Trip Report by Curtis Marantz

Sep 19, 2015 — 7:35 AM
Dana Point Harbor, Orange, California, US
Protocol: Traveling 1.75 kilometer(s)

On our morning departure, it was clear, calm, and with temperatures in the mid-60s. 18 species

Comments: Jon Dunn, Tom Benson, Curtis Marantz, Robert McNab, Thomas Ford-Hutchinson, and Bruce Aird led the Fall Pelagic Trip for the Sea and Sage Audubon Society aboard the Ocean Institute’s R/V Sea Explorer with Chuck Kemnitz as our captain. We arrived at the dock at 6:40 am, after which we did a brief orientation before boarding the boat a little after 7:00 am, and then leaving the dock at 7:19 am. We spent relatively little time in the harbor today, cruising steadily along only the inside of the outer breakwater checking the gulls, pelicans, and cormorants before continuing offshore (see separate list). On our return, we again covered the harbor, but far more quickly and with few people scanning the birds carefully (3:05-3:20 pm). The birds seen on our afternoon return were generally similar to what we saw in the morning, so this list represents only those birds seen on our morning departure. We paid relatively little attention to the birds around the parking lot and the dock, yet we found a few land birds and we even saw a migrant or two. We found good numbers of gulls, pelicans, and cormorants around the harbor and on the breakwater, but only moderate numbers of terns and very few shorebirds, the latter highlighted by two oystercatchers. Also on the boat were Steve Morris, Jeff Bray, Brittany O’Connor, Michael Harrison, Don Hoechlin, Andy Lazere, Vic Leipzig, Mike Huang, Amin Khalifa, David Evans, Matt Grube, Dick Cabe, Ryan Winkelmen, Ebbe Banstorp, and many others who were familiar from previous trips. On our morning departure, it was clear, calm, and with temperatures in the mid-60s. On our afternoon return, it was still clear, but now with a (5-10 knot) breeze from the west, and temperatures that were in the upper 70s. 6:40-7:35 am, and on our return, 3:05-3:20 pm.

California Sea Lion - 2 (at least one of the two young sea-lions at the end of the breakwater had a tagged flipper and an electronic transmitter on its back). The photograph below was taken by Jeff Bray
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21391275830/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm1.staticflickr.com/714/21391275830_199eaefa11_b.jpg

Red-breasted Merganser - 1 (seen before we left the dock, but not as we cruised through the harbor)

Brandt’s Cormorant - 9 (sitting together at the end of the main breakwater) The photograph below was taken by Jeff Bray.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21553125456/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5756/21553125456_32af224260_b.jpg

Double-crested Cormorant - 75 (the vast majority of the cormorants around the harbor today were Double-crested, including several birds in the eucalyptus trees on the island)

Brown Pelican - 75 (we saw quite a few pelicans around the harbor)

Snowy Egret - 4 (seen by some on the inner side of the south jetty)

Black Oystercatcher - 2 (calling) The first photograph below was taken by Jeff Bray
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21579351855/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5694/21579351855_cb958ddb98_b.jpg

Spotted Sandpiper - 2

Willet - 1

Heermann’s Gull - 75

Western Gull - 500 (Marantz did his best to count the gulls as we left port, but about a third of these were seen on the south jetty and beyond the range of making an accurate tally)

Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) - 5

Anna’s Hummingbird - 1 (a female seen in trees around the parking lot)

Cassin’s Kingbird 1 (singing; an unseen bird heard from trees around the parking lot)
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American Crow - 6
California Thrasher - 1 (singing; Aird heard this bird from near the parking lot)
Black-throated Gray Warbler - 1 (calling; heard by Marantz and Grube, but also seen by Ford-Hutchinson in trees near the restrooms)
House Finch - 1 (calling; heard-only)
House Sparrow - 2 (calling; heard-only)

Sat, Sep 19, 2015 — 7:35 AM - 3:05 pm
Offshore waters between Dana Point and Lausen Sea Mount, Orange, California, US
Protocol: Traveling 114.5 kilometer(s)
28 species (+5 other taxa)

