



# Mexico Pelagic trip report

29th November-8th December 2015

by Chris Collins, Tour Leader

## Introduction

The main focus of this ‘world first’ voyage was to look for two of the rarest and most localised seabirds on the planet, Townsend’s Shearwater and Ainley’s Storm-petrel, and we had great success with good views of both species.

It was, however, extremely worrying that we saw so few shearwaters (probably less than 35 individuals) and there seems to be little doubt that the feral cats on Socorro are continuing to devastate the population of this critically endangered bird. Without urgent action, the future of the species is surely extremely bleak. (Editor’s note: we may have been ‘early’ in the breeding season so hopefully there are still more Townsend’s out there!)

On a more positive note, however, as well as the two principle targets, we found an excellent range of other seabirds including Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses, Black and Least Storm-petrels, Cook’s Petrel, Black-vented, Wedge-tailed and Pink-footed Shearwaters and four species of booby – Blue-footed, Masked, Red-footed and Brown. The latter included Brewster’s Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster brewsteri* (which is only found on islands in the Gulf of California and off West Mexico) and looks distinctly different to all other forms, given the pale heads of the males. A potential future split.....

Our fish oil slicks also gave us excellent opportunities to study and photograph the “Leach’s Storm-petrel complex” that occurs off Western Mexico with Northern Leach’s, Chapman’s and Townsend’s Storm-petrels all being recorded. Given the plumage, flight and size differences between these birds, we were often left bemused as to why they remain lumped, even if separating the different dark-rumped birds can be a challenge.

Whilst we did not have permission to land on either Guadalupe or Socorro, nevertheless, we were able to do a couple of skiff rides on the western side of the latter island allowing us some reasonable looks at the endemic, and near threatened, Socorro Wren.

As well as the birds, a good selection of cetaceans were also recorded including Bryde’s and Humpback Whales plus Cuvier’s Beaked Whales, Short-beaked Common, Long-beaked Common, Bottlenose and Rough-toothed Dolphins.

Other marine creatures included California Sealion, Northern Elephant Seal, the highly endangered Guadalupe Fur Seal, Blue Shark, Hammerhead Shark, Bull Shark and Striped Marlin, so despite the exploratory nature of this expedition, it was an undoubted success and highly memorable for all involved.

The following text describes our activities on a day-by-day basis and will hopefully bring back many happy memories for those who joined the trip.

Chris Collins

December 2015

(Editor's note: WildWings are currently planning to repeat this voyage in November 2017, please see our website for the details, some itinerary revisions will be made as a result of this inaugural expedition, and we will continue to try and get permission to land on both or at least one of the islands, which would also add more potential land bird endemics.)

## **Day-by-day Log**

### **29 November 2015**

It was a perfect winter morning in San Diego with blue skies and hardly a breath of wind and by 07:15am the group had assembled at Fisherman's Landing for the beginning of our highly anticipated pelagic expedition. It had, after all, been almost two years since most people had reserved their places on this 'world first' trip and the sense of excitement was almost palpable.

A few moments later, the crew invited us to board *Searcher*, our home for the next nine nights and as soon as everyone was confirmed aboard, Captain Art introduced himself and the crew and we left the wharf. Once the safety briefing was complete, we were free to head outside where the first birds were found. There were good numbers of Western Grebes, Western Gulls and Brown Pelicans in the harbour and it was not long before we cleared the bay and were heading out into the open ocean.

Turning to the South, the bridge team set a course for Ensenada, the town on the Mexican side of the border where we were required to officially clear into Mexico before we could continue onwards to Guadalupe Island.

Cruising down the coast, we were soon into Mexican waters and with the journey expected to take about six hours, there were plenty of opportunities to settle in, unpack and spend time out on deck looking for our first pelagic species of the expedition.

For some, their first new bird of the trip was Cassin's Auklet and during the late morning, we passed through an area which was clearly favoured feeding for this species, with at least a couple of hundred individuals being seen. Most of these were in small groups and would generally dive or fly before we got too close but those who persevered were rewarded with some decent views of this diminutive auk.

There were also good numbers of Black-vented Shearwaters, so the cruise along the coast was a perfect opportunity to familiarise ourselves with this species.

As we continued onwards, there were good numbers of cetaceans with regular sightings of (Long-beaked) Common Dolphins, as well as a few Pacific White-sided and Bottlenose Dolphins. At one point, we also passed close to a Humpback Whale and some also saw a Guadalupe Fur Seal, so it was a highly productive start to our expedition.

