

La Conexión

Mexicana

Escapees RV Club Chapter 8

Winter 2018



Wildlife in Baja California

**Crossing the Border and the
Serpentine Surprise**

La Conexión Mexicana

Escapees RV Club Chapter 8

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Website: www.mexicanconnection08.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/EscapeesMexicanConnection

On the cover:

While the golden eagle appears on the Mexican flag, the crested caracara shown here is Mexico's national bird. This charismatic bird of prey was revered in ancient Mexico and is known for its fierce bravery, often facing off with enemies the measure more than twice their size. Photo by Betty Wills.

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The Mission of Chapter 8, which was organized in 1985, is to:

- ◆ Introduce Escapees Chapter 8 Mexican Connection members to RV travel in Mexico, its traditions, culture, scenery, food, and folklore.
- ◆ Travel South of the Border and give back more than the enriching experiences we gain, through charity donations and business patronization.
- ◆ Enable Chapter 8 members to feel comfortable to return to Mexico for future Rallies as well as their own road trip adventures.



Website: www.mexicanconnection08.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/EscapesMexicanConnection

Membership Reminder: Chapter 8 membership is due in April of each year. If you haven't already, please renew on the Chapter 8 website's [Membership Renewal page](#).

Escapees Chapter 8 Officers

President — Ed Dennis, ed@ekdennis.com

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1st VP & 2019 Wagonmaster — Kassandra Dennis, kassandra@ekdennis.com

2nd VP & 2020 Wagonmaster — **Vacant, please volunteer**

3rd VP & 2021 Wagonmaster — **Vacant, please volunteer**

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Rolling Rally Q&A

Member-submitted questions

Have a question about the 2019 Rolling Rally? E-mail [Chapter 8 President Ed Dennis](#) or [2019 Wagonmaster Cassandra Dennis](#). You never know, we might even publish it so everyone can benefit from your curiosity!

Q: I set an appointment to get my small dog her International Health Certificate with a vet. They told me I must provide an address in Mexico where I am going. What address shall I use?

- Gail Taylor

A: Just put La Jolla Beach Camp in Ensenada as the final destination for Escapees Mexican Caravan RV trip. The La Jolla website lists the address as **Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada Hwy Km 12.5 to La Buffadora Ensenada, México 2279**. We also had our vet mention the RV caravan on our dog's certificates last year.

While it is true that it's easier to get a pet into Mexico than it is to get a pet back into the United States, there's no need to panic. Just keep handy your dog's health certificate, a copy of the rabies vaccination, and your dog's AKC paperwork showing you own your dog. If your dog doesn't have AKC papers, having your pet wear tags and keeping health records from your vet should be sufficient. Including a photo of your pet in the paperwork might also be helpful. The main criteria is that she looks healthy and not like you rescued a Mexican street dog.

Keep in mind, sometimes Border patrol agents check and sometimes they don't. You can read more on the Chapter 8 website in the article I wrote "[So, You Are Thinking About Bringing Your Pet To Baja California!](#)"

Happy Trails...

Sherry Pavlich,

Escapees RV Club member

Charity Donation Pickup Request Answered

Member-submitted request

Past Chapter 8 members Stan & Mary Chrisenbery have quite a few items to donate to the upcoming 2019 Rolling Rally auction and charity. Among the items are a pressure cooker, slow cooker, crutches and walker. The only catch is the Chrisenberys are unable to attend the rally and needed SKP help to pick up the donated items.

Special thanks to Denny and Dona Martinsen who have agreed to come to Dewey, AZ (about 80 miles north of Phoenix) to pick up the donation and bring it to the 2019 Rolling Rally! This is just but one example of how our community comes together to help each other and to help advance the Chapter 8 mission.

We are grateful to the Chrisenberys for the donation and to the Martinsens for making sure it gets to its destination.



SKPs Ahoy!

Get ready to enjoy the 2019 Rolling Rally from February 11 to March 1 in beautiful Baja California! Bring good levelling blocks for camping at Potrero Park.

Discover Potrero Park's California retreat...
Explore the vineyards and zoologico exotics of Guadalupe Valley...
Enjoy Ensenada, fine Fiestas, random Charity and beautiful Beach Time!

Editor's Notebook

Joseph M. de Leon

A new year and a new caravan is upon us. I regret that I can't join you all, especially considering the government shutdown could endure past February. But as a furloughed federal employee, I'd have to report back to duty within 24-hours of the government being funded again. Meanwhile, I sit idle.

This year, I'll enjoy the trip vicariously through your photos. If you've seen the newsletters for 2018, you'll notice the same 3 people credited for photos. Without Jean Pedersen and Bob Petitt, this newsletter would be filled with mostly my photos.

I need your help! Please share photos from the 2019 Rolling Rally. Upload your photos to an online library, like Flickr, Google Photos, or SmugMug. Then send me the link to the collection so I can pick and choose photos to go with future articles regardless of the topic.

Wishing all of my fellow SKPs a wonderful trip!

Joseph is a former graphic artist, web producer, and newspaper reporter currently working for the U.S. Forest Service in Kettle Falls, Washington. He travels in a Class C motorhome with his wife Denise and their dog Kimbo.



The frozen and snowy Inland Northwest is no place for a regular RV. Many people live in 5th wheels and trailers here, but they have beefed up insulation and many build roofs to keep the snow off. Meanwhile, our Class C Loretta rests in storage. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

President's Message

Ed Dennis

As we are about to embark on our Chapter 8 Rolling Rally to explore *Baja California*, it is time for a presidential comment on the State of Chapter 8. At this writing, it appears that we will reach our goal of sixty rigs despite a few cancellations for medical or other extenuating circumstances. Enthusiasm for the annual Mexican Connection excursion is high despite the continuing wall-related rhetoric dividing America. With over three decades of Chapter 8 rallies in Mexico without a major incident, we have seen no justification to be overly concerned of anywhere our Rolling Rally route takes us; your Wagonmaster and I have carefully chosen and traveled this route several times in preparation.



Ed Dennis, Chapter 8 Mexican Connection President and 2018 Wine to Whales Wagonmaster. Chapter 8 archival photo

I am proud to say that over the last few years, existing Chapter 8 Members have become even more welcoming of newly joined Members. Since the original intent of Chapter 8 was to introduce new RV travelers to Mexico, so that inclusion of new Members ought to be the priority of old Members. The Executive Board elected last year have embraced past challenges and brought a measure of harmony and accomplishment of which all Members can be proud. Also, the roads we will travel on the Rolling Rally and beyond have been significantly improved in many areas.

