in Año Nuevo State park, but since the boat trip took longer than expected there wasn't much daylight left and no voles were seen with certainty. After dropping most people off, Vladimir drove Steve Davis, Karen and Phil to the Mexican Free-tail colony, and then to Sacramento.

#### List of mammals seen

Virginia Opossum, *Didelphis virginiana*

Desert Cottontail, *Sylvilagus audubonii*

Brush Rabbit, *S. bachmani*

Black-tailed Jackrabbit, *Lepus californicus*

Eastern Fox Squirrel, *Sciurus niger*

Western Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus griseus*

Pine Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

California Ground Squirrel, *Xerospermophilus beecheyi*

White-tailed Antelope Squirrel, *Ammospermophilus leucurus*

Nelson's Antelope Squirrel, *A. nelsoni*

Yellow-bellied Marmot, *Marmota flaviventris*

Lodgepole Chipmunk, *Tamias speciosus*

Yellow-pine Chipmunk, *T. amoenus*

Alpine Chipmunk, *T. alpinus*

Merriam's Chipmunk, *T. merriami*

California Chipmunk, *T. obscurus*

Little Pocket Mouse, *Perognathus longimembris*

San Joaquin Pocket Mouse, *P. inornatus*



Using the correct field guide! (CH)

Baja Pocket Mouse, *Chaetodipus rudinoris*  
 California Pocket Mouse, *C. californicus*  
 San Diego Pocket Mouse, *C. fallax*  
 Spiny Pocket Mouse, *C. spinatus*  
 Long-tailed Pocket Mouse, *C. formosus*  
 Desert Pocket Mouse, *C. penicillatus*  
 Merriam's Kangaroo Rat, *Dipodomys merriami*  
 Fresno (San Joaquin) K Rat, *D. nitratooides*  
 Desert K Rat, *D. deserti*  
 Heerman's K Rat, *D. heermanni*  
 Giant K Rat, *D. ingens*  
 Narrow-faced K. Rat, *D. venustus*  
 Dulzura K Rat, *D. simulans*  
 Agile K Rat, *D. agilis*  
 Chisel-toothed K Rat, *D. microps*



Vladimir and scorpion (CH)

Big-eared Woodrat, *Neotoma macrotis*  
 Dusky-footed Woodrat, *N. fuscipes*.  
 Intermediate Woodrat, *N. intermedius*  
 Deer Mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus*  
 California Mouse, *P. californicus*  
 Piñon Mouse, *P. truei*  
 Brush Mouse, *P. boylii*  
 N. Baja Mouse, *P. fraterculus*  
 S. Grasshopper Mouse, *Onychomys torridus*

Mexican Free-tailed Bat, *Tadarida brasiliensis*  
 Big Free-tailed Bat, *Nyctinomops macrotis*  
 Western Yellow Bat, *Lasiurus xanthinus*  
 Townsend's Big-eared Bat, *Corynorhinus townsendii*  
 California Myotis, *Myotis californicus*  
 Yuma Myotis, *M. yumanensis*  
 Canyon Bat (Western Pipistrelle), *Parastrellus hesperus*

Bobcat, *Lynx rufus*  
 Coyote, *Canis latrans*  
 Kit Fox, *Vulpes macrotis*  
 Black Bear, *Ursus americanus*  
 Northern Raccoon, *Procyon lotor*  
 Sea Otter, *Enhydra lutris*  
 Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*  
 California Sea Lion, *Zalophus californianus*  
 Northern Elephant Seal, *Mirounga angustirostris*  
 Harbor Seal, *Phoca vitulina*

Mule Deer, *Odocoileus hemionus*  
 Bighorn Sheep, *Ovis canadensis*

Steve gets his award! (FAR)



Humpback Whale, *Megaptera novaeangliae*  
Orca, *Orcinus orca*  
Long-beaked Common Dolphin, *Delphinus capensis*  
Harbor Porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*

**Total 64 species**

**Species seen during the Sierra pre-trip:**

Desert Cottontail, *Sylvilagus audubonii*  
Mountain Cottontail, *S. nuttallii*  
Pygmy Rabbit, *Brachylagus idahoensis*  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit, *Lepus californicus*

Western Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus griseus*  
Pine Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*  
California Ground Squirrel, *Xerospermophilus beecheyi*  
Belding's Ground Squirrel, *Urocitellus beldingi*  
Piute Ground Squirrel, *U. mollis*  
Lodgepole Chipmunk, *Tamias speciosus*  
Yellow-pine Chipmunk, *T. amoenus*  
Alpine Chipmunk, *T. alpinus*  
Least Chipmunk, *T. minimus*  
Long-eared Chipmunk, *T. quadrimaculatus*  
Panamint Chipmunk, *T. panamintinus*  
Allen's Chipmunk, *T. senex*

Little Pocket Mouse, *Perognathus longimembris*  
Great Basin Pocket Mouse, *P. parvus*  
Ord's Kangaroo Rat, *Dipodomys ordii*

Deer Mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus*  
Brush Mouse, *P. boylii*  
Montane Vole, *Microtus montanus*

Yuma Myotis, *M. yumanensis*

Coyote, *Canis latrans*

Mule Deer, *Odocoileus hemionus*

**Total including the pre-trip 75 species**

Brush Mouse (VD)