Comments: Jon Dunn, Tom Benson, Curtis Marantz, Robert McNab, Thomas Ford-Hutchinson, and Bruce Aird led the fall pelagic trip for the Sea and Sage Audubon Society aboard the Ocean Institute's R/V Sea Explorer with Chuck Kemnitz as our captain. This list represents those birds seen during a clockwise loop from Dana Point out to the Lausen Sea Mount, north to the waters off Newport Beach, and then back along the coast of Laguna Beach to the harbor. From the harbor, we headed east, if not slightly southeast, to the waters off San Clemente before turning west toward the Lausen Knoll, where we put out a slick of fish oil in the hope of attracting petrels and shearwaters over the shallow waters. After a short time spent at our slick, we continued to the northwest toward San Gabriel Canyon and Outer Continental Shelf platform "Eureka," located west of Newport Beach. From the oil rig we cruised east toward, but not quite reaching, the Newport Marine Canyon before turning back to the southeast and returning to port along the coastline remaining within six kilometers of the shore and in water that was 300-450 meters deep. We encountered moderate numbers of Black-vented Shearwaters, but only one Pink-footed Shearwater and no Sooty Shearwaters. We also found moderate numbers of Cassin’s Auklets and Black Storm-Petrels, but only one or two distant storm-petrels that appeared not to be Blacks. Despite relatively low numbers of birds overall, we had several highlights, the best of which were a juvenile Red-footed Booby, a Manx Shearwater, juveniles of both Long-tailed Jaeger and Arctic Tern, and good views of a pair of Craveri’s Murrelets. Also on the boat were Steve Morris, Jeff Bray, Brittany O’Connor, Michael Harrison, Don Hoechlin, Andy Lazere, Vic Leipzig, Mike Huang, Amin Khalifa, David Evans, Matt Grube, Dick Cabe, Ryan Winkelman, Ebbe Banstorp, and many others who were familiar from previous trips. We had clear skies all day, calm conditions early and with no more than a mild (5-10 knot) breeze from the west later in the day, and mild to warm temperatures that even offshore likely ranged from the mid-60s to the upper 70s. The dominant swell seemed to be coming from the west at only two feet, but there was a mixed swell and at times some ripple that made it difficult to spot small alcids on the water. Weather conditions during this period at the San Pedro South Waverider Buoy, located mid-channel off San Pedro at 33° 34’ 40” N, 118° 11’ 04” W, and thus about 6½ kilometers west-northwest of the most northwestern point on our track, represented water temperatures that increased from 22.9º C to 24.1º C (&#61;73.2º F and 75.4º F, respectively) by 12:30 pm before dropping slightly, and a swell at 0.8-0.9 meters (&#61;2.6-3.0 ft), with a dominant period that switched between the west at 8 seconds and the south to south-southwest at 13-14 seconds, and an average period of 6.7-7.4 seconds over the course of the trip (these values taken from the NOAA website). Conditions during this period at the inshore Dana Point Buoy, located about 4½ kilometers off Dana Point at 33° 27’ 31” N, 117° 46’ 02” W, were water temperatures increasing from 23.6º C to 24.9º C (&#61;73.5º F and 76.8º F, respectively), and a swell of 0.6-0.8 meters (&#61;2.0-2.6 ft) from the south to south-southwest, with a dominant period of 13-14 seconds and an average period of 7.0-7.8 seconds.