By 14:00 we were approaching Ensenada and as we entered the harbour a selection of other species were found including Brandt's Cormorants, Heermann's Gull, Red-throated Diver, Surf Scoter, Willet, Marbled Godwit and Surfbird.

Although nine officials showed up to clear us and the vessel, the process was relatively quick. The wait at the wharf was, however, far from a birdless experience with some fantastic looks at American Coot and Western Grebe, whilst a range of other species were seen more distantly including Great-tailed Grackle, American Crow (a very localised bird in Mexico), Raven, Common Starling, Belted Kingfisher and Turkey Vulture.



### **Western Grebe – numerous in San Diego and Ensenada Harbours**

As soon as we were authorised to continue our journey, Captain Art instructed the crew to release the lines and he set a course for Guadalupe Island. Leaving the harbour, a handful of Clark's Grebes were seen and a little later as we approached deeper water, there was a shout when a Common Guillemot was spotted. Despite being a common bird further north, this is an extremely rare species in Mexico and it was only the second time Steve Howell had seen one in Mexican waters !!!!



**Heerman's Gull – although numerous in California and NW Mexico, this is surely amongst the more handsome of the world's gulls**

A little later, we saw a breaching Humpback Whale but it stopped 'performing' as we got closer. By 16:30 the light was starting to fade – it had been an excellent first day despite the mid-afternoon administrative stop.

**30 November**

For the majority of the group, the day's birding began at dawn and as the sun began to rise, we were positioned off the northern end of a large seamount to the north-east of Guadalupe Island. As soon as there was enough light to see, the crew put out a fish oil slick and we then waited patiently to see if any birds would arrive.

Whilst initially the birding was somewhat slow, storm-petrels began to appear with increased regularity over the course of the next couple of hours with several species seen. Sorting out the larger Blacks and the diminutive Leasts was not too complicated but the "Leach's types" caused more confusion, although the consensus was that the majority of the birds we were seeing were migrants from more northerly climes as many were in heavy moult with gleaming white rumps. There were certainly no birds which fitted the known criteria for Ainley's Storm-petrel.

After three hours around the slick, the decision was taken to continue our journey towards Guadalupe and there was no denying that the next few hours were somewhat quiet with only the occasional Sooty Shearwater and an unidentified turtle being the highlights.

Captain Art had suggested that we would arrive at the northern end of the island at about 14:30 and almost exactly on schedule we approached a bay where there were over one hundred Northern Elephant Seals hauled out on the beach. Although the majority of the animals were sub-adult males or females, there were a number of huge adult males. Whilst the younger males would occasionally rear up against each other and have a short fight, sleep was clearly a higher priority and the beach soon returned to calm.



**Northern Elephant Seals – good numbers of these huge pinnipeds breed on Guadalupe**

Slightly to the side of the main haulout were about half a dozen Guadalupe Fur Seals, another of our target species.

After watching the seals, *Searcher* cruised down the eastern side of the island and we quickly appreciated that Guadalupe was a very special island with some spectacular geology. Clearly, Guadalupe had had a volcanic past with a wide range of different range of colours in the rocks.

As the sun began to set, we reached the southern end of the island and three Cassin's Auklets caused some excitement for a few moments as initially we hoped they might prove to be Guadalupe Murrelets. Several distant Laysan Albatrosses were also spotted flying high above one of the islets where we knew the Ainley's Storm-petrels bred but as the light faded, unfortunately no storm-petrels were seen.

Presuming that our day's birding was over, everyone headed inside for dinner but as this concluded, there was a shout to alert everyone that some storm-petrels were flying around the vessel. Many people hurried outside and a few moments later, a storm-petrel was found on the deck with two others found in quick succession.

Given our location, the presence of a brood patch and the bird's somewhat mottled rump, there was little doubt that we had a live Ainley's Storm-petrel – a birding first and a taxa that only a handful of others had ever seen alive !!!!

Cameras were quickly grabbed from cabins and the bird was carefully measured and documented before being released. The mood which had possibly been a little down (after our lack of success at finding this species at sea) had suddenly lifted and everyone was delighted to be part of this unique experience. We had truly made seabirding history !!!!



