

Canada - The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 September - 7 October 2014



Brown Bear Swimming by Ian Woods



Orca by Ian Woods



Sea Otters by Ian Woods



Tour Group at Jamie's Whaling Station, Tofino

Report compiled by Alan Miller
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Summary:

The 2014 Naturetrek 'Canada – The West' Tour Group spent two weeks in stunning scenery visiting the Vancouver area and Vancouver Island where they enjoyed fantastic vistas and wonderful wildlife. There were many highlights including close encounters with both Black and Brown (Grizzly) Bears and four separate sightings of Orcas. The group were charmed by Bear cubs, delighted watching Sea Otters and ecstatic at a surprise encounter with two Grey Wolves. Not only was the wildlife first class but the group stayed in some lovely places, enjoyed delicious food and encountered excellent hospitality. A bonus was the weather which was generally kind to the group. One exception was a full day of rain whilst at Great Bear Lodge but on the positive side the real Rainforest was experienced, and at one time ten Brown Bears were visible through the rain from a covered hide. With almost daily outings on the water the sea was mainly calm and still. This tour is designed to offer a whole range of wildlife experiences and the group maximised their opportunities and shared wonderful experiences whilst having a lot of fun with everyone taking home a wealth of happy memories.

Day 1

Wednesday 24 September

Fly from London Heathrow to Vancouver then drive to Tsawwassen

Weather: Fine and sunny in London; on arrival at Vancouver dark, fine and 18 degrees.

Group members flying out from the UK converged on Terminal 5, London Heathrow airport for the 5.15pm British Airways flight to Vancouver on Canada's West Coast. Due to a number of factors including some disruption at Heathrow earlier in the day, flight BA85 didn't take off till 6.25pm. With the late departure and strong head winds we didn't land at Vancouver till just before 8pm local time. As we were flying west we gained time going back across the time-zones, British Columbian time being GMT -8 hours. Our body-clocks therefore thought it should be nearly four in the morning.

Once we had cleared immigration and collected our baggage we were greeted by Ken, our local guide for the tour, together with three Group members who had arrived earlier and spent a couple of days in Vancouver. After sorting out vehicles we headed for Tsawwassen. Night had fallen and it was dark so we watched the twinkling lights of Vancouver rather than seeing wildlife.

We were soon at Tsawwassen and settled into our new surroundings at The Coast Tsawwassen Inn. Ken had earlier made contact with the remaining three members of our Group who were already at the Inn. Due to the hour and the journey most chose to retire and inspect their beds. Before retiring, arrangements were made for pre-breakfast birding for those who wanted to, and then for the whole Group to meet properly over breakfast the following morning.

Day 2

Thursday 25 September

Ferry crossing to Vancouver Island then drive to Ucluelet on the Island's West coast.

Weather: Overcast but dry till 3pm then rain for the rest of the day. High of 20 degrees.

Most of the Group met outside the Inn at 7am. Ken drove the party to Boundary Bay then Alan walked the Group to the seashore. Alongside the path were Lincoln's Sparrows and a rare sighting of a White-throated Sparrow, whilst in the channel was a Great Blue Heron. On the exposed tidal areas Lesser Yellowlegs and Ring-billed Gull were found. On the sea were numerous rafts of ducks and geese including Canada Geese, American Wigeon and Pintail. There was some excitement amongst the Northwestern Crows and European Starlings when an American Kestrel flew over. The commonest gull was Glaucous-winged Gull and one sat proudly on a post in front of us so Alan could point out its features. Near the car park we found a Black-capped Chickadee before re-joining Ken for a ride back to the Inn.

The whole Group met at 8am in Ballroom C. Over a private breakfast everyone introduced themselves and gave their hopes and wishes for the tour ahead. Having received their challenges, Ken and Alan talked over plans for the days ahead. We then checked-out, loaded the vehicles and headed for the Ferry terminal. Once we had booked in and the vehicles were in line at the ferry waiting area we went to look out over the bay. Sightings included Pelagic Cormorant, Double-crested Cormorant, Common Loon, Surf Scoter and Common Murre. Soon the call came to return to our vehicles and we boarded the Queen of Alberni Ferry.