California Flying Fish - 5
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Smooth Hammerhead Shark - 3
California Sea Lion - 3 (we saw only a few sea lions offshore)
Northern Elephant Seal - 1 (an apparent female or immature loafing at the surface).
We traveled the route below in a clockwise direction.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/cmarantz/21719895835/ (GPS track - Matt Grube)
Eared Grebe - 1 (a bird seen on the water along the coast off Laguna Beach soon took flight)
Pink-footed Shearwater - 1 (a single bird seen on the water off Newport Beach was, amazingly, the only one that we encountered)
Manx Shearwater - 1  Ford-Hutchinson and possibly others spotted this bird amid a flock of about 100 Black-vented Shearwaters that were sitting on the water just west of Dana Point at 33° 27' 46" N, 117° 44' 02" W. Unfortunately, the flock took flight shortly after we located this bird, so many onboard saw this bird only as it flew off with the other birds. We never did see this bird alight on the water and it quickly disappeared to the northwest. This was a small shearwater that appeared similar to the Black-vented Shearwaters in its size and proportions. It had a relatively slim bill with a hooked tip and a steep forehead yet a gently rounded crown on a head that was of unremarkable size. The neck was slim and of medium-length, and the body was plump. The wings appeared relatively short when folded, yet when this bird took flight, it was clear that they were long, relatively slim, and with broadly pointed tips. The tail was short, yet its shape was difficult to determine in the field. When seen on the water, this bird appeared only marginally darker than the Black-vented Shearwaters, and in fact, it was more difficult to pick out amid the other birds than is typically true of this species (this presumably reflecting the late afternoon light under which we made our observations). Although some were able to see the white undertail-coverts when the bird was on the water, others spotted this bird mostly as a result of the conspicuous hook of whitish that curved upward from the throat behind the dusky auriculurs. Also evident on this bird, but similar to the Black-vented Shearwaters, were the white throat and foreneck that contrasted with the rather dusky color of the forehead, crown, back and sides of the neck, upperparts, and wings, all of which appeared more dark brown than black. It was less clear, however, if this reflected the bird’s true coloration due to worn or faded plumage or instead the late afternoon light. Our views of the flying bird were relatively brief and generally as it flew away from us. We were nevertheless able to note at this time that this bird was indeed blacker above than were the nearby Black-vented Shearwaters. This bird was uniformly blackish from the crown, nape, and back of the neck, down across the back, scapulars, upperwings, rump, and tail. This bird did not appear to have conspicuous flank-patches, suggesting that the white of the flanks did not extend upward onto the sides of the rump to the degree that is often the case in this species. Even as this bird flew off, it was possible to note that the pale coloration of the throat wrapped upward around the rear edge of the auriculurs, but only a few were able to notice the white undertail-coverts (and even in photos these were obscured at least in part by the dark feet). The throat, breast, belly, and flanks were mostly if not entirely white, but there was at least some suggestion that the darker color of the sides of the neck extended onto the sides of the breast. This bird’s bill was a medium to dark gray, much like it was on the other birds in the flock, and the eyes appeared to be dark (or at least not conspicuously pale), but it was only in photos that it was possible to see that the feet were relatively dark. The photos in the composites below were taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson and Jeff Bray (“Manx Shearwater”)  https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5681/21367210909_e13f0eabf0_b.jpg
Black-vented Shearwater - 400 (Marantz tallied 395 birds, so a total of 400 is likely quite conservative)
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Black Storm-Petrel - 35 (all of the storm-petrels that were seen well enough to identify definitively represented Blacks, of which a few were seen well and many more were quite distant)

storm-petrel sp. - 2 (dark-rumped) We saw two very distant storm-petrels that did not appear to represent Blacks, and in fact, some onboard were moderately confident that at least one of these was a Least Storm-Petrel.

Red-footed Booby - 1 (a description and photos will be sent to the CBRC of an immature that was seen 12:20-12:32 pm after first being called out by Tom Benson near Outer Continental Shelf platform "Eureka" at 33° 33' 35" N, 118° 07' 04" W; this bird gave a croaking, "wok" call) The first two photos of the Red-footed Booby below were taken by Jeff Bray
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21367569499/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm1.staticflickr.com/747/21367569499_a5ebba1599_b.jpg
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21391277700/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5753/21391277700_ef6aec00d5_b.jpg

Brandt's Cormorant - 40 (We saw 12 cormorants loafing on Outer Continental Shelf platform "Eureka" and another 25 standing on the San Juan Rocks, yet we encountered only a very few others offshore.)