**Ainley's Storm-petrel –one of the most poorly known seabirds on the planet and the first time it had been definitely recorded on a bird tour**

After everyone had got some shots and the bird had been measured, it was released. Over the course of the next half hour two more individuals were found, so Chris spoke to the crew and a few moments later, they reduced the number of lights. Although this had the desired effect and the number of stormies flying around the vessel was immediately reduced, everyone was ecstatic to have seen this enigmatic bird so well.

**1 December**

Shortly after 04:00 the crew lifted the anchor and we left our comfortable anchorage at the southern end of Guadalupe. It had been a pleasant and restful night but it was time to continue our journey and as the sky began to brighten, we were about 25 nautical miles to the south of the island.

The crew had begun an oil drip whilst it was still dark and as soon as there was enough light to see, we laid out another slick. Although the first birds to investigate this were a gaggle of gulls (which we had hoped would not follow us out from the island....), this was not all bad as there was a decent range of species and as well as the familiar Western Gulls, there were American Herring Gulls, California Gulls and at least one Glaucous-winged Gull.

With no rice crispies or popcorn in the oil, we hoped the gulls would soon get bored and disperse but they lingered, possibly deterring other species from venturing in. Nevertheless, it was certainly a successful session with several Least Storm-petrels, some “Northern Leach’s Storm-petrels” and a couple of bonus birds, a Laysan Albatross and a Cook’s Petrel. Whilst the former could well have been a local breeder from the islets at the southern end of

Guadalupe, the Cook's Petrel had pretty much crossed the entire Pacific Ocean given it had come all the way from New Zealand – a journey of 10,000 kilometres !!!!

### **Cook's Petrel**

After three hours on the slick, no Ainley's Storm-petrels had appeared so we decided to continue our journey southwards. Although the occasional Sooty Shearwater was seen, birding was rather quiet and the expectations of some were possibly not that high for the afternoon chumming session.



Chris had said we would stop at 15:00 and right on schedule, Captain Art slowed the engines and our crew dumped a substantial slick over the side. With the gull flock having long disappeared, the contrast with the morning session was extraordinary with storm-petrels appearing almost immediately. After only seeing a handful over the previous few hours, it was amazing how these birds could seemingly appear out of nowhere when there was something to attract them towards us.

With a moderately lumpy sea, everyone had to be careful out on the decks as Art skilfully manoeuvred *Searcher* up and down the slick but his efforts were greatly appreciated with some fantastic views of the storm-petrels. Once again, most of the birds appeared to be Northern Leach's and despite careful scrutiny, no birds which resembled the Ainley's Storm-petrels we had seen so well the previous evening were spotted. We were certainly left bemused and confused as to where these birds were feeding, given we had tried to the north, east and now south of Guadalupe. Presumably they all went west.....

Despite this minor disappointment, the oiling session was highly instructive and as well as the Northern Leach's and Least Storm-petrels, at least one Chapman's Storm-petrel was spotted, along with a second Cook's Petrel for the day, a Brown Booby and a Black-vented Shearwater.

By 17:00 the sun had set and we continued onwards towards Alijos Rocks, however, there was one more new bird for those who persevered until the very end, when a Pink-footed Shearwater was spotted crossing the bows.

## **2 December**

During the night, *Searcher* continued to head south-east and with a following sea, it was a restful night. By dawn we were over 150 nautical miles from Guadalupe and with our anticipated arrival at the Alijos Rocks being at about 13:00, the morning was a restful experience for some, whilst others continued their diligent search for seabirds.

With no underwater features (ie seamounts) to concentrate the birds, the birding was somewhat patchy but despite this, there were birds to see with the most unexpected sighting being a couple of Cassin's Auklets. As well as these, several Leach's Storm-petrels were spotted, along with Laysan Albatross, Sooty Shearwater and at least three Cook's Petrels. Along with the birds, a number of marine creatures were found including several turtles and a couple of sharks.

Shortly before lunch was announced, the Alijos Rocks could be seen distantly on the horizon and by the time everyone had finished eating, we were rapidly approaching these extraordinary stacks which are 150 nautical miles off the Baja coast.



### **Alijos Rocks**

It was clear that these acted as a magnet for wildlife with a hammerhead shark and more turtles in the water and Magnificent Frigatebirds, Masked and Brown Boobies and Laysan Albatrosses flying around.

Captain Art carefully circumnavigated the three stacks giving us an excellent opportunity to see and photograph them and once we had completed the circuit, *Searcher* went to anchor a



little to the north. The crew immediately started throwing some fish scraps in the water in the hope of attracting some of the albatrosses to come closer to the vessel but, unfortunately, this strategy did not succeed despite their best efforts. A range of fish, a Bull Shark and a large male California Sealion did, however, appreciate a meal with the shark somewhat upsetting the crew by also eating their chum bag !!!