We left our berth at 10.15am for the two-hour sailing across the Strait of Georgia to Nanaimo. The sea was calm and visibility was reasonable. The Group all began the crossing on the Sun (Observation) Deck where sightings included Common Loon, Surf Scoter, Bonaparte's Gull and Blue-winged Teal. Approaching Vancouver Island there were a number of Harbour Seals around Entrance Island and nearing the terminal our first Rhinoceros Auklets were spotted.

Soon we were disembarking and heading away from Nanaimo; north and then west towards the Pacific Rim National Park. From the vehicles we spotted numerous Ravens and Turkey Vultures, and near the road two Mule Deer.

We stopped for lunch at Little Qualicum Falls Park and whilst Ken prepared our picnic Alan led a lovely circular walk crossing both the Upper and Lower Falls. We returned to the picnic area and enjoyed a hearty lunch which was interrupted by a very obliging Red-breasted Sapsucker. As we were finishing two Band-tailed Pigeons were found sat at the top of a tree.

Back on the road we made good progress. As we drove over the Island's central ridge the rain started and it continued on and off for the rest of the day. We made a short comfort stop at Taylor River Rest Area then

arrived at Ucluelet at 5.15pm where we checked into our home for the next three nights at the Bayshore Waterfront Inn. After leaving our luggage and freshening-up we went to Offshore Seafood Restaurant for dinner. Back at the Inn our plans for the next day were outlined before the Group adjourned after a wonderful first full day in Canada's magnificent scenery.

Day 3

Friday 26 September

Ucluelet and the Pacific Rim National Park

Weather: Overcast/rain 7.45am to 10.30am then clearing and fine. High of 18 degrees.

Most of the Group met at 7am for a pre-breakfast walk. In the channel outside the Inn a Harbour Seal swam close by. Overhead huge skeins of Canada Geese flew noisily overhead in 'V' formations. Other sightings included Belted Kingfisher, American Robin and Song Sparrow. At 7.45am it started to drizzle and as most of the party were without coats we retreated back to the Inn.

The 'early birds' met the rest of the Group and we drove to Fetch restaurant at Black Rock Resort for an enjoyable breakfast in lovely surroundings with a super view out to sea. After eating we drove the short distance to Amphitrite Point and walked part of the Wild Pacific Trail to the Lighthouse. The path was through the woods but it also gave us some views out to sea. In bushes on the shore a Wilson's Warbler was seen then nearing the lighthouse we came across a mixed flock of birds and we were surrounded by Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Golden-crowned Kinglets and a single Brown Creeper. We also had good views of Steller's Jay.

Back at the vehicles we drove to the village store to get sandwiches for lunch then moved down to Jamie's Whale Watching Tours office for the noon trip on the boat, Lady Selkirk.

Our route for the trip took us into Barkley Sound and around the Broken Group of Islands. As we left our berth we spotted our first Bald Eagle. We saw an interesting selection of birds on the sea including Common Murre, Wilson's Grebe, Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Phalarope, Harlequin Duck and Heermann's Gull.

As we entered Trevor Channel a whale 'blow' was spotted and for $\frac{3}{4}$ hour we were captivated watching our first Humpback Whale which would 'blow' and show itself, doing this three or four times before diving displaying its characteristic 'fluke' and then being submerged for 8 minutes before reappearing.

Then to our delight a pod of seven Orcas were spotted close to the shore. We followed the pod for over a mile as they moved along the coast, sometimes at a fast rate. They were Transient (mammal eating) Orcas believed to be hunting for seals. Eventually it was time to head back towards Ucluelet. Enroute we stopped at a small islet holding 16 Black Oystercatchers, and nearing our berth we watched 2 California Sea Lions. We docked at 5.30pm after a superb trip.

We returned to the Inn and reconvened at 6.45pm to walk to a restaurant for dinner. We were slightly delayed when two Bald Eagles were spotted in a tree behind the Inn. Eventually we arrived at Matterson House and enjoyed a tasty evening meal. After dinner we all retired happy following a superb day in the fresh air.

Day 4

Saturday 27 September

Ucluelet and Tofino

Weather: Fine, clear, warm and sunny. Sea mist at Incinerator Beach. High of 20 degrees.