Double-crested Cormorant - 1 (this bird flew by us when we were not too far off Dana Point) Pelagic Cormorant - 1 (a single bird sitting with Brandt's Cormorants on the San Juan Rocks eventually flew off to the north)

Brown Pelican - 8 (we saw only a few pelicans offshore today) The photo below was taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson
https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21555037665/in/dateposted-public/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5626/21555037665_490aa92299_b.jpg

White-faced Ibis - 24 (Dunn, Benson, and several others noted a single flock of 24 ibis in flight off San Clemente at 33° 22' 30" N, 117° 42' 19" W) The photo below was taken by Jeff Bray.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21553125906/in/album-72157658862802012/

Marbled Godwit - 3 (We saw flying by well offshore a single godwit and later two together) Sanderling - 12 (a flock of 12 small shorebirds seen flying south in a tight flock off Dana Point were clearly peep and identified by Dunn as Sanderlings)

Red-necked Phalarope - 100 (calling; most of these birds appeared to be juveniles but we did see numbers of birds that were either adults molting into basic plumage or juveniles that had already begun their post-juvenal molt; Marantz alone tallied 96 birds, so the total of 100 is likely to be quite conservative)

Red Phalarope - 2 (calling; single birds seen on the water were larger than nearby Red-necked Phalaropes, heavier-billed, and with uniformly gray backs) The first photograph below was taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21367183828/in/dateposted-public/
https://farm1.staticflickr.com/667/21367183828_a3600afc5e_b.jpg

Pomarine Jaeger - 1 (subadult) The first 3 photos below were taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson
https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21367183918/in/dateposted-public/
https://farm1.staticflickr.com/564/21367183918_1d15189a22_b.jpg
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21553125806/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5757/21553125806_7a8c4c60bb_b.jpg
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21366427220/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm1.staticflickr.com/600/21366427220_23c1e990b3_b.jpg

Parasitic Jaeger - 3 (an adult dark-morph off Laguna Beach in the afternoon was well seen, but a light-morph of uncertain age in this same general area was not seen quite as well, and another light-morph adult was seen in the morning by only a few)

Long-tailed Jaeger - 1 While cruising north from the Lausen Sea Mount at 33° 26' 43" N, 118° 02' 17" W, Benson spotted this bird on the water and even at quite a distance we noted that it looked a bit
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odd. We then motored up on the bird and determined that it was a juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger with what may have been an unusually pale head. After a short time on the water, this bird picked up and flew a short distance before alighting again briefly. Eventually it took off and flew out of sight. This was a relatively small, gull-like bird that sat low in the water yet it held the wingtips upward at an angle that was steeper than is typical of gulls. Moreover, upon approaching this bird, we noted that the bill was quite short and not overly heavy, that the forehead was relatively steep, that the crown was smoothly rounded on a head that seemed small relative to the plump body, and that the wings were relatively long and pointed. We further noted a buoyant flight that was almost tern-like, but with the wings being angled sharply downward at the wrist. The body was plump, but the neck was short and stocky, and the head seemed small in proportion to the bird’s size. The relatively long wings tapered to pointed tips and the medium-length tail was more tapered distally than is true of most gulls. Rather odd about this bird was that the entire head and neck appeared to be nearly white (though in reality they were probably pale buff) and essentially unmarked. Contrasting sharply with the pale head, the body and visible parts of the wing were dark brown. When seen at a distance, the body appeared to be weakly mottled, if not largely unmarked, but on closer examination, and particularly when this bird took flight, it became clear that the body and wings were finely barred with buff almost throughout. Although the pale coloration of the head and neck was the most conspicuous aspect of the plumage, the rump was similarly quite pale (though also boldly barred), the tail was dark brown, and the wings were dark brown with fine scaling on the coverts and whitish shafts to the outer two or three pairs of primaries. Black secondaries produced a dark trailing-edge to the wing that was quite conspicuous, at least in photos. The underparts were paler than the upperparts, but their precise coloration and pattern were difficult to discern as the bird flew off. This was also true of the underwing pattern. The dark tip of the bill contrasted sharply with a pale gray base to result in a strongly bicolored appearance. The eyes were dark, but it was impossible to discern in the field the coloration of the legs or feet. The single photo below was taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson and those in the composite were taken by Jeff Bray. title="Long-tailed Jaeger (Juvenile)"
https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21563796951/in/dateposted-public/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5690/21563796951_0cc2bed95e_b.jpg
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21542342002/in/album-72157658862802012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5698/21542342002_e7a49847d2_b.jpg

