A wonderful variety of birds, a beautiful day along the coast, and a fun and knowledgeable group combined to create a particularly enjoyable day for the more than 25 Birding in Marin participants that visited Drakes Beach, the Fish Docks, and the Point Reyes Lighthouse. Five Barn Owls decorated the sky as we watched from the Drakes Beach parking lot. Close by, Yellow Warblers bounced in and out of the willows as two Great Horned Owls watched and hooted. This was just the beginning of what was to become a twelve-raptor day for our group.

Red-necked Grebes, a Ruddy Duck, loons, cormorants, Common Murres, and many foraging Elegant Terns were observed on calm Drakes Bay. One of seven Parasitic Jaegers seen flew nearly over our heads causing serious concern with the Elegant Terns. Bob Battagin directed us all to three Common Terns on the beach amongst the settled flock of Elegant Terns, Heermann’s Gulls, California Gulls, Western Gulls, Marbled Godwits, and Whimbrels.

A lone Bonaparte’s Gull was sighted on a rock near the elephant seals as we watched 3 more Parasitic Jaegers chasing 100+ Elegant Terns. As we headed toward the Fish Docks, we encountered our first raptor identification dilemma perched in one of the cypress trees. After much discussion it was determined to be a juvenile Broad-winged Hawk. This was later confirmed by examining photos taken by Matt Perry and Len Blumin. This unusual raptor sighting was followed by the appearance of a Swainson’s Hawk which circled the area providing excellent views for the entire group. In the vicinity of the ranger residence, many of us saw our first-of-fall Golden-crowned Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and Townsend’s Warbler. In the distance at the Fish Docks, a single Wandering Tattler was spotted.

At the Point Reyes Lighthouse, we got some great views of a Peregrine Falcon and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Our popular, young birding companion, Lucas Corneliusen, spotted a Rock Wren on the cliffs below our lunch spot and ended up seeing a total of five life birds during the day. While gathered for lunch a large group of people sang “Happy Birthday” to Barbara Rozen who chose to spend her birthday out birding. On the way back we paused at the Mendoza Pond where an Eared Grebe, Tricolored Blackbirds, and Say’s Phoebe were seen.

Out on the Spaletta Plateau, a Ferruginous Hawk filled our bins and scopes momentarily, and four Pacific Golden-Plovers were located. A dowitcher lurked about
with 40 Black-bellied Plovers and 10 Killdeer. We made a last stop to check the Spaletta slop pond for a hoped for Pectoral Sandpiper (not found) but did discover a Wilson’s Snipe.

Throughout the day we noted 76 species (26 new to our cumulative year list) and had a rather wonderful time. Thanks to the many trip participants (too many to list) who helped spot and identify birds, shared their spotting scopes and knowledge, and contributed immensely to a fun and interesting day for all.

By Jim White