Today we went for an early breakfast at The Gray Whale before driving to Tofino. We checked in at Jamie's Whaling Station then, to much amusement, we were kitted out with red full body floatation suits and waterproof jackets before going to the jetty to meet Marla who was taking us on a Black Bear Zodiac tour. At 8am we boarded the zodiac and cast off. Once out of the harbour area we held on and had fun racing along the Browning Passage to get to the inlets around Fortune Channel and Tofino Inlet to search for Black Bear. As we entered the channel we saw Harbour Porpoise then watched lots of Harbour Seals hauled out on a rocky outcrop.

We then spotted our first Black Bear on the shore turning over rocks to look for food, mainly crabs. With the zodiac motor turned off it was peaceful and quiet and we could hear the stones clunking as the bear rolled them over to look underneath. Eventually we moved on and in another cove found a Bear with a cub. Our list grew to four when we later spotted another Black Bear.

All too soon it was time to head back to base but we had an unexpected treat in store when we watched two Grey Wolves walking along the shore of Meares Island. One wolf was dark grey and the other a sandy grey colour. As the wolves disappeared from view into the long grass we returned to Tofino reflecting on an excellent outing. We got back to the dock at 11am and after disrobing we relaxed with coffees on the balcony.

Before lunch Group members had an hour to look around Tofino. Many visited the Galleries and looked around the market before we enjoyed a picnic in the sun in a small park with excellent views over the Inlet.

Driving back towards Ucluelet we stopped at Incinerator Beach for a walk along the shore. Unfortunately there was a sea fret so visibility was poor but it did make it atmospheric with surfers appearing out of the mist, and we found a Common Murre at the edge of the sea.

Continuing on we drove out of the mist and back into the sun and stopped at Thornton Creek Hatchery at 3.30pm. As we were getting out of the vehicles a Black Bear crossed the access road behind us and disappeared into the undergrowth. We gathered together and walked down the boardwalk between the Hatchery and the creek. After a short while a Black Bear came into view at the opposite side of the creek. It was no more than 20 yards from us and we watched it for half an hour as it eyed-up the salmon in the waterfall and stalked salmon in the water immediately in front of us. After an exhilarating close encounter we returned to the vehicles. As we drove back to the main road we encountered another Black Bear on the roadside to conclude a great day's sightings.

Back at Ucluelet everyone met again at 5.45pm and we walked to Norwoods where we were treated to a delicious high-class dinner.

Day 5

Sunday 28 September

Ucluelet to Zeballos

Weather: Fine, clear, warm and sunny. High 24 degrees

Today we had a reasonable distance to cover to get to our next adventure stop so at 7.15am we loaded the vehicles with our baggage before we went to The Blue Room for breakfast. We left Ucluelet at 8.45am initially retracing our route across the island making a comfort stop at the Taylor River Rest Area and pausing by the river at Port Alberni where Cedar Waxwing and Merlin were spotted from one of the vehicles.

We arrived at Cathedral Grove at 10.45am. Here we walked the trail through some ancient trees including an 800 year old Douglas-fir standing 76 metres tall with a girth of 9 metres. During the walk we added Pacific Wren and Red Squirrel to our trip sightings.

Moving on we drove to Oyster Bay Shoreline Park for our picnic lunch. Whilst Ken prepared the food Alan went with the Group to the shoreline. As we were in a different habitat with sandy scrub we had a different selection of sightings. The ground was alive with many grasshoppers and flashwings and on reaching the bay the tide was out and we added some new birds including Black Turnstone and Black-bellied Plover. In the trees beside the picnic tables were Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Flicker and American Robin.

After lunch we still had a distance to travel so we pressed on making a stop at Sayward Junction before turning onto an unpaved road lasting 42 kilometers into Zeballos. Nearing Zeballos people in one of the vehicles were delighted to spot a superb male Roosevelt Elk in a clearing. On stopping and reversing to the spot a further 5 hinds were located. The Elk didn't stay in view for long and retreated into the trees.

We arrived at the Cedars Inn, Zeballos just after 6pm and were greeted by Christina. After finding our rooms most of the Group adjourned to the balcony for a drink before dinner. After a tasty evening meal everyone retired for the night with high hopes for the day to come.