After a pleasant hour or so leisurely watching the birds around the rocks, the crew lifted the anchor and we cruised south for thirty minutes or so and then another fish oil slick, laced with rice crispies, was put overboard.

### **Magnificent Frigatebird**

Initially this generated little interest from the storm-petrels but as time passed, more and more came onto the slick with birds showing characteristics of Northern, Townsend's and Chapman's Leach's Storm-petrels all being present. As well as the Leach's, several Least Storm-petrels were also seen, however, the biggest surprise was a lone Glaucous-winged Gull, a species Art told us he had never seen before at or near the Alijos Rocks !!!

For those interested in other wildlife, a Striped Marlin provided a diversion from the birding as it cruised along at the surface giving some reasonable views.

As the sun began to set, we returned to the rocks in the hope we might be able to anchor for dinner (and possibly find some of the storm-petrels which are reputed to breed there) but with



a strong current running, this proved impossible. As a result, the crew lifted the anchor and we continued our south-easterly journey towards Socorro.

### **3 December**

During the night the sea conditions continued to moderate and by the time dawn broke, the seas were the flattest we had experience since leaving San Diego. Having made good speed overnight, the crew put out an oil slick as soon as everyone had finished breakfast and once again, we had some Leach's Storm-petrels come in reasonably promptly.

As on previous occasions, many were left more than a little confused by these birds - were we looking at Northern Leach's, Townsend's or Chapman's or a combination of all three ?? Photos certainly helped but nevertheless, it was clear that this was an extremely confusing complex.....

The most unexpected bird of the morning, however, was a Yellow-rumped warbler which inexplicably appeared out of nowhere and flew round the ship for several minutes, briefly landing aboard. This bird was clearly very lost and when it disappeared, it was difficult to imagine it would survive for much longer. Life for lost migrants could be short and brutal...

After spending a couple of hours on the slick, it was time to move on and with the weather now becoming positively balmy, many chose to relax on the back deck whilst other continued their search for seabirds. These included a couple of Cook's Petrels, along with more Leach's Storm-petrels, however, the most unexpected sighting was a brilliant yellow butterfly (which was believed to be a Southern Dogface) which flew across the bows heading east. We were over 160 nautical miles off the coast and it was difficult to imagine how this brightly coloured insect had reached this location but it was extraordinary that it seemingly knew the correct direction for reaching land.

After another tasty lunch served up by the excellent galley team, we cruised onwards for another hour or so and shortly before 15:00 Captain Art reduced speed and another oil slick was put overboard. Unlike some of our previous oiling sessions, it took a little while for the storm-petrels to respond, although the almost complete lack of wind certainly did not help, but after waiting patiently for a little while, the birds began to congregate and once again the photographers went into overdrive attempting to document as many individuals as possible.

On this occasion, there were at least two dark rumped birds which appeared significantly smaller than the other birds and the consensus was soon reached that these were Townsend's Storm-petrels. Compared with the Northern Leach's (which were all in moult), these birds were not only tiny but had a quite different flight pattern. Indeed, there were even questions as to whether they might be Least Storm-petrels but with their forked tails and small white saddlebags, it seemed that they were Townsend's.

With the light beginning to fail, Captain Art set a course for Socorro Island, however, we had only been travelling a few minutes when he announced that there was a pod of Short-beaked Common Dolphins off the starboard bow. Over the next twenty minutes or so, the dolphins gave us a fantastic show, with some coming close to the vessel, whilst others gave a great demonstration of their leaping abilities.

After dinner, most of the group gathered on the back deck when Art switched off the majority of the lights so we could look at the stars. With no light pollution for at least a couple of hundred kilometres, the stars were spectacular and many people lingered for almost an hour. By recent standards, it was a late night for the majority, with many people only wandering off to bed at 21:30 or so.

#### **4 December 2015**

It was another smooth night out on the East Pacific and as a result of our continued southerly course, dawn was almost thirty minutes earlier than it had been at the beginning of our expedition. As the sun came up, a Red-footed Booby appeared and began hunting the flying fish which were being flushed out of the water by *Searcher*.