Shawn Loring, CEO of our parent organization, Escapees RV Club, Inc., has made note of our progress. Chapter/BOF Director, Lockie Sailor has taken an active



Eons of granite erosion made bizarre boulder fields near Cataviña. Photo by Jean Pedersen

interest in our growth and mission statement fulfillment. Tammy Johnson, Editor of the Escapee Magazine, requested a special article on Chapter 8 (which ran in the last edition) and published a special half-page event information in a prior publication.

We have received rave reviews for our newsletter and website thanks in a great part to Newsletter Editor, Joseph de Leon, and the multi-talented Historian, Debby Clark. Together with a host of Chapter 8 article writers, Joseph and Debby have brought greater interest and accuracy to the words and pictures that describe our hopes, share our knowledge, and relate our adventures.



A trio of Escapees practice the “skill set of traveling the highways and byways of Mexico” at La Gringa near Bahia de Los Angeles after the 2018 Wine to Whales caravan. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

Of special note is the long serving excellence of Treasurer, Steve Bufty, who continues to steer our financial course in keeping with our non-profit status intact, while keeping bills paid on time and member questions expeditiously answered. Our Membership Chairperson, Jay Hoult, is working to upgrade the membership process with the help of other Board Members. Our Secretary, Jean Pedersen, is a steady contributor of pertinent questions and new ideas.

True to our mission statement, in recent years we have provided thousands of SKPs with information on the art and skill set of traveling the highways and byways of Mexico. Our caravans and

rallies have provided in-kind donations of clothing, blankets, child and adult diapers, shoes, walkers, canes, toys and non-perishable foods, etc. Additionally, Chapter 8 has conscientiously expanded its charity funding for:

1. A home for disadvantaged medically and/or mentally challenged children
2. A shelter where abused women and their children can regain dignity and work
3. A helping hand for the economically disadvantaged elderly
4. A holiday season gift of food, clothing, blankets and toys for 460 poor families
5. A highly successful scholarship program for bright students with insufficient resources
6. A clinic that provides neutering and spaying to control the feral pet population
7. A non-profit, low cost, children's park and zoo of formerly abused or abandoned exotic animals
8. A symphony program to provide instruments and instruction to musically gifted students
9. An educational computer system for an underfunded school for children migrant workers
10. Escapee RV Club's "CARE" facility located in Livingston, Texas



And most of all, to our SKP community, we bring an extra dimension of adventure, an insider's look into the real Mexico, an opportunity to bond with like-minded SKPs, and fun events

Residents near La Jolla Beach Camp benefit from Chapter 8 donations during Christmas, receiving much needed necessities, such as blankets and food. Photo by Ed Dennis

that most commercial tours have yet to find! Such is both the challenge and reward for those who step up to the role of Wagonmaster and give of their time, talents and resources to take the lead in building a reciprocal “people-to-people” alliance of cultural understanding, building friendships on both sides of the border and knowing in your heart that true charity is its own reward.

With all the progress we have made, the primary remaining challenge is for a few good folks to step up to the challenge of being Wagonmasters. Leading a caravan into Mexico is easier now with the help of past efforts in a teamwork approach. Now that Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel and Top Tier gasoline is readily available, major roads from the border to the interior are being rapidly upgraded with new pavement and wider shoulders that opens new routes to exciting adventures. The techniques and formula spreadsheets of recently successful rallies are available to those who demonstrate a willingness to learn and lead, bringing greater satisfaction to the group and the Wagonmaster who leads them.

The most challenging and most rewarding position on the Executive Board is that of Wagonmaster of the next rally. It is a system that gives an SKPer the opportunity to grow the skills, alliances and knowledge that makes for better Caravans and Rallies for Chapter 8 members. In their wisdom, previous Chapter 8 Bylaw builders created three Vice Presidents: the First V.P. is the Wagonmaster of the current year. The Second V.P. is advisedly the Assistant Wagonmaster of the current year, and Wagonmaster of the next year. The Third V.P. is advisedly the Assistant Wagonmaster of the next year and Wagonmaster of the subsequent year.



Wagonmasters have a challenging yet rewarding job, which includes finding RV-appropriate routes, enough parking, and places to eat. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

While the position of Wagonmaster may seem a bit daunting at first, the help that is available from the Immediate Past President, President, and Wagonmasters from prior years, (plus documents and contacts from past Rallies held by the Historian) is complemented by assistance from the rest of the Executive Board. To qualify as a Wagonmaster: 1. A candidate must announce the destination of his or her intended rally or caravan as a prerequisite. 2. Such destination must be ratified by the Executive Board for the benefit of Chapter 8 Members before the event can become sanctioned as a Chapter 8 Rally or Caravan. 3. Pragmatically, the elected Wagonmaster must demonstrate a close working relationship with the Executive Board to gain the insight, skills, planning and support that have provided the greatest degree of success to past rallies and caravans.

It is this attention to detail and willingness to share the workload that provides a greater Mexican experience at a non-profit price that is made possible by everyone doing a little so all can benefit more. While there has been a tendency to “reinvent the wheel” of rally events each year, the membership in the Mexican Connection, that once was the largest Escapee Chapter with 635 members, has dwindled down in members and Executive Board participation. It seemed ready to fade away after three decades of teaching folks about the art and benefits of traveling in Mexico.



Chapter 8 membership is on the uptick after a steady decline. Photo by Jean Pedersen

Thankfully, our Chapter 8 membership is growing again and our Facebook page is too. As Wagonmaster and President, we have traveled thousands of miles in Mexico and have many wonderful experiences to relate, and we look forward to passing on our knowledge and support to those of good will and conscientious work ethic who will be entering a new golden age of Mexican travel adventures.

For the last several years, the unsure availability of Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel (ULSD) has restricted people with diesel engines from 2007 to the present from going deeper into Mexico than a single tank of American made diesel could take them and get back to the border. Shortly before the 2018 *Baja* Caravan, the Mexican law of 1938 which created Pemex was changed to allow importation of ULSD and Top Tier gasoline to be sold throughout Mexico under many different brands. Mexican refined diesel fuel has 300 parts per million or more of sulfur, while ULSD has 15 parts per million! It was out of our continuing concern for Chapter 8 members' engines obtaining genuine ULSD that the last two Chapter 8 events have been held in *Baja California*. A longer Caravan to *Guerrero Negro* for the bold and a shorter trip on the better roads to *Ensenada* for those who would prefer to stay within a hundred miles of the border. Research by a few interested members into the proliferation of adequate diesel in other areas of Mexico is ongoing. It was the published intent of the last Mexican administration to accelerate the availability of ULSD fuel that efficient modern diesel engines require.