Day 6

Monday 29 September

Zeballos (Sea Otter boat trip and wildlife drive)

Weather: Overnight rain. Skies clearing during the day. Cloud developing late afternoon

We awoke to a wet, misty morning but as we finished breakfast the rain stopped and the skies began to clear. Most of the Group chose to get some exercise and walk to the harbour where, at 9.30am we met Dan and joined him on his 28 foot Skiff the Nootka Express for what turned out to be nearly a full day on the water around the Zeballos and Esperanza Inlets.

As we left Zeballos we spotted a couple of Bald Eagles sitting near the tops of trees and on the water a raft of Common Merganser and another of Surf Scoter. On the shore we found three Black Bears; a male then a female with a cub. As we progressed we came upon a pod of five Orcas. This time they were a Resident, fish-eating pod which was fishing in the inlet. Moving on we found our first Sea Otters in their cute, characteristic pose laid on their back with head and feet showing and a gap between.

The morning had flown by and at 1.45pm we landed on Nootka Island for a break to stretch our legs. Around the landing site on a pebble beach was a very confiding Pectoral Sandpiper and we also spotted Savannah Sparrow and Black-bellied Plover. On the water again we continued our search and on a large Kelp bed we found a raft of 18 Sea Otters including mothers with kits. We stayed with them for some time and observed their behaviour. At one point we were surrounded by males who appeared to be trying to lure us away from the kits by showing well close to the skiff but on the opposite side to the young ones.

Delighted with the experience we continued on and moved into Esperanza Inlet where, around the decking and logs at an unoccupied building we spotted Black Turnstone, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, Belted Kingfisher and Harbour Seals. We continued on hoping to get a second look at the Orcas and went as far as the Tahsis Inlet before turning around and heading back to Zeballos. Our look was in as we entered the Zeballos Inlet as the pod of Orcas was relocated and we watched them again for a while. As time was getting on we made the home leg back to the harbour but still saw a further two Black Bears on the shore and another Harbour Seal.

It was 4.30pm when we docked after a marathon trip for which we thanked Dan very much. Most of the Group walked back to the Inn and were pleased to meet a lady in her garden. She had a bird feeder hanging in a tree and there were numerous Steller's Jays in the tree and using the feeder. She was happy for us to go into the garden to get some excellent close views and photographs. Back at the Inn we had a very late sandwich lunch and were pleased Ken had taken his customary bag of goodies to keep us sustained during the trip.

We had a little time before dinner so once refreshed we went on a wildlife drive around Zeballos. It proved to be a very productive outing. First we found a single Black Bear close to the road, then further on we came round a bend and found three Black Bear cubs playing on the road causing us to stop. As we drove round the inlet we stopped for an excellent photographic opportunity of a Bald Eagle in a roadside tree. We finished at Resolution Park and were about to head back for dinner when we heard a whale blow across the inlet. We located a Humpback Whale close to the harbour and watched it for 15 minutes. We eventually got back to the Inn and over dinner talked about our excellent day in fabulous scenery with brilliant sightings.

Day 7

Tuesday 30 September

Zeballos to Port McNeill. Whale watching trip.

Weather: Mainly overcast with a couple of light showers. Still with calm waters

Today we had breakfast at 7am then, after saying 'Goodbye' to Christina and the Cedars Inn we departed and drove north to Port McNeill. We arrived about 9.30am and after a quick visit to the Visitor Centre to use the facilities and then reporting in at the tour office we boarded the Naiad Explorer for a whale watching trip on the north-west side of Vancouver Island. Captain Bill from Mackay's Whale Watching Tours welcomed us aboard and at 10am we departed Port McNeill Harbour and headed into Broughton Strait.

We encountered a short shower on departure then the skies cleared, visibility was good and the sea calm. Sea birds had been in short supply so far on our adventures but this was soon to be put right. It started when a Leach's Storm-Petrel flew by then the boat was surrounded by Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels. We slowed to a crawl and noticed the surface of the sea moving all around us. There were hundreds of Red-necked Phalaropes all

around the boat giving excellent views of this difficult to see species. Other birds on the sea included Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Pacific Loon, Cassin's Auklet, Ancient Murrelet and Common Murre.

