Second time lucky, after rescheduling from our planned date of 1 October, when the weather was really windy. Although we had big northwest swells left over from recent strong winds the morning was mostly calm; a northwest wind picked up in late morning but stayed at around 15 knots and the New Sea Angler rode the seas well. A few Pigeon Guillemots, some loons, and 4 Red-necked Grebes were seen outside the harbor, and then it was offshore.

Brief views of distant shearwaters were followed by a couple of belts of thick fog, causing concern that we might not see much if we were stuck in fog all day. However, the fog perhaps contributed to a very obliging Rhinoceros Auklet that refused to dive, but then suddenly we broke out into clear skies and were surrounded by feeding Humpback Whales, along with some Northern Fulmars (which we then saw throughout the day), gulls (ditto), and a scattering of shearwaters.

Captain Rick turned off the engine and we sat amid the blowing (and sometimes fluking) whales—an amazing experience. A fly-by Tufted Puffin was seen nicely by all as it circled us, and the first Black-footed Albatross affirmed that “we weren’t in Kansas anymore” and were in the deep waters over Bodega Canyon. The day continued under sunny skies, with plenty of albatrosses, and good views of Buller’s, Sooty, and Pink-footed Shearwaters, plus patches of Cassin’s Auklets, many too full of food to take off.

A couple of Peregrine Falcons were a bit of a surprise well offshore, one of them stooping on a luckless Red Phalarope. A few Pacific White-sided Dolphins joined us briefly, and a group of Dall’s Porpoises put on a dashing show! A Laysan Albatross
welcomed us to Marin County as we approached the deep-water pinnacles at the northern end of Cordell Bank, and we enjoyed nice views of this handsome bird alongside his Black-footed cousins. And then there were some majestic Blue Whales, a couple of curious Steller’s Sea Lions, and a Northern Fur Seal to round out the diversity. All in all, a magical day offshore in a small part of the biggest wilderness in North America.

Report by Steve Howell
Photo by Nick Gray (Black-footed Albatross)