It has been the recent nature of Chapter 8 to have two General Meetings of the Membership at the annual Rally. It is here that our dedicated Executive Board can freely meet to explore ways to improve our chapter and present them at the General Meeting so that changes, if needed, can be made to the Bylaws, Standing Rules, Election of Officers and relevant old or new business. Due to this



Mexican PEMEX gas station. Photo courtesy [Wikipedia](#)

year's increase in new members, first timers will be a voting majority and, therefore, in their votes rest the future of Chapter 8. Many SKPs began their participation with SKP Hops and commercial caravans after a first experience of international RVing with a Mexican Connection Rally.

In past years, first timers have not been as included as they might have been by the more established members. The clear consensus of the current Executive Board was to reverse the trend to be in sync with the founding premise of Chapter 8. It was the stated purpose of this chapter to teach new people how to successfully RV in Mexico. Subsequently, an additional mission statement included providing charitable donations to established Mexican charities. Therefore, our chapter should be all about including new people and considering new directions that embrace our twin purposes of teaching new members about traveling in Mexico and providing acts of charity south of the border.



An example of what success might look like following a Chapter 8 trip. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

This year, our Wagonmaster has provided some extra time and events at Potrero Park to include more fun in *Tecate* and more understanding of how to get more from the Rolling Rally experience. As a chapter, we are fortunate in the quality and quantity of SKPs who have joined together to have more fun, explore Mexico in a more meaningful way, make Mexican Connection charity more relevant, and provide the leaders to give Chapter 8 the opportunity to grow again in service to its participating members.

Ed Dennis,

President, Escapees RV Club, Chapter 8, The Mexican Connection

Wildlife

in Baja California



As the sun sets, silhouettes provide excellent cover for much of Baja California's wildlife, which includes hundreds of species of birds, scores of reptiles and amphibians, dozens of mammals, and a famously abundant marine life. Photo by Bob Pettit

By Joseph M. de Leon

Traveling in *Baja California* by land gives visitors a glimpse of what it might be like to travel back in time. It doesn't take long for the scenery go from urban to downright prehistoric looking. Driving south from the modern port city of *Ensenada*, the farther one goes, the more mesmerizing the landscape becomes.

The *Baja California* peninsula stretches about 760 miles into the Pacific Ocean and varies between roughly 25 and 200-miles wide. Weather patterns range from Mediterranean-type conditions with winter rains, to extremely arid, to tropical weather with summer rains. The geography on the more than 55,000 square miles peaks at 10,154 feet along the *San Pedro Mártir* mountains, includes 65 islands and has a coastline that spans more than 1,900 miles. This allows such vegetation as coastal chaparral, conifer forest, and tropical deciduous forest to thrive.

The result is spectacular biodiversity. Close to 500 species of plants, 4 amphibians, 43 reptiles, around 200 birds and over 50 mammals have adapted to difficult ecological conditions in *Baja California*, according to [World Wildlife Fund](#).

The wildlife you're most likely to see in February are creatures of the ocean – sea birds, sea lions, and whales. Other commonly seen animals on land include coyote, rabbit, and roadrunner. Those who worry about snakes and creepy crawlies can rest assured sightings of these creatures are rare during the winter, unless you're digging or turning over stones.

When I was in my early 20s, I worked as a reptile zookeeper at the San Antonio Zoo, so I have a deep admiration for what many consider “lowly” amphibians, lizards, and snakes. In the Texas Hill Country, there are only four venomous snake species: the copperhead, cottonmouth, coral snake, and the iconic



In the course of its evolution, the Isla Catalina Rattlesnake lost its rattle because it has no enemies on its endemic island habitat. Photo courtesy CaliforniaHerps.com

Western diamondback rattlesnake. We kept a number of Mexican snakes in the zoo's collection, including a colony of rattlesnakes adapted to living in the mountainous regions of Southern Mexico.

Imagine my delight to learn there are no fewer than 18 species of rattlesnakes on the peninsula! However, even in the very places I expected to see a spiny lizard or a bull snake, none were visible. The boulder strewn landscape surrounding *Cataviña* seems the idyllic place to encounter reptiles of all sorts, but during our time there in February 2018, scarcely a living creature was seen, save for the occasional unidentifiable bird in the distance. We stayed at [Rancho Santa Ynez](#) near *Cataviña*. As in northern climates, winter in Baja California is largely a time of rest for many terrestrial creatures.



Boulders, scrub brush, and cactus provide ample habitat for creatures in the area around Cataviña; however, animal sightings in the winter are rare here. At the far top of the towering cactus, birds make hollows. Note the red circle: Denise says “hello.” Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

It's a different story on the coast.

North of *San Quintín*, there is little difference in sea life compared to Southern California. Kelp beds, sea urchins, and abalone are common, as are seals and sea lions. South of this area, marine life adapted to the cool Pacific currents begin to diminish as more tropical species take hold. *Punta Abreojos* is considered by many to be the start of truly tropical waters.

Along the southern stretch of this transition, *Guerrero Negro* is the premiere spot to watch gray whales, as those who attended the 2018 Wine to Whales caravan can attest.

We stayed at [Mario's Tours](#), which offers an RV campground, a good quality, rustically decorated restaurant (figure 1), a whale museum and learning center (figure 2), and whale watching boat tours, complete with transport to and from *Ojo de Libre* Lagoon (figure 3). The lagoon's unusually high salt content draws the whales, often attracting more than 1,000 cavorting whales at a time (figure 4).

Mario's in Guerrero Negro

1



2



3



4



Mario's Campground in Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur, is for whale watching. Photos 1 & 2 by Joseph M. de Leon; photos 3 & 4 by Bob Pettit

Pregnant mothers and single females seeking mates are usually the first to arrive in January. The lagoon offers protection and its high salt increases buoyancy, making it easier for baby whales to learn how to swim. By mid-February to mid-March, most of the population has filled the lagoon with nursing, calving, and mating gray whales. By the end of April, most new mothers have left the lagoon, but many mothers stay well into May to make sure their babies are strong enough for the journey north far into the Arctic Ocean – a 13,600 mile journey believed to be the longest annual migration of any mammal.

Whales are common along the peninsula's east coast in the Sea of Cortez. A full-time resident population of finback whales – second in size only to blue whales – lives in the Cortez. Humpback whales are often seen in the Cortez during winter, especially off the southern most tip. Even blue whales are occasionally seen in the area.