Over the next hour, the number of boobies steadily increased, with at least six Red-foots and a couple of Masked and Browns joining the little flock of opportunists. Whilst some of the boobies made repeated attempts to catch the flying fish, few were successful but despite this, their antics provided great entertainment.

As breakfast was concluding, Art announced that he was making a slight course change so we could try oiling over a small rise that rose up from the fairly flat seabed we had been travelling over for the last couple of days.



Once we reached this, the crew put out a slick and we sat there for the next 90 minutes or so hoping for something different, especially as the sea temperature had gone up over 5<sup>o</sup>C since the previous morning. Although four Northern Leach's Storm-petrels gave a reasonable show and a dark-rumped bird put in a brief appearance, this session was rather quiet, so at 09:00 Chris and Art took the decision to continue onwards.

#### **Northern Mockingbird**

Whilst the expectations of some might have been that the rest of the day would be quiet, this assumption proved incorrect with a couple of notable highlights. The first of these was the utterly unexpected appearance of a Northern Mockingbird which flew around *Searcher* on and off for about an hour, occasionally alighting on the deck. We were about 200 kilometres offshore, so this bird was certainly very lost and with so little shipping in the vicinity it was hard to imagine it would survive for long.

A little later, there was a shout from the bow when a pod of dolphins were spotted. For the first few moments, these were somewhat uncooperative but Captain Art skilfully manoeuvred us towards them allowing us some great views. With their highly distinctively shaped heads and pink lips, there was no doubt these were Rough-toothed Dolphins – a new cetacean for many of the group and for Captain Art !!!!

After another tasty lunch, the early afternoon passed reasonably quickly and at 15:00 another chum slick was put out. Initially there was only a muted response from the storm-petrels with a couple of individuals coming in and then quickly disappearing but by late afternoon, there were about ten birds whizzing around on the slick. Whilst most of these appeared to be moulting adult Northern Leach's, several dark-rumped birds also put in appearances on the slick and once again the cameras were busy as the keen photographers attempted to get more photos.



### **Rough-toothed Dolphins**

With several different birds seemingly coming in and then being replaced by other dark-rumped individuals, it was certainly challenging to work out whether we were watching Chapman's or Townsend's Storm-petrels and with some of the birds also moulting, this added further to the complexity. Understanding storm-petrels in this part of the world was certainly not simple.....

### **5 December**

After the smooth seas of the previous few days, the night was somewhat rougher than expected and by morning, the weather was far from ideal with rain and reasonable swells. As the sky brightened, we could see Socorro Island on our port side and by 06:00 we were positioned in the bay at the southern end of the island where the Mexican navy had their base. Captain Art had warned us that the clearance could take a couple of hours and thirty minutes or so after we arrived, a small boat came out to *Searcher* with various officials and a couple of military personnel armed with some rather impressive weaponry !!!



### **Socorro Island**

Although Art had hoped the process could be completed without face-to-face passport inspections, the senior official had other ideas and everyone was required to line up to confirm the information on the manifest.

Eventually after inspecting the engine room, forward hold and various other parts of the ship, we were cleared to continue and we sailed clockwise around the coast to Grayson Cove. The

crew soon had three skiffs in the water and after a thorough briefing from Art, we loaded up and headed inshore.

Cruising along the rocky coastline, we found a Wandering Tattler, with the views being much better than the bird which some of the group had been seen in the bay by the military base. Our main goal, however, was to see if we could locate any of the landbird endemics but a reasonable swell breaking onto the rocky beach meant it was simply not possible to get too close.

Despite this, a Socorro Wren was spotted and after directions were passed from one boat to another, everyone got some reasonable views. Although distant, we could see that the birds (it transpired that there were actually two) were distinctly pale and with Chris playing a recording, the male bird even briefly sang back.

With no other landbirds being seen, we continued around the coast and at one point were joined by a pod of at least ten Bottlenose Dolphins. These came extremely close to seemingly investigate the skiffs, allowing us some excellent views, before disappearing as quickly as they had appeared.

Reaching a guano covered islet, there were a dozen or so frigatebirds roosting on the rocks and checking through these we found one Great Frigatebird amongst the Magnificents.

After returning to *Searcher*, the crew soon had the skiffs back aboard and after lunch, we headed away from the anchorage. The plan had been to check out another bay for a possible later skiff ride but when a seabird flock was spotted, Chris asked Captain Art to turn towards that in the hope of finding our second main target of the expedition, Townsend's Shearwater.

