

Field Trip Report: West Marin Big Day with Keith Hansen

September 28, 2011

Trip Leader: Keith Hansen



Twenty-five birders assembled in a timely fashion in Point Reyes Station. The trip leader was Keith Hansen, well known wildlife artist, naturalist, and enthusiastic and knowledgeable birder. The weather was most favorable for birders, which on Point Reyes may not be the best weather for seeing migrants or vagrants. We finished the day, however, with 105 species, with warblers making an appearance in our last hour of birding in Tomales Bay State Park.

Keith's tutorials were of particular interest. Keith took the time to review three species of blackbirds side by side on the Spaletta Ranch: **Brewer's**, **Tricolored** and **Redwinged**. A cooperative, posing **Willow Flycatcher** at the Fish Docks led to an interesting overview of the Flycatcher family. Back on the Spaletta Plateau, Keith explained the differences between **Northern Rough-winged** and **Bank Swallow** in flight, with additional commentary on **Violet-green** and **Tree Swallow**. Then we moved on to the gulls and terns on Drake's Beach.

At four o'clock we had 94 species - six more to settle in at 100 species. Keith led the contingent on to Tomales Bay State Park – Heart's Desire Beach along the lower road beyond the ranger station. Within an hour's time and the help of nine **Bushtit** (gotta love the Bushtits !), we had awesome views of **Wrentit**, **Brown Creeper**, **Hutton's Vireo**, **Townsend's Warbler**, **Hermit Warbler** and a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** or two. Of course birding has a social component. At five o'clock we all agreed that a glass of wine was the perfect way to end a Big Day, so off we went to enjoy time with the wine gods and a half dozen **Band-tailed Pigeon** for a closing flyover.

By Rich Cimino

Photo by Dave Herrema