Next our attention was turned to whales when we had a wonderful experience watching three Humpbacks displaying, breaching and tail slapping. At one point gulls were congregating close to the boat over a shawl of fish and as we watched a Humpback came straight out of the water with its mouth wide open to collect as many fish as possible: a wonderful sight.

We had to tear ourselves away from the whales and slowly passed a small islet covered with Steller's Sea Lions. We could see nearly a hundred on our side of the islet including some huge bull sea lions. It was now time for lunch on board and we idled slowly enjoying soup and a roll.

After lunch we continued and came across some Pacific White-sided Dolphins which were huge fun. As we did a figure of eight they would charge at the boat then ride the bow wave beside us much to our enjoyment. All too soon it was time to head back to Port McNeill but we had one more treat in store when, close to the harbour, we found two small pods of Orcas. We eventually berthed at 3.15pm after a brilliant trip and as we walked back along the jetty two adult Bald Eagles landed on an adjacent crane calling and displaying.

Back at the vehicles we made a quick stop to view what is described as The Worlds' Largest Burl (a massive growth on a tree stump) before heading to our accommodation at Black Bear Resort. We checked-in and freshened up then we were off again. We drove to Cluxewe Resort where we had a short walk before dinner. In the Cluxewe river we watched Pink Salmon jumping and had a good view of a Common Loon. As we walked through the campground and alongside the bay other interesting sightings included Song Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Harlequin Duck, Red-breasted Merganser and in a tree top a flock of birds including Pine Siskin and Crossbill.

At 6.30pm we had an enjoyable dinner at Cluxewe Reserve Restaurant before returning to Black Bear Resort for the night.

Day 8

Wednesday 1 October

Port McNeill, Telegraph Cove, Quatse River and flight to Great Bear Lodge

Weather: Overcast start with skies clearing during the afternoon. Still. High 14 degrees

Today we had a leisurely start to allow everyone time to repack luggage to take on the Float Plane later in the day as we were only allowed 13kgs per person. We packed the vehicles as 9.30am and before leaving watched 2 Mule Deer just behind the Inn.

First we drove slightly south and turned off towards Telegraph Cove. On the roadside one of the vehicles had excellent close views of a Ruffed Grouse next to the road. We stopped at a viewpoint to see the massive logging operation at work before arriving at Telegraph Cove. We spent a pleasant hour enjoying a cultural visit looking at the original houses with history notices outside and some members visited the museum which contained a number of sea mammal skeletons. Birdlife around the cove included Belted Kingfisher, Pacific Loon, Song Sparrow and Steller's Jay.

Next we drove north to the Quatse Salmon Hatchery on the Quatse river near Port Hardy. We had our picnic lunch near the river which contained lots of Pink Salmon, then we were then introduced to Louisa who gave us a conducted tour of the hatchery and Stewardship Centre which we found very interesting.

Moving on, we arrived at Port Hardy Seaplane Base just before 2.30pm. We completed personal paperwork and stowed excess baggage then waited for the Float Planes to take us to Great Bear Lodge. The capacity of the lodge had recently been extended so we were joined for our stay by an Australian and a further five Brits. With clear skies the three Float planes took us on the direct route and by 3.30pm we were all at the floating lodge at Nalos Landing, Smith Inlet being given a warm welcome by owner Marg and the staff. Rooms were allocated and bags dropped and we were soon having refreshments whilst Blakeley briefed us on Lodge etiquette and safety. The last job was to issue everyone with an all-in-one quilted suit and full waterproofs which were to be tested during our stay!

At 4.45pm we boarded the Lodge bus (an old school bus) and set off along their track running alongside the Neikite River. Within a hundred yards we had our first bear encounter but it was two Black Bears crossing the track in front of us. We continued to the first open platform next to the river and settled ourselves in. As we waited for bears we were entertained by American Dippers chasing each other and landing very close to the platform. We also saw Common Merganser, Great Blue Heron, Raven, Bald Eagle and gulls including Ring-billed, Glaucous-winged, American Herring and Californian.

