

Baja Whales & Wildlife

Searcher Natural History Tours

FALL 2010



Photos similar to these help researchers learn about the movements and habits of gray whale cow-calf pairs in Laguna San Ignacio. (Photos by Frank S. Balthis)

Getting to know gray whales in Laguna San Ignacio

How long do gray whale cow-calf pairs remain in a lagoon? How many calves are born each winter? Do large numbers of single whales deter mothers with calves away from a lagoon so that they move on to utilize another? Answers may come through photo-identification work by the Laguna San Ignacio Ecosystem Science Program (LSIESP).

LSIESP researchers collect photos of individual gray whales, especially females with calves. They take photos when gray whales surface to breathe and are curious around the whale watching boats. They photograph the whale's dorsal area, including the dorsal hump and knuckles. Those areas and the associated color patches on gray whales identify individuals much like fingerprints identify individual humans. There are now 10,000 digital images of gray whales in the archive from the 2006-2010 seasons in Laguna San Ignacio.

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A TRADITION OF QUALITY ECOTOURISM TO BAJA CALIFORNIA

For more than 25 years, the *Searcher* has conducted natural history expeditions to Baja California's coastal waters and islands. We are one of only a few U.S. businesses with special permission from the Mexican government to operate natural history cruises into Mexican ecological preserves and national parks.

OUR MISSION:

"To observe marine animals in their natural environment, and to share that experience with our passengers."

Searcher Natural History Tours

Celia Condit and Art Taylor

2838 Garrison Street
San Diego, CA 92106

Tel: 619-226-2403

Fax: 619-226-1332

Email: searcher@bajawhale.com

Web site: www.bajawhale.com



Stay Connected on BajaWhale.com

We want to stay in touch with whale and wildlife lovers, so we're launching an enhanced Web site this fall. By visiting www.BajaWhale.com, you can also connect with us via Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

You'll notice three categories of our tours now: Baja Whalewatching, Wildlife Weekends, and Pelagic Birding. All are natural history tours, each with a slightly different focus but designed to provide our customers access and education to marine life. You'll see a tour calendar and quick-view itineraries for each one. Plus, you'll be able to get tour documents and reservation inquiries handled more efficiently. Look for updated photos and a Captain's blog that's searchable and easier to access.

We won't lose the personal touch though! We'll still be offering our reports from the field, and we'll be accessible by phone and email for all the usual personal service for reservations, questions, hotel and activity suggestions, and foreign travel concerns. (The old-fashioned way of picking up the phone to ask a question is still encouraged!)



A curious gray whale calf approaches *Searcher* passengers in Laguna San Ignacio.



Lambchop's Chocolate-Butterscotch Cheesecake

Betcha can't eat just one piece!

Crust:

- 2 cups chocolate graham cracker crumbs
- 4 T salted butter, softened

Grind crackers into fine crumbs using a blender or a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Add butter and blend until smooth. Press into bottom of 9-inch springform pan and refrigerate while preparing the filling.

Filling:

- 24 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1½ cup white sugar
- 3 cups sour cream
- 4 large eggs
- 1½ T pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 cup butterscotch chips

Use an electric mixer to beat cream cheese until smooth. Blend in sugar and sour cream. Add eggs and vanilla and mix until smooth.

Combine chocolate and butterscotch chips. Mix ¾ of the chips into filling. Pour filling into the crust-lined pan and smooth the top with a spatula. Sprinkle remaining chips on top.

Bake 75 minutes at 300° F. Turn oven off and leave the cheesecake in oven for 30 minutes more. Remove from oven and chill in refrigerator overnight.

Other variations:

- ◆ Substitute peanut butter chips for butterscotch chips.
- ◆ Add six drops of green food dye to filling and substitute mint chocolate chips for butterscotch chips.

—Steve Lamb (aka “Lambchop”),
Searcher cook

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Eventually the *Baja Whales and Wildlife* newsletter will be produced in email format only, so be sure to sign up for our e-newsletter now. Just go to <http://www.bajawhale.com>

To subscribe is easy, but don't forget to confirm your subscription by following the directions of the email you'll receive after signing up. This ensures your security and it means we don't email to anyone who doesn't want it. Also please know that we also don't share your email with anyone.



Where do we go?



The cliffs of Isla San Jose are the backdrop to a colorful morning in the Sea of Cortez.

Isla San Jose

A highlight of the Sea of Cortez portion of our 12-day Baja Whales and Wildlife tour is a morning visit to Isla San Jose. Sometimes we arrive before dawn, in time to see the brilliant sunrise redden the pale sandstone cliffs of Punta Colorada. After breakfast, we board *Searcher's* skiffs for a cruise along the island's shoreline. We take our time exploring the cliffs where we can see and photograph brown- and blue-footed boobies, sally light-foot crabs, brown pelicans, yellow-footed gulls, and nesting osprey.

We venture ashore for a morning walk in an arroyo, home to remarkable birds such as Gila woodpeckers, verdin, hummingbirds and gnatcatchers. Some of us stop to take photos of desert iguanas, chuckwallas, whiptail lizards, and other island reptiles.

After the walk and the day warms up, we get into the water at San Jose for a wonderful snorkel in a large cove. The underwater rocks and reefs are home to tropical reef fishes, moray eels, coral fans, and more.