California sea lions, elephant seals, and harbor seals breed and calve on the larger islands along the Pacific coast. [La Lobrera](#), a sea lion crater near *El Rosario*, is an excellent place to see these charismatic creatures. A 4x4 vehicle is recommended.



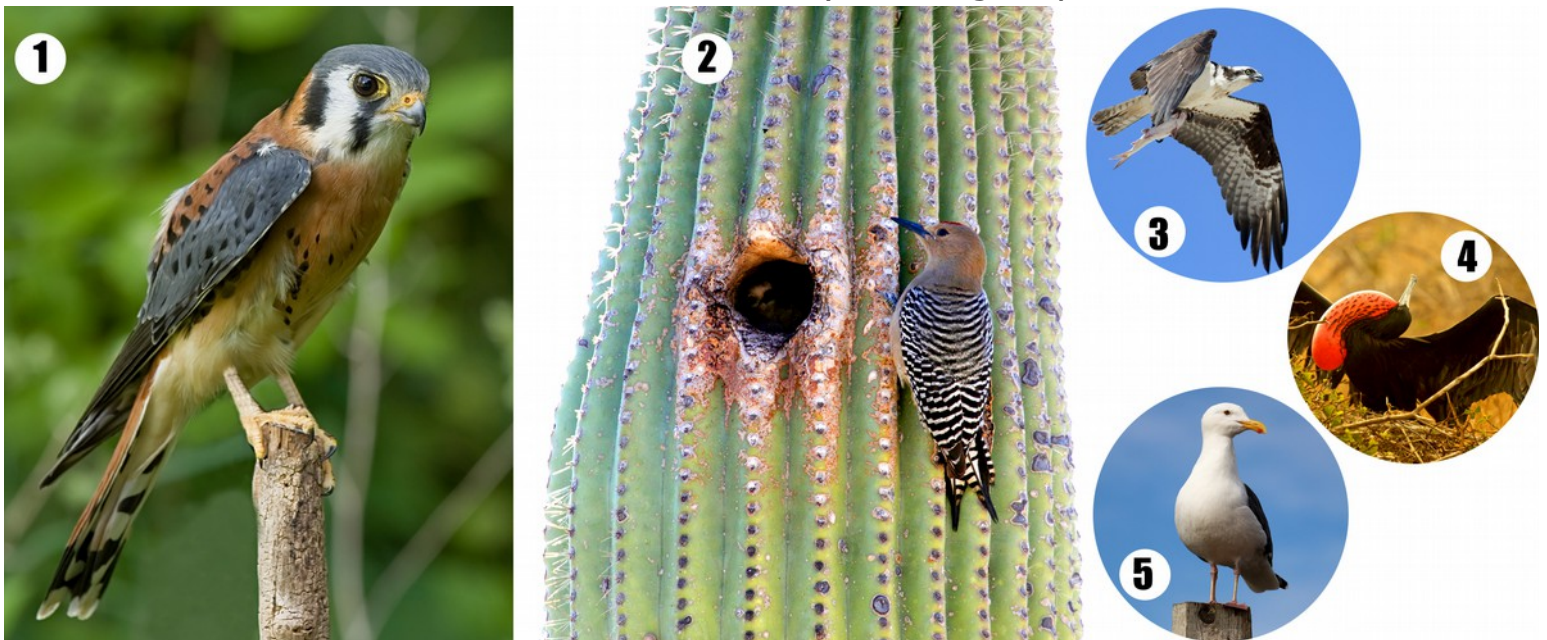
Although poor road conditions make La Lobrera a bit difficult to reach, the viewing platform on the edge of the crater and the surrounding seascape make the trip well worth the effort. Photos by Jean Pedersen

Whether you're in the city, on the coast, or in the desert, birds are ever present, even if you might not immediately notice them. Some of the more common and visible birds in *Baja California* include birds of prey, sea birds, and a cactus dweller.

The smallest falcon in North America, American kestrel (figure 1) feeds primarily on large insects like beetles and grasshoppers, but occasionally takes small mammals like voles and bats and even such creatures as earthworms, lizards, and crayfish.

Gila woodpeckers (figure 2) build nests in large cactus, which other birds use as homes once the woodpeckers leave. Pairs of Gila woodpeckers excavate a hollow in a large cactus, but must wait several months for the inner pulp of the cactus to heal and dry out before they can build a nest and raise young.

The osprey (figure 3), also known as the sea hawk, is among the most common raptors worldwide, thriving in any area that provides an ample supply of fish. Special adaptations make this bird a formidable fisher, which include an oily coating to prevent



Common birds of Baja California, clockwise from left, American kestrel (photo by Greg Hume); Gila woodpecker (photo by Gary L. Clark); osprey (photo by Bob Petitt); magnificent frigatebird (photo by Andrew Turner); Western gull (photo by Bob Petitt)

waterlogged feathers, nostrils that can close to keep water out during dives, and barbs on its toe scales and talons that help osprey grip slippery fish.



Exotic animals at the zoo, from top: wild cattle (photo by Bob Petitt); wildebeest (photo by Jean Pedersen); hippo (photo by Bob Petitt)

The magnificent frigatebird (figure 4 on page 19) is an unmistakable large seabird about the size of a pelican with dark plumage, forked tail, and angular wings. But what really sets this bird apart from others is the male's bright red inflatable sac, which is used to attract a mate. A brutal feeder, when frigatebirds can't find enough freshly-caught fish, they are known to relentlessly harass other birds, forcing them to drop or even regurgitate a recent meal.

While some may dismiss the Western gull (figure 5 on page 19) as an unremarkable bird, they sometimes practice the noteworthy behavior of dropping hard-shelled clams and crabs onto rocks while in flight to break them open. The scourge of many mothers, Western gulls often raid nests to eat eggs and young birds, even scavenging dead sea lion pups.

Wildlife can be elusive, especially if time is in short supply. Fortunately, there will be ample time to get a close look at exotic and local wildlife during the 2019 Rolling Rally. Participants will have the opportunity to tour the *Zoológico Parque del Niño Jersey* and even interact with staff.

The zoo serves as a sanctuary for neglected, abandoned, and confiscated wildlife. While the rehabilitation and care of animals is the zoo's main work, the grounds also provide guests with children's play areas, a swimming pool, and a man-made lake with paddle boats.

Work to improve enclosures, provide animals with the best care available, and maintain park amenities never ceases. The zoo is open to the public on weekends and during the week by reservation. The winter is the slowest time of the season, despite the mild weather. The 2019 Rolling Rally visit comes at a good time because it will provide some much needed income. Come spring, the grounds again overflow with curious guests.