We had nearly given up hope of a Brown (Grizzly) Bear sighting as darkness was falling and a mist settling over the river when, through the gloom, a sow with three cubs was spotted about 200 yards distant. They were walking along the opposite shore towards us and as we watched we saw the adult catch a Chum Salmon. With light almost gone we returned to the bus. As we drove back down the track we spotted another distant Brown Bear in the vehicle headlights then to our amazement a Brown Bear ran across the track in front of us carrying a Pink Salmon in its mouth.

We returned to the Lodge very happy with our day but there was one more treat for us before dinner when an American Marten was seen on the decking peeping into the lodge windows. We finished the day enjoying a dinner of Sockeye Salmon.

Day 9

Thursday 2 October

Great Bear Lodge

Weather: Generally fine but a little light drizzle early afternoon. Still.

The day dawned bright and clear and as we were eating breakfast we watched the American Marten swim across to the lodge, do a circuit of the decking and swim back to dry land.

At 8am we boarded the Lodge bus and headed back along the track to the open Blind. As we approached there were two Brown Bears nearby but they moved off with our arrival. We settled in and again had a close display by the American Dippers and we watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk chasing Northwestern Crows before our patience was rewarded with a Grizzly walking upstream to a position opposite our platform and we watched it chasing salmon on the braided section of river.

Whilst watching this bear another came into view from upstream on our side of the river. It came within 15 yards of us then retreated slightly and started to cross the river. We then noticed two cubs following it and the family group walked past our position allowing excellent viewing. After views of six bears it was time to head back to the Lodge for lunch.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch before preparing for our afternoon adventure, a walk through the rain forest. Initially we walked along the roadway with regular stops for our guides to explain the forest, its trees and the ecology of the area. During the walk a number of birds were spotted including Golden-crowned Sparrow and Cooper's Hawk. Eventually we turned off along a bear trail which took us to a Bear Rubbing Post and an old Bear Day Den and their use was explained. We then retraced our steps back to the road where the Lodge bus was waiting. On the return journey we stopped at a Bear Highway (track used by bears to move to the next valley) and Stomp Marks were explained. We made a second stop to see a Bear Wallow.

Back at the Lodge we had time for a drink and light snack before reboarding the Lodge bus at 4.30pm and heading to the open Blind for our last bear viewing session of the day. On the drive some of the Group saw a Douglas Squirrel run across the track and a Varied Thrush being flushed from the track as the vehicle approached. We spent a couple of hours on the platform and had sightings of four more Brown Bears, one of which came very close to us. On this occasion our drive back to the Lodge in the dark was uneventful and we headed straight in for drinks then dinner.

Day 10

Friday 3 October

Great Bear Lodge

Weather: Rain all day, sometimes heavy. Still

We awoke to discover the day had dawned dull and grey with a heavy cloud cover. It was raining and this was to persist all day. With mixed expectations we set off at 8am in the Lodge bus but this time we went to a covered hide (Blind) which afforded us some protection from the elements. There was no need for us to have worried as this turned out to be our best bear session. It started with a single Brown Bear just downstream from our position. This bear remained in view for most of the morning session. After a while a sow with three cubs came into view upstream. It was great fun watching the cubs playing. Mum would catch a salmon, take a single fillet for herself then let one of the cubs take the carcass for a feed.

Whilst this action was taking place just upstream, a little distance downstream a mother with two older cubs came into view and they were fishing on the opposite side of the river. Then a mother with a single cub approached from an upstream direction on our side of the river and they swam across the river in front of us. A quick count revealed that there was ten Brown (Grizzly) Bears in view at the same time!

Eventually it was time to head back to the Lodge but there was to be one more bear experience. We started to walk in line from the hide to the bus when a Bear was spotted next to the hide. Those inside stopped to see the bear but, on seeing us, it left the river and tried to pass by along the track behind us. Unfortunately it was confronted by the bus blocking the track. The door was hastily closed to stop the bear getting on. It made two attempts to pass then went back round to the river and passed in front of the hide. A wonderful few moments for us but which had put our guides on red alert.

Back at the Lodge we had lunch which was disturbed by the appearance of a Yellow-rumped Warbler on the decking and a support trunk. With the rain now falling like stair-rods there was a change of plans and we were shown some videos, mainly of bears filmed locally using remote cameras.