Craveri’s Murrelet - 4

The first two birds that we encountered were spotted on the water by Marantz and Don Hoechlin roughly 10¼ kilometers to the southwest of Dana Point at 33° 23' 18" N, 117° 46' 54" W. We quickly stopped the boat and all onboard were afforded better-than-average views of these birds on the water for an extended period of time before they eventually took flight and disappeared. The murrelets typically remained at the surface providing good views, but they made a few short dives, and when they took flight they flew to the side rather than away, so our views and photographs of these birds in flight were about as good as can be expected. We also once heard them give some soft, “peeping” notes, but they were a little far for us to hear these sounds clearly. These were conspicuously small alcids that had striking patterns. Each of these birds had a slim, medium-length bill that tapered to a pointed tip, a sloping forehead and a flat-crowned appearance on a head that was unremarkable in size, a short and at least relatively stocky neck, and a body that was plump yet not quite as rounded as is that of a Cassin’s Auklet. The bill did not appear conspicuously long, as is typical in Craveri’s Murrelets, but it was also not overly short. The tail was held cocked upward, so the undertail coverts were clearly visible as each bird swam away from us. It was difficult to discern the wing shape and primary projection. The tails of these birds did not appear to be overly long. The plumage was a striking combination of black upperparts and snow-white underparts. The forehead, crown, nape, back and sides of the neck, back, scapulars, wings, rump, and tail appeared to be uniformly black in the morning light. The demarcation between the black face and the white
throat extended back from near the gape under the eye and along the lower edge of auriculars before curving down the side of the neck. It was difficult to see in the field if the chin was black, but it is likely that this will be clear from the photos. The small, white notch that Scripps’s Murrelets often show immediately in front of the eye was not apparent on these birds, and they appeared to lack the pale eyelids that are often conspicuous on Scripps’s Murrelets. The white undertail-coverts were clearly evident when these birds swam away, but the white of the breast and belly were visible only when they took flight. Also clearly evident on the flying birds was a black spur that extended down from the side of the neck near its junction with the throat. It was likewise only when these birds took flight that it was clear that the underwing coverts and remiges were extensively, though seemingly not entirely, blackish. The bill was entirely black. The dark eyes did not contrast with the black plumage of the face, but it was difficult to say much of anything about the legs and feet when these birds took flight (though it is possible that they will be evident in the many photos that were taken when these birds took flight). The first three photos below were taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/20932277354/in/dateposted-public/ https://farm1.staticflickr.com/671/20932277354_ec1851957f_b.jpg/ https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21528825046/in/dateposted-public/ https://farm1.staticflickr.com/740/21528825046_4b66c56679_b.jpg https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21543819972/in/dateposted-public/ https://farm1.staticflickr.com/633/21543819972_bb99269175_b.jpg Scripps's/Guadalupe/Creaveri's Murrelet - 2 (views of two additional murrelets that were seen only in flight and at moderate distance were insufficient to have distinguished among the three, black-and-white Synthliboramphus) Cassin's Auklet - 50 (we encountered quite a few Cassin's Auklets, but most were seen only in flight) Heermann's Gull - 100 (more than half of the Heermann's Gulls followed us offshore from the Dana Point Harbor, yet they dropped off pretty quickly and we encountered only a very few of these birds while offshore) The photograph below was taken by Jeff Bray. https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/21553129046/in/album-72157658862802012/. https://farm1.staticflickr.com/700/21553129046_464e135e15_b.jpg Western Gull - 125 (most of the gulls followed us offshore from the harbor, after which numbers seemed to decrease over the course of the day before increasing again near the oil rigs) California Gull - 10 (numbers of California Gulls seemed unusually low today) Common Tern - 125 (calling; although normally found in only small numbers on these trips, Common Terns were conspicuous and plentiful for