The combination of changes of venue that include urban, desert, and coastal landscapes coupled with a stay at the zoo gives caravan participants an unprecedented opportunity to enjoy nature at every turn. Regardless of where one goes during or after the 2019 Rolling Rally, *Baja California* offers spectacular scenery and unforgettable wildlife.



Top: A member of the zoo staff offered a tour of the zoo grounds to 2018 Wine to Whale caravan participants. Inset: The zoo's veterinarian discusses some of the challenges of caring for exotic animals on a shoestring budget. Photos by Jean Pedersen

CB Radio



By by longtime Chapter 8 Member Bob Elliott

From many years of flight instruction and a couple years of Mexican Connection CB experiences, I believe that the following guidelines will reduce confusion:

- Make sure no one is talking before you press the transmit button. If you “step on” another transmission, usually both transmissions are garbled and both of the transmitting parties may not know that their transmissions were not delivered. When this happens, someone else can say: “The last transmission was stepped on.”
- Each transmission has four parts:
 - ◆ **Who you’re calling.** You have to get the attention of who you want to talk to if you want them to “be present” for your communication. Each group should decide on how they want to refer to each other, for example, “6-1” for the group leader of group 6.
 - ◆ **Who you are.** The person you are calling needs to know who is talking to them to get full understanding from the communication. Mention the number you were assigned

according to you Travel Group, for example, if you are fourth in Group 6 then your ID would be "6-4"

- ◆ **Where you are.** For Mexican Connection group calls this is usually understood, and can be dropped from the transmission, if everyone is where they are supposed to be. But if you're out of position, for example, delayed by traffic, then include where you are.
- ◆ **What you want.** State the reason for the transmission. What do you want to know, communicate or have happen

Here's an example of the above 4 parts:

"6-1, this is 6-4. We are dropping behind about 1/4 mile now. Please slow down until we let you know we've caught up."

- **Acknowledgment:** It is nice to let whoever called you know that you understand a communication, e.g., with a "Roger," which means I understand. "Say again" means you didn't understand. "Negative" is a clearer way of saying "no."

Caravan Guidelines

The following guidelines make for happy caravanning, especially if there is lost communication:

1. Follow the route of the rig in front of you.
2. Keep a safe distance between you and the rig in front to allow space for passing vehicles. (This will keep the locals happy)
3. Adjust your speed to the rig behind you. Yes, behind you. If you do this, then the whole group will slow down when someone gets delayed.
4. If you lose sight of the rig behind you, notify the Group Leader and pull over where it is safe. Even if you can't connect on the CB, this should stop everyone in front of you if they are following guideline #3 above. If the missing rig doesn't show up after say 5 minutes, and you can't contact them on the CB, come up with a plan.



Realize these guidelines will result in the group driving at the comfort speed of the slowest drive. Following these guidelines should eliminate stress for the entire group and allow for a comfortable and fun travel experience.



A group of SKP rigs travel through Baja California during the 2018 Wine to Whales trip. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

Note from the Wagonmaster:

Please follow the posted speed limits, even though you will find that locals will most likely ignore them. Feel free to take advantage of the shoulder to allow more room for vehicles to pass. The custom in Mexico is for the slower vehicle to drive on the shoulder (if available and safe to do so) when another vehicle would like to pass. On top of that you can signal the driver behind you that it is safe to pass by using your left signal blinker. Yes, left signal blinker, it is a Mexican custom.

Remember to watch out for the abundant "alto" (arterial stop sign) and for "topes" (Mexican speed bumps) especially for the large ones, affectionately nicknamed Dolly Partons. See more about [road signs starting on page 34](#).

More [CB info can be found on the Chapter 8 website](#).



These signs mean "tope," or speed bump, ahead. Expect to see a big variety of road signs in Mexico, including homemade ones. Can you guess which one reminds some people of Dolly Parton? Various sources

What it means to be a **Group Leader**



by Terry and Jane McClay, CH8 Rolling Rally Group Leaders

Being a Group Leader is both a responsibility and a privilege. You have the responsibility to provide leadership and carrying out the Wagonmaster's directions, plus you get the privilege of bonding early with other leaders, all while you enjoy the pleasure of creating a cohesive and friendly traveling group. There are two aspects to this role: First there is what we will refer to as the technical part and then there is the social part.

You will be arriving at the rally start point, usually 2-3 days, before the rest of the Rolling Rally. This gives you the opportunity to get to know the Wagonmaster and the rest of the Group Leaders. This is a time for building leadership for the caravan. Discuss experiences with each other. Talk as a group about how decisions are to be made and make sure you are comfortable with the process. The leadership team will cross the border for a trial experience a couple of days before the rest of the Rolling Rally attendees arrive. This provides you with the actual border crossing process so you will be able to help your group when the time comes.

Technical aspects of the role

You will attend Wagonmaster Meetings to get details of the next event, directions to the next stop, potential hazards on the route, and provide feedback from yourself and from your group. Make sure to take good notes.

Get to know your Tail Gunner, the nickname used for the last person in a group who makes sure no one gets left behind. Figure out how the two of you will communicate. You will need to know when everyone has pulled out from a stop, when someone has a problem, or if anyone in the group is separated or is falling behind.

Hold meetings to disseminate the information from the Wagonmaster meetings to your group. Be detailed in providing the information so that everyone is aware of the length of travel so they can be prepared for food and fuel. Be open to questions from your group. Make sure everyone understands the information you provide and be open to opinions and suggestions others may make. Make sure everyone knows the start times for activities, for travel, and the lineup order. Ask about tank levels (fuel, water, and holding tanks) to see if anyone needs additional stops.

When talking about the routes you will be taking, be sure to discuss everyone's experience with their RV. Are they new to RVing? Are they familiar with their equipment and CB? What is the expected speed at which you will be driving? Will everyone be comfortable with the groups' decision on speed and when to make stops for regrouping if needed? In the first meeting discuss CB call signs such as Group

Number position (the third rig in group 5 would be 5-3) or if the group prefers you can make up a name such as "Taco3". [See CB Radio Etiquette on page 22](#). Have the group line up in the same position on travel days unless it is decided as a group the day before. Remember



A group waits at a gas station in Tecate, BC to give each rig time to clear the border crossing. Communication ensures everyone knows what to expect. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

to be flexible when possible. Talk about passing information back to the Tail Gunner and forward to the Group Leader as you may get spread out or the signal may be lost on the other side of a hill.