One effect of the torrential rain was that the river level had risen. We could also see cascades appearing on the wooded slopes all around us. This meant that the rocky areas in front of the hides which attract the bears would be under water and our best chance of seeing bears would be from the water. We were not going to see bears from the shelter of the Lodge so at 3.30pm we donned full waterproofs and headed off in four small boats, each under the control of a guide and powered by an outboard motor. We patrolled the river and bisected the grassy areas and in four hours managed to see another four Brown Bears spending some time following them from the water as they walked the bank side looking for salmon.

We returned to the Lodge at 7.30pm and after discarding our wet layers enjoyed dinner before retiring for the night.

Day 11

Saturday 4 October

Great Bear Lodge, return flight to Port Hardy and drive to Port McNeill

Weather: Overcast with rain during the morning and early afternoon. Clearing later.

We awoke to find the outside world still grey with a heavy drizzle and some mist. River levels were still high so our best chance for seeing bears was again by boat. Our waterproofs from the day before had been in the drying room all night so were more or less dry. After breakfast we got dressed for the weather and at 8am set out on the boats. This time the four boats didn't all take the same route so it wasn't till we returned to the Lodge for lunch that we could compare sightings.

The morning turned out to be very productive. A new mammal for our tour was River Otter. On the water were several bird species including Trumpeter Swan, Eared Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, American Wigeon, Canada Goose, Cackling Goose and White-fronted Goose. Bald Eagles were giving a good aerial display and ten were counted. Not to be outdone we enjoyed sightings of ten Brown Bears.

We returned to the Lodge at noon for lunch. Before our afternoon activity it was necessary to pack and move our bags so the rooms could be prepared for guests arriving later in the day. By 1pm the sky was lighter and the drizzle almost stopped. Our last activity was to be a scenic boat trip downstream from the lodge for a couple of hours. Some of the Group chose to stay in the comfort of the Lodge Lounge but the remainder headed out again.

Our afternoon route took us down Smith Inlet to Pirate Cove which was more a torrent than the usual trick of water falling into the cove. We then crossed into Walkum Bay. At the head of the bay we spent some time looking at the salmon and talking about the spawning techniques and seeing the distribution of carcasses. Although no new birds were seen, sightings included Common Loon, American Dipper, Trumpeter Swan and more Bald Eagles. 3pm saw us back at the Lodge for coffee and cookies.

Our time at Great Bear Lodge was nearing an end so before the arrival of the Float Planes we said our thanks to Marg on behalf of the staff. Due to the weather and other commitments the first plane arrived at 3.30pm but the last was over an hour later. The weather was clearing at lower levels but it was still misty higher up so the direct route was not possible and our return route was low over Smith Inlet, around the headland and across the Strait back to Port Hardy.

The weather was much better back on Vancouver Island and whilst waiting for the last plane to arrive we watched Steller's Sea Lions feeding on salmon in the bay, counted the Black Turnstones, Bonaparte's Gulls and Harbour Seals, and had fun trying to photograph the salmon leaping out of the water all around the jetty. The bonus for the last Float Plane passengers was a glimpse of Humpback Whales in the Inlet.

Once we were all reunited and our bags loaded onto the vehicles we drove back to Port McNeill and the Black Bear Resort. A quick freshen up and we headed over to the Northern Lights restaurant for our dinner. As we crossed the road two Mule Deer were seen on the roadside verge. We had a lovely meal and were entertained by a charming hostess.

Day 12

Sunday 5 October

Port McNeill to Tsawwassen via Vancouver ferry

Weather: Cloudy start clearing to warm and sunny. High 22 degrees

Today we had a long drive back to Vancouver so a reasonably early departure was necessary. We loaded the vehicles at 6.45am and were waiting for the breakfast room to open at 7am. Once fortified we were on the road by 7.30am. We hadn't gone very far when a Barred Owl was spotted on a roadside wire. We quickly stopped but the owl wasn't prepared to wait for us and flew off. Continuing on a Red-tailed Hawk was spotted before we reached Campbell River where we stopped at Tim Hortons for coffee.