As we got closer, a shearwater was spotted and after some initial stress, everyone had soon connected with this critically endangered species. We then spent the next couple of hours or so chasing feeding flocks finding more shearwaters, as well as the highly distinctive Brewster's Brown Booby.



**Brewster's Brown Booby**

With somewhat breezy conditions and a moderate sea, it was challenging to get good photos of the shearwaters but with this species now well seen, along with Ainley's Storm-petrel, our two principle seabirding goals of the expedition had been achieved.

Cruising around until dusk, a total of up to thirty Townsend's Shearwaters were recorded although no large rafting groups could be found. Sadly, we found no evidence to suggest that estimates that there might now only be low hundreds of individuals were wrong.

As the sky darkened, Captain Art and his crew anchored *Searcher* not far from Grayson Cove. The wildlife entertainment for the day was, however, not entirely over as before dinner the crew threw some fish scraps to seven Bull Sharks which were circling the vessel and after we had eaten, a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins spent some time feeding around the stern in the ship's lights.

## 6 December 2015

It was a calm night at anchor and as soon as the eastern sky had begun to brighten, the crew raised the anchor and we sailed to Playa Blanca on the northwest side of Socorro. There was some swell and wave action in the bay but after carefully watching the way *Searcher* was moving, Captain Art decided it would be safe to have a skiff ride and shortly after 07:00, two skiffs were ready to take those who wanted to go.

We concentrated on the vegetation at the far end of the bay and two Socorro Wrens were soon found giving everyone some reasonable views. Moving over to another patch of vegetation, we hoped to find the endemic Socorro Warbler but with a stiff breeze blowing, none could be coaxed out. Nevertheless, the trip was very worthwhile, with a total of six Socorro Wrens being seen, as well as a Wandering Tattler.

By 09:00 everyone was back aboard *Searcher* and we sailed round the northern tip of the island and began a slow circumnavigation. Compared with when we had arrived 24 hours earlier, the weather was extremely pleasant with blue skies and only a light wind and swell and we got some great views of this rarely visited island.

Rounding the southern tip, we headed out offshore in the hope of repeating our success of the previous day and finding some feeding flocks and more Townsend's Shearwaters. Unfortunately, however, no flocks were located, although a handful of shearwaters were seen,



with one bird in particular giving us some great looks as it flew ahead of the vessel for a few moments.

### Townsend's Shearwater

Whilst the bird was not close enough for full frame photos, nevertheless, the views were sufficient for the photographers to be satisfied that they had documented this critically endangered bird.

Heading inshore towards Grayson Cove, we hoped to find some rafting groups but none could be found so once again we headed offshore, aiming to intercept any birds which were heading for the island. By dusk this strategy had not resulted in us finding any further birds and whilst we were delighted to have seen this species, it was also somewhat sobering to know that only a few years before, thousands of shearwaters had been seen around the island. The decline had clearly been catastrophic and without urgent action it was difficult to feel confident that this species would survive for much longer.

After spending the early evening at anchor, *Searcher* left the protection of Socorro shortly after dinner and we began the journey towards Cabo San Lucas at the tip of the Baja Peninsula.

## **7 December**

By mid-morning we were almost equidistant between Socorro and mainland Mexico and the birding started very well when a Black-footed Albatross was spotted in the wake. Although the bird did not come particularly close, this was a new bird for some of the group and a new species for our trip list.

Somewhat later, a Bryde's Whale showed briefly but at 15:00 we stopped for the final chumming stop of the expedition. We were still almost 100 nautical miles offshore and in waters which were approximately 12,000 feet deep but the oiling session was very productive with both Black and Least Storm-petrels showing well, as well as both white and dark-rumped "Leach's Storm-petrels".

For many, however, the highlight were two Pomarine Skuas which gave some fantastic views as they repeatedly circled the vessel, occasionally landing on the water to eat some of the rice crispies which had been added to the oil.

By 17:00 the sun had set and *Searcher* went back on course for Cabo San Lucas. Sadly our journey of over 1,300 nautical miles was almost over but our expedition had undoubtedly been a considerable success with great views of two of the most poorly known seabirds on the planet (Townsend's Shearwater and Ainley's Storm-petrel), as well as plenty of other pelagic species.

## **8 December**

During the night *Searcher* approached Cabo San Lucas and when most people woke, we were already tied up at the wharf. Our expedition had reached its end and after an early breakfast, everyone disembarked and began their journeys home or onward to other birding destinations.

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