It's back to the boat just in time for a warm shower and lunch. We'll motor aboard *Searcher* into the rich waters of the San Jose Channel—an area between Isla San Jose and the peninsula of Baja California that's spectacularly scenic. Here we often spot herds of common and bottlenose dolphins, sperm whales, fin and blue whales, and other marine mammals and birds. Against this backdrop of the mountainous peninsula and the varied rock colors of the island, we glide over a blue ocean. Add in a few leaping dolphins or mobula rays, or a surfacing blue whale and diving birds, and you have Baja magic!



(Above) A skiff ride around Isla San Jose brings us close to sea life.

(Below) A still tide pool reflects the island.



Gray Whales

Continued from cover—

These images are also available to other researchers in other areas of the gray whales' range.

LSIESP, led by Steven Swartz Swartz and his Mexican colleagues from universities in Baja California, recently published their 2010 field report on Laguna San Ignacio's gray whales (including their abundance, acoustics, and effects of whale watching), seagrasses, marine birds, sea lions, and community outreach and education research. Several of our passengers have met Swartz as he rides south with us to his research station in the lagoon. For more information or to join us in making a donation to this research and conservation organization, go to www.lsiesp.org

Margaritas! Hold the salt

LSIESP and other supporting organizations recently held a 10-year anniversary celebration of "sustainable development" at Laguna San Ignacio. It was 10 years ago that the Mexican government voted down the proposal for a solar salt production facility at the lagoon (which many environmental groups feared would cause great disturbance to the gray whales).



By Owner/Operator Art Taylor



During May and June offshore San Diego, we have an opportunity to encounter blue whales—the same blue whales we see in Baja California in winter—as they make their way back north for summer feeding in central California. There's also the possibility to see dolphins, seabirds, other whales, and a variety of seals and sea lions.

So, this past Memorial Day weekend we offered a 2½-day Wildlife Weekend trip. We heard from our passengers and customers that they were happy we were offering tours shorter than our 12-day Baja whale watching tours, which not everyone can enjoy due to time or budget constraints. The trip was fantastic—a variety of wildlife that was much more than we anticipated. We found not only blue whales, but ten other cetacean species plus a host of seabirds such as albatrosses, shearwaters, tropicbirds, storm petrels, and more. Our sightings list filled the entire marker board on the boat!

In fact, our first Wildlife Weekend was so successful that we're going to offer three more 2½-day trips in 2011, as well as one brand new tour: Wildlife Week (5 days). The itinerary is exciting, as we will be spending time in deep water; areas around islands (Los Coronados, Guadalupe, San Martin, and Todos Santos); and coastal areas searching for seabirds, whales, and other marine wildlife of northern Baja California. You can find details on our new Web site: <http://www.bajawhale.com>

We hope to have you aboard in 2011 so we can share the whales and wildlife of Baja with you.

Art Taylor



Common dolphins (at left) and blue whales (above) were two of the cetacean species that greeted us on our 2½-day Wildlife Weekend trip. (Both photos by Val Shore.)

Searcher Natural History Tours 2011–2012 Schedule

To see full trip itineraries go to www.BajaWhale.com

12 days in Baja: San Diego to Cabo San Lucas

*For openings on 2011 tours,
please call or email our office.*

Jan 23–Feb 3, 2012

Feb 7–18, 2012

Apr 7–18, 2012

Magnificent gray whales, frolicking dolphins, and vast numbers of seabirds welcome you to Baja. Explore the offshore islands of Islas Todos Santos and Islas San Benito looking for harbor seals, sea lions, elephant seals, and nesting birds. Walks reward you with breathtaking vistas and glimpses of rare plant life. In Laguna San Ignacio, pangas bring us eye-to-eye with gray whales.

You'll have time to explore pristine beaches and mangroves before we move south to spend more time at sea with gray whales and watch blue whales, common dolphins, and frigatebirds. Offshore Cabo San Lucas, we'll look for the acrobatic humpback whales of Gorda Banks.

Explore some of the most beautiful islands and beaches of the Sea of Cortez and snorkel among brilliant



reef fishes and California sea lions. We'll search for blue, fin and sperms whales as well as bottlenose and common dolphins and sea lions. Explore and photograph Baja's beaches, tide pools, islands plants, and bird life. Passengers board the *Searcher* in San Diego and fly home from Cabo San Lucas. \$3,875

Wildlife Weekend — 2½ days

May 28–30, 2011 (Memorial Day)

June 3–5, 2011

June 10–12, 2011

Cruise past Islas Los Coronados and the nearby deep-water trench to look for migrating blue and fin whales, dolphins and pelagic seabirds as well as other marine mammals and birds. \$450

Wildlife Week — 5 days

May 30–June 3, 2011

All the action of a Wildlife weekend, plus additional travel farther south into Baja waters. We'll anchor off Isla San Martín, cruise by Islas Todos Santos, and look for wildlife surrounding Isla Guadalupe. \$995





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GARDENA, CA

(619) 226-2403

2838 Garrison Street
San Diego, CA 92106

2011-2012 Tour Schedule inside ...

- ◆ animal sightings
- ◆ whalewatching
- ◆ birding

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Photo by Aaron Remy

**See the best of Baja
aboard the *Searcher*!**

Check us out online.

- ◆ Read the daily wildlife sightings from our 2010 trips.
Check Captain Art's Whale Blog:

<http://www.bajawhale.com>

- ◆ Watch video of our incredible encounters with wildlife.

<http://www.youtube.com/BajaWhale>

- ◆ Email searcher@bajawhale.com or call us at (619) 226-2403.