During each leg of the trip, you will need to pass on to the group information about the road, such as [topes \(Mexican speed bumps\)](#), pot holes, bike riders, big rigs approaching, passing cars, and anything else that may be hazardous. Be mindful of group members who may need to stop for a restroom break. Make sure to do a CB check with your group before heading out each day.

Do not pass another group unless they have stopped and you



communicate with the stopped group's leader. If another group passes you, give them some time before starting out to prevent the parking team from getting overwhelmed with rigs to help park at the next stop. As a general rule, allow 15 minutes between groups.

With dozens of rigs to accommodate, the parking team has a huge task to perform at each stop. Team Leaders can help by keeping space between groups. Photo by Joseph M. de Leon

After each leg of the trip, hold a meeting to discuss how it went. Things to ask: Was the speed OK? How was everyone's comfort level? How are the fuel levels? And ask for feedback.

The Social Part

As a Group Leader you want to build a cohesive and friendly group. Make your group meetings enjoyable. These are times to get to know each other. You can make them pot lucks, BYOB, go to a nearby restaurant, etc. You don't have to always make them an event but be sure to include everyone. Meeting as a small group is a great time to

talk about each other's expectations of the rally, the best way to communicate, how to attend to the needs of everyone the best a group can, and how to express problems to the Group Leader without having to go to the Wagonmaster.

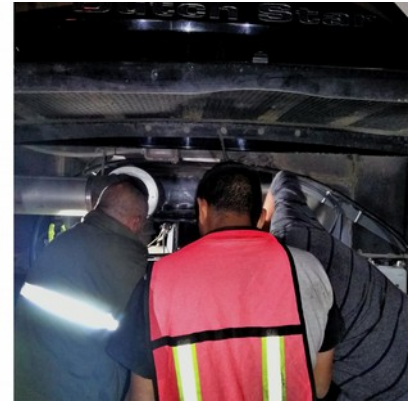
As with any group, there are individual differences that may cause issues between members. The best way to handle this is through private discussions with the people or person causing the issue, and as you know, it is never wise to call someone out in a group meeting. If you can't resolve the issue, talk to the Wagonmaster or one of the other Group Leaders to get advice. Make an effort to have private time with each of the members in your group as some may not feel comfortable bringing up issues in a group setting. Be friendly, open, responsive, and have a wonderful time during the Chapter 8 Rolling Rally!!



Great friendships form during Chapter 8 potlucks and outings. Photo by Bob Petitt



Crossing the Border and the Serpentine Surprise



By Chapter 8 SKPs Ed & Kassandra Dennis

Kassandra and I left the snow and ice of winter in Quebec (Canada) speaking French, to stop in cold and snowy Nappanee (IN) to speak German with Amish friends while our coach got some factory service in English and arrived safely in sunny *Baja California* (MX) speaking Spanish in a 2,600-mile trek to assure all was ready for February's Rolling Rally. We had a sudden reminder of what to add to our list to bring along... particularly when traveling long distances in unfamiliar territory.

But first, a word about the tranquil *Tecate* Border Crossing as of December 30th, 2018. Crossing from the U.S. side to Mexico is the same easy access it has always been. Of the major border crossing cities, *Tecate* is NOT your typical border town... it is more like a small peaceful town in the tranquil areas of the Mexican interior. Since all the "Build the Wall" hullabaloo, the U.S. Border Patrol has added loops of razor wire to the top of existing fences, changed the entrance for pedestrians so that a passport must be shown before setting foot on American soil (to avoid random foreign nationals asking for asylum on U.S. soil), and changed the route for commercial trucks entering the U.S. to the same one used by cars. All-in-all, crossing the border at *Tecate* is pretty much the same as it has been for years.

After checking in at beautiful *Potrero* County Park in the hill country of southern San Diego County and filling up our water tank with some of

the finest water in the U.S., we headed for the border. I went ahead in our Sprinter van to check on Rolling Rally points of interest on the "Ruta del Vino" through *Guadalupe Valley* while *Kassandra* drove our motorhome. I filled up with #2 diesel on the U.S. side and thought *Kassandra* had crossed the border minutes before me as confirmed by the border control agent. As it happened, *Kassandra* had been waiting for me and was actually behind me, but I had exited the fuel station on the other side and we missed each other. After the *Tecate* Border Crossing I tried to reach her by cell phone but my attempts just went into voice mail. I waited for her to arrive at *Zoologico Parque del Niño Jersey* (62 miles south of *Tecate*) until it was clear that something was amiss... and headed back to *Tecate* on the beautifully improved Mexico Hwy 3 wondering about the fate of our Newmar Dutch Star and the love of my life that I last saw smiling from the driver's seat.

Rounding a curve 23 kilometers south of *Tecate*, I saw our Dutch Star with its flashers on by the side of the busy road. I pulled to the side and put my flashers on and was relieved and happy when we shared a hug. *Kassandra* related that the Check Engine light came on followed a few seconds later by a Stop Engine light and the temperature gauge was pegged at HOT. A car that has lost a fan belt can get a bit farther than a 450hp diesel pusher that has lost a Serpentine Belt that drives several critical components. Serpentine Belts are characteristically different sizes for the many different models of diesel engines.

Consequently, everyone who owns a diesel is well advised to keep an extra belt in case of emergencies. Another item to add to your Travel Necessities List is a set of reflective triangles and a diagram as to how the Serpentine or Fan Belt(s) are to be installed. The larger diesel engines, like ours, will often have two separate



Serpentine belts. Photo courtesy Auto Parts Warehouse

Serpentine Belts. If you don't have a spare, you will have to be towed and will likely have some down time before the correct one reaches you.

Before I arrived on the scene, a passing semi driver, who spoke no English, stopped to help Cassandra. He allowed her to use his powered Mexican cell phone in his truck to call our friend, Miguel Pabloff at *La Jolla* Beach Camp who said he would bring along his mechanic to help as soon as he could. By the time I arrived, Cassandra already had the coach flashers flashing, the emergency reflective triangles set out to provide early warning to approaching drivers and had the spare Serpentine Belt in her hand... but installing it can be a difficult task.

Just then, I saw a Green Angel truck approaching with his emergency lights flashing. The Green Angels (*Angeles Verdes*) are seasoned mechanics who patrol the major Mexican highways to help stranded tourists free of charge. They are part of the Office of the Secretary of Tourism of Mexico with whom Chapter 8 had a special relationship developed for the 2018 Wine to Whales Baja Caravan. Seconds later Miguel "Mike" Pabloff pulled up with "Chui" who has a mechanics shop at *La Jolla* Beach Camp. Mike had recently finished 2nd in the Baja 500 race after having rebuilt the race car with his brother. As we all gathered around to puzzle over how to best install the new belt (sadly our diagram was misplaced), the young truck driver who helped Cassandra earlier showed up with a hot order of Chinese takeout saying (in translation) it was for the "lady in distress."



