

Hargrove 2019 Annual Report

Executive Summary

Quote for the Year: “Our house is on fire!” — [Greta Thunberg](#), Time’s Person of the Year.

Trips: The two most frequent questions we are asked these days: Where have you traveled this year? When is your next trip? This year, we had three long trips with short visits to Austin and Houston and a week at a family camp wedged into the calendar. We have four trips planned for 2020: Costa Rica, Spain, Bolivia, and Indonesia. Every place we plan a trip these days seems to have demonstrations or riots, so...



Austin, Kerrville and the Hill Country, and Houston

Before our big trips, we managed a quick visit to Texas. After checking out Austin, we traveled into the Hill Country, visiting Linda’s favorite [Aunt Mary](#) and her daughter, Carolyn Smith. Mary Smith died later in the year. Then on to Houston for some enjoyable bridge with Bob Arnett, tempered only slightly by coming in

SECOND three days in a row.



Israel

Then, we went to Israel, in late March with our friends Jenny and Terry Cloudman. Jim’s favorite photo from the trip is this nice shot of a Marsh Sandpiper at the IBRCE (International Birding and Research Center Eilat). The area around Eilat in the south of the country is a fabulous spot for spring migration.

The weather was a bit uncooperative. The winds encouraged the migrants to fly right past us, but we still had views of thousands of storks and other birds as they made their way north from Africa. We also managed to visit the typical sites for tourists: Masada, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem. At the Dead Sea, Jim had the interesting experience of meeting several fellow psoriasis sufferers there for the traditional cure. (See 2 Kings 5, and read *between the lines*.) We tried to bathe in the sea, but it was too cold for more than a quick wade. The heated pool in the hotel, filled with Dead Sea water, was better. An album of photos from the trip is [online](#). The desert makes photography challenging. It’s hard enough to see the bird, much less find it in the viewfinder. Fortunately, our guides, Andy Whittaker and Meidad Goran took some good photos to augment ours.



Northern Europe

In April, we traveled to northern Europe. We have for some time wanted to see some special birds in breeding plumage. For example, we have seen Ruffs many times, even in California, but always in non-breeding plumage. We timed the trip specifically to give us a chance to see birds such as this Capercaillie, whose display was the highlight of the trip. After taking a video of the male’s display, Jim started playing it back. The bird heard it and charged the van we were in, forcing a quick end to the review.

Our visit began in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. We arrived early as usual, and spent a delightful morning touring the city with a FREE guide who peppered us with jokes and interesting tidbits, easily earning a good tip. We had a wonderful Thai dinner at a restaurant that shared part of the building we stayed in. We also took in a performance of Romeo and Juliet by the national ballet company, which was very well done.

Our excellent guide, Arturo Topp, from Finn Nature, took four of us to several sites in Estonia, and one night in Latvia. The latter was spent in a converted manor house dating to at least the 19th century. Afterwards, we flew on to Finland and wound our way north all the way to Norway. We spent several days near Vardø on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. After checking out the nearby areas, we took a short ferry ride to Hornoya Island, home to thousands of nesting seabirds. Among the many great sightings, the trip list included six different species of owls. Two *half birds* (*missed by Linda*) dated to Alaska 42 years ago! An album is [online](#).



Camp Mather

In July, we spent a week at Camp Mather, a site near Yosemite owned by San Francisco Parks and Recreation. Claire won a lottery to reserve a cabin for the entire family. We were a bit disappointed to discover the cabin lacked *en suite* bathrooms. Those were a “short distance” away. The area abounds in flowers at this time of year, such as Mariposa Lily shown at left. We

were lucky to have two experienced guides to tell us what we were seeing. The weather was beautiful all week as we visited Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy reservoir and enjoyed a talent show where Scarlet excelled with her hula hoop and a young boy burped the alphabet. [Another online photo album.](#)



Malawi

We try to get a photo of the two of us by a big tree for each of our tours. This one, a Baobab said to be 2500 years old, may be the biggest ever. We are the tiny figures at the base. For several years, we have donated to Rice 360, a global health initiative at our alma mater. This led to an invitation to visit Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Blantyre, Malawi, to see how the program has been implemented in *resource challenged* setting. We combined the visit with a birding and wildlife tour led of Malawi led by Dion Hobcroft and local guide, Abasi. We took *lots* of photos, [which are online.](#)

Family, etc.



Linda and Jim

[Many photos are online.](#)

We both noted the completion of our 75th trip around the sun this year, entering late middle age. Linda's birthday coincided with Easter and the Bring Your Own Big Wheel race, which begins at our driveway before descending the curviest street in San Francisco.

We are adjusting to life in the urban environment of San Francisco, where wildlife is sparse, but exercise is free: walking uphill. (It's always uphill.) A morning routine: Get up early to deal with important tasks: Microsoft Solitaire Daily Challenges; the NYT crossword, which we work together; the Times Spelling Bee, which Jim and Claire both tackle and compare notes; and, oh yes, the accounts. Then Linda typically walks Scarlet and Nico to school and continues to her *Aquafit* class at UCSF. Jim plays tennis at nearby club. Linda currently attends three book clubs monthly. Our neighborhood, Potrero Hill, is quite social, with regular potlucks and coffee klatches as well as its own Democratic Political Club. We keep in touch with our many Oakland friends. We were pleased to host several visitors to this amazing city during the year and hope for more in 2020.



Charles, Amy, Kai, and Kiera

Everyone is doing well. Kai and Kiera went to Language Camp in Minnesota: Danish (Kai), Spanish (Kiera). They hope to return next year. Kai continues to play video games and study piano. Both Kai and Charles are now fencing. Kiera is working on the violin, along with Girls' Garage and karate. She won a prize at this year's Iron Chef Party (the 15th in California!) with an [extremely complex cake](#) inspired by the Great British Baking Show.

Their entire family went to Belize this year, for diving, and Guatemala, to explore Mayan ruins at Tikal. Amy and her mother enjoyed cruising the Baltic area. Charles's bees seem to be doing well enough to provide the occasional jar of honey to us as well as donations to charitable causes. Amy shows where the family musical talent comes from by singing with the Contra Costa Chorale.



Claire, Ron, Scarlet, Nico

The opening of the new *Chase Center* within walking distance was enough to convince Claire and Ron to get partial season tickets for the Warriors. They also attended one of the first music events there as well as some Grateful Dead happenings in Mexico. All of us continue to visit the *Purple Haze* property near Philo, CA, where Ron's bountiful garden provided [a bumper crop of tomatoes](#) and peppers this year. Scarlet loves to read and usually has a book in her hand. She also aspires to be an author. Nico prefers building complex creations in Legos. After our beloved cat, Cash, died, leaving us without a cat for the first time in more than 50 years, she was replaced with two kittens, Biscuit and Cupcake. (Scarlet chose the names.) They frequently make themselves at home in our unit as well as the upper one.

Merry Christmas and all that

Happy Holidays! To all of you. We hope you have a happy 2020. We will keep you posted on our travels to see as much of our world as possible before it is all gone.