much of the day, including a single flock of about 50 birds encountered south of the offshore drilling rigs; Marantz tallied 96 birds, but others thought the total was even a bit higher) The first photograph below was taken by Thomas Ford-Hutchinson. https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21367183618/in/dateposted-public/ https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5738/21367183618_ab17dbf8bd_b.jpg Arctic Tern - 1 Dunn spotted this bird amid a flock of 40-50 Common Terns that were subsequently observed foraging and loafing on the water a short distance south of Outer Continental Shelf platform “Eureka” at 33° 32’ 57” N, 118° 06’ 44” W. It took quite some time to obtain good views of this bird, which was typically seen flying low over the water and repeatedly dropping to the surface. Although the tern remained at some distance for much of the time, it eventually made a couple of relatively close passes that provided us with better views from distances down to about 50 meters. Whereas some thought the flight was more fluttery and with quicker wing-beats than the Common Terns, this was not easily apparent to all. We saw this bird alight on the water only once, and only briefly before the entire flock again took flight. This was a relatively small tern that was typical of the genus Sterna. Some thought that it was slightly smaller than the Common Terns, but this was at best difficult to confirm. It had a relatively short, slim bill that tapered to a pointed tip, a rounded crown on a head of unremarkable size, and a body that was typical in mass for a bird in this genus. Some
thought the bill was shorter than those of the Common Terns, but this was at best difficult to see in
the field. The long wings tapered to pointed tips and the medium-length tail was slim when held
closed yet at least weakly notched when spread. The wing-beats may have been slightly more rapid
than those of the Common Terns, but this was not overly conspicuous, nor were differences in overall
structure, such as the degree to which the neck was short and the body behind the wings overly long.
This bird’s plumage patterns were typical of a young Sterna tern, yet whereas some noted the
upperparts as being washed darker others thought they were scaly. The forehead was white, but the
crown, nape, and at least most of the auricular region were black, which resulted in this bird having a
partially hooded appearance. The lower part of the face, along with the underparts in their entirety
appeared to be uniformly white. The upperparts were light gray, with some noting what appeared to
be a suffusion of brownish and others able to discern fine scaling. The uppersides of the wings were
light gray lacking the darker middle and outer primaries that are typical of Common Terns. Dunn also
pointed out that the secondaries were white, so the trailing edge of the spread wing was white as
opposed to showing the dark band that was clearly evident on at least some of the young Common
Terns. The upperside of the tail was pale, but it was difficult to note contrast between the inner and
outer rectrices. The underwings were mostly white and although many found it difficult to discern the
dark trailing-edge to the primaries in the field, this is shown clearly in photos. The bill appeared to be
black and the eyes were dark, but it was not possible to see the legs or feet clearly on a bird that was
seen almost exclusively in flight. The photos in the composites below were taken by Thomas Ford-
Hutchinson and Jeff Bray. (title="Arctic Tern (Juvenile)"
https://www.flickr.com/photos/77523243@N00/21563785021/in/dateposted-public/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5790/21563785021_0b1d0d7a24_b.jpg
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crispystatic/20930792304/in/album-7215765886280202012/
https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5772/20930792304_8446a50880_b.jpg
Sterna sp. - 20 (the vast majority of the medium-sized terns clearly represented Common Terns, but a
certain percentage of these were probably best left unidentified given the distance of observation)
Royal Tern - 2 (we saw a young bird shortly after leaving the harbor in the morning and an adult on our
afternoon return to port)
Elegant Tern - 12 (calling; we saw several birds near the harbor, but only scattered ones and twos offshore)
hummingbird sp. - 1 (a few aboard saw an unidentified hummingbird while we were offshore)
Barn Swallow - 1 (some observed a single bird well offshore as it flew by with two unidentified swallows)
swallow sp. - 2 (seen by only a few aboard)

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