We reached Comox Valley Rest Area at 11am and stopped for brunch. The Information Centre was open and with an opportunity to shop, several presents were bought. Continuing our journey south we spotted several Ravens and Turkey Vultures. We pulled into the car park at Buttertubs Marsh at 1pm. By this time the sky had cleared and it was quite warm as we set off to do the circular walk around the marsh. The walk was very productive with several new bird sightings for our tour including Lesser Scaup, Spotted Towhee, Pied-billed Grebe and Wood Duck. We also found a few Woolly Bear caterpillars and a Western Painted Turtle.

We reached Naniamo Ferry Terminal at Duke Point at 2.30pm and didn't have to wait long before we were being loaded onto BC Ferry 'Coastal Inspiration' for the 3.15pm crossing to Vancouver. As we left port heading into the Strait of Georgia there was a call of 'whale ahead' and a lucky few saw a pod of three Orcas pass close by the ferry. The water was calm but there was a breeze on the open observation deck with the movement of the boat. Some hardy souls stayed on deck and whilst there were few wildlife sightings we did see Western Gull, Thayer's Gull, Kittiwake, Surf Scoter and White-winged Scoter.

After landing at Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal we returned to The Coast Tsawwassen Inn. Rooms were allocated and we freshened up before walking to Mario's Kitchen for our last Group dinner which was a fun affair.

Day 13

Monday 6 October

Tsawwassen to Vancouver Airport via Reifel Bird Reserve and Iona Beach Regional Park.

Weather: After misty start clearing to blue skies, still and warm. High 22 degrees

With an overnight flight in prospect for most of the Group we had a later breakfast taken in a private room. This was our last opportunity for a Group meeting so after we had eaten we had our last log call and then debriefed the tour. Everyone talked of their highlights and the main threads were how everyone had got on well together and had a good time, the wonderful wildlife encounters and the experience of flying in a Float Plane. We then collected our bags, loaded the vehicles and departed the Inn.

We drove to Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, arriving at 10.45am. We spent a magic few hours around the reserve and were delighted with a host of good sightings. Black-capped Chickadees were very confiding. Seed had been bought as we entered the Reserve and we kept stopping for people to put some on the palms of hands and to our delight the Black-capped Chickadees came down and helped themselves to the seed. In trees close to the path we found a flock of Cedar Waxwing, a party of Northern Flicker and a Peregrine, all of which were seen through the telescope. From the path we kept flushing Dark-eyed Juncos and Chipping Sparrows and watched a pair of Wood Duck which were blocking our way.

At the Observation Tower at the far end of the reserve we enjoyed excellent views of Red-winged Blackbirds and a large flock of Long-billed Dowitcher. Around the back of the reserve we had close views of a Hairy Woodpecker and distant views of a Northern Harrier quartering the reeds. The walk around the reserve had been very productive and enjoyed by all.

Near Reception we found Ken who had returned earlier to prepare our last tour picnic and a hearty lunch was enjoyed.

We left Reifel at 2.30pm and headed straight to Vancouver Airport to drop off Lynne who was catching an earlier flight back to London. After farewells we drove to Iona Beach Regional Park for a last bit of birding. We spent a pleasant hour looking over the ponds, the river and the sea and were about to call time when a honking was heard overhead. On looking up a flock of Snow Geese flew overhead in 'V' formation with the sun glinting on their feathers. This was a species quite a few had hoped to see and a fitting last new bird of the tour.

Returning to the airport 'goodbyes and thanks' were said to Ken who was heading back to the ferry terminal to catch the evening ferry home, and 'farewells' to Linda and Peter who were extending their stay in Canada. The rest of the Group checked in then waited for their plane. Flight BA84 pushed-back 8.40pm and took off at 9pm. Once in the air we settled down for our flight back to London Heathrow Airport.

Day 14

Tuesday 7 October

Arrival at London Heathrow Airport after overnight flight from Vancouver

Due to a headwind and a little congestion at Heathrow we were slightly delayed but BA84 touched down at 2.20pm after a good flight. Jean and Colin headed for 'transfers' to find their onward flight to Scotland and the next step for the remainder of the Group was to pass through immigration and then collect our baggage. The last

thing was