Nothing is more welcome to stranded motorists in Mexico than Angeles Verdes. Photo courtesy RV.net

Despite all the help and tools, the missing diagram of exactly how the belt should be installed caused the installation to be delayed until sometime after sundown. The depleted water/anti-freeze mixture in the radiator was refilled and there were high-fives all the way around as the engine roared to life as if nothing had ever happened. Over the sixty plus years that I have traveled to various countries in Europe, Africa, North and South America, Mexico has always been among the very best when it comes to warm welcomes along the way and a helpful hand in times of distress. In these times of screaming headlines, enhanced TV coverage and hyper-political Twittering north of the border... the good times, tasty food and friendly folks in the land of *mañana* are much the same... but the roads have much improved and better quality fuel stations with names like Shell, Chevron, ARCO and BP are springing up with Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel and Top Tier gasoline even beyond *Baja California*.



Friendly people, affordable prices, and top-notch food quality can be found at Calimax, the supermarket closest to La Jolla Beach. Photo by Cassandra Dennis

The rumor that the "Free Zone" covering part of *Sonora* and all of *Baja California* had been changed and that U.S. citizens bringing large vehicles into this part of Mexico would have to post a deposit and pay a fee for the Temporary Import Permit (TIP) "hologram" proved to be entirely false when we met with Mexican Officials at the Border. However, the TIP procedure remains the same as it has been for vehicles entering Mexico outside of the established "Free Zone." In the interest of informing our fellow Chapter 8 members and for our own safety and well being, we closely monitor the pulse of Mexican

tourism by our personal contact with the Office of the Secretary of Tourism, our many friends in strategic Mexican communities, leaders of commercial tours such as *Baja Amigos* and SKPs such as Terri & Mike Church who wrote the definitive books on Mexican Travel and who are currently RVing in Mexico.

Clearly, stopping the legal multi-billion-dollar trade flow of commerce through the designated points of entry for even a day would create severe negative financial consequences on both sides of the border. Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail and the hospitality, peace and tranquility to be found in most of Mexico will turn our national headlines to more pressing concerns. Meanwhile, wherever you may roam, remember to bring Emergency Reflective Triangles, Fan/Serpentine Belts with the installation diagrams... and the positive attitude that makes RVing a great way to RV across North America!



The Tecate Port of Entry is one of three ports of entry in the San Diego–Tijuana metropolitan region, but has the feel of an interior Mexico town compared to other border crossings.

Photo courtesy Wikipedia

Navigating Roads in Baja California

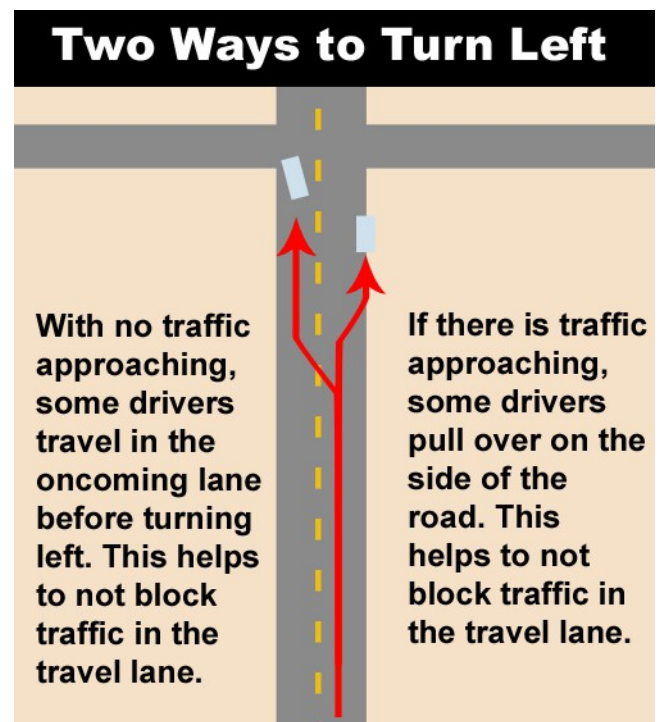
By Joseph M. de Leon

One of the great joys of traveling in a foreign country is immersing in the local ways. The food, music, style of dress, even grocery stores have their own distinct flavor. But driving in *Baja California* is a different animal entirely.

Firstly, the road conditions can be terrible. While the government continues to make progress in improving long stretches of highways between major towns and attractions, once you're off the beaten path, your rig may take a beating.

Secondly, the rules of the road are different here. Virtually no one drives the speed limit (but you should) and few actually stop at stop signs (which is why [topes](#) are so prevalent). When a local wants to turn left on a two-lane road, they will usually get into the oncoming traffic lane and turn left from there. If they can't make it because there's oncoming traffic, many will just pull off to the right to avoid blocking traffic (or a rear-end collision) and wait for a clearing.

Then there's the matter of blinkers. In Baja California, they are not often used for signaling a turn or lane change. Blinkers are instead used to let folks know it's OK to pass on a highway. This is especially helpful on hilly terrain or winding roads where visibility is limited. It's also why the



Using turn signal...

USA = turn left

Mexico = safe to pass

caravan splits up into groups, so we're not needlessly congesting the roads. And it's why you'll be asked to leave plenty of room between rigs. Here's how it works:

- **The approach** A vehicle rolls up behind you and wants to pass. You can easily tell because they are tailgating you and keep peeking out into the oncoming lane in an attempt to see around you.
- **Notify group** Radio the group to let them know what's happening. It's likely others will have spotted the traffic. In high-traffic areas, it may become tedious to relay each and every pass, so [talk with your group leader](#) about how everyone prefers to handle these situations.
- **Signal to pass** If the oncoming lane is clear, put your left turn signal on and gradually slow down, if needed, to help them complete the pass. Leave plenty of space between rigs so passing vehicles have ample room to hopscotch through the caravan group.
- **Carry on** Resume speed and continue on your journey.

There are jerks in every country, so don't be alarmed if people drive in ways you don't expect. Sometimes, speed demons will split the lane and force you into the median as they pass you half in your lane and half in oncoming traffic. I only saw that happen twice in the two months I was in *Baja California* in early 2018.

Regardless of where you go, one thing is certain: road signs in *Baja California* can be confusing. In some places they are entirely absent and when they are present,



What does this sign say? In the previous issue, I challenged you to read this sign. "No utilice," do not use, "freno," brakes, "de motor" of the motor. You would recognize the sign in English as "No engine braking!" Photo by Denise Valdez

they can be easy to miss. Locals often cover road signs with posters seeking lost pets or advertising a business. While you'll occasionally see [universal icon style signs](#), most road signs are block text on a white background.



Sometimes, a different phrase is used for the same meaning. The top sign reads “transito lento,” slow traffic, “carril derecho,” right lane. The bottom photo reads “carril izquierdo” left lane, “solo para rebasar,” for passing only. Photo by Denise Valdez

During the 2018 Wine to Whales trip, the caravan continued south of *Ensenada* to *Cataviña* and ended in *Guerrero Negro*, which is just across the state line in *Baja California Sur*. The further south we went, the more treacherous the road seemed to become. Rigs zig-zagged to avoid potholes, often traveling in the opposite lane of traffic in an attempt to seek out a somewhat smoother ride. It was frustrating at times because each group mixed rigs of different sizes. While the driving instinct was to simply follow in the path of the forward rig, the reality was that with different size wheel bases and widths, what one rig could easily maneuver around often became an assured crater hit.

If you find yourself in this situation, take it slow and pay attention to what your rig is capable of. For example, our Class C wheels are set more widely apart than those of most Class B rigs, but not as wide as some Class A motorhomes. Also, we tow a vehicle on a dolly, which can bottom out on certain dips or [topes](#). It's not just about your rig – it's also smart to keep in mind what you as a driver are capable of. I was so stressed



Sign placement and literal translations can be confusing. This safety message reads “conectate a la vida enciende tus luzes,” or connect yourself to life, burn your lights. Photo by Denise Valdez

from hitting so many potholes, my shoulders, neck and arms ached from bracing myself for so long. We switched drivers. Denise meandered through potholes like she'd been doing it all her life. Sure she hit a few, they can literally be unavoidable, but she kept us going like a pro.

Fortunately, the road between *Ensenada* and *Guerrero Negro* has gotten significant maintenance since February 2018. Several folks have reported the road conditions south of *Guerrero Negro* were in good condition in early 2018 and I suspect that's true for early 2019.



You're likely able to guess the meaning of many of the road signs you'll encounter. Here's a few clues with answers on the following page. Top photo: an "escuela" is a school – also, notice the red circles. Bottom row from left: come and go; danger; school velocity; diminish. Photos by Denise Valdez

After the Wine to Whales caravan, we joined a group of rigs to *Bahia de Los Angeles*, and the roads were very good. Then we were invited to join the group on to *San Felipe* through a stretch of highway that is under construction. And when I mean it's under construction, I mean there is no paved road at all. Just a dusty, washboard of a gravel road. With mostly no road signs. It's the route through Coco's Corner and it's extremely rough.



Fun times ahead with Chapter 8! Photo illustration by Joseph M. de Leon

The day before, a scouting party checked out the beginning of the route and deemed it passable. Had I known what we were getting into, I would have declined. The shaking was so severe, I worried our rig would rattle apart. Fortunately, the only damage we received was to our tow dolly – a weld came undone on a fender. We quickly had it repaired at a welding shop in *Bahia de Los Angeles*. I was pleased to learn our Class C 2010 Coachman Freelanders is built more resiliently than I feared.

And the best part is that we got to see places in *Baja California* we never would have had we listened to that inner voice of fear. Read the road signs as best you can and if all else fails, trust your rig.

Answers to signs on previous page:

Top photo: school crossing; bottom row from left: U turn in 150 meters; hazardous material tanker crossing; school zone slow down; urban zone slow down

Upcoming Issue & Submitting Content

Joseph M. de Leon

The next issue of *La Conexión Mexicana*, scheduled in your inbox and on the Chapter 8 website in April, is shaping up nicely! Here's what's in store:

- **Recap of 2019**

- **Rolling Rally** – The most anticipated issue of the year, this one will provide a review of the latest caravan. I bet you took more than a few photos on a Chapter 8 rally, current or past. [Send in a photo](#) and a short description of any Mexican Connection rallies you photographed.

- **2020 Rally sneak peak** – Read a preliminary description of what the wagonmaster has in store for the next Chapter 8 annual rally destination.

If you have any story or photo essay ideas, I'd love to hear them. Maybe it's a side trip you took. Or maybe you have a different perspective on a topic we've already covered. We're all eager to see something interesting, learn something new, or relive fun moments.

Until next time, happy travels!



Enormous boulders mark a parking area in the Valle de Guadalupe. Share one of your favorite photos from a Chapter 8 rally and we just might publish it in the next newsletter. [E-mail it](#) to or post on [Facebook](#). Photo by Joseph M. de Leon.

Content Submission Guidelines:

Contributing to *La Conexión Mexicana* is easy and can be as long as a multi-page article or as simple as a single photo. Please follow the guidelines below or e-mail me if what you have in mind isn't covered.

1. **Meet the deadline** – Spring 2019: **March 31**, published mid-April; Summer 2019: **June 30**, published mid-July; Fall 2019: **Sept. 30**, published mid-Oct.; Winter 2020: **Dec. 15**, published mid-Jan.
2. **Make articles lively** – Whether just a few paragraphs or a few pages, write short, descriptive sentences. Imagine you're telling the story to a friend. Write complete sentences and double check that you've spelled names and places correctly.
3. **Include photo captions** – make sure to write a caption for each photo you submit. Include captions in a text file, using the photo's file name to distinguish each caption. The best captions include the location, names of folks pictured, and offer a bit of additional information not obvious from the photo.
4. **Submit a few files by e-mail** – If you're submitting an article or a few photos, please send to josephmdeleon@gmail.com. Use a subject line that describes the attached files, for example “San Felipe article with photos,” not “Here you go.”
5. **Consider using “the cloud” if submitting lots of files** – There are many free services available, including DropBox and SmugMug. I'm happy to offer my opinion on how to do this. Alternatively, you can group photos in several e-mails.
6. **File formats** – for articles, Word (.doc), text (.txt), and Rich Text Format (.rtf) work well, or you can include the text of the article in the body of the e-mail. For photos, please submit photos in .jpg format. If at all possible, downsize photos to no larger than about 1 megabyte. It'll make your upload and my download quicker, especially when Wi-Fi is spotty or unavailable.

*The Carolyn J. lists to the side in her permanent anchor outside of Molino Viejo, San Quintin. It's a favorite roost for many area sea birds.
Photo by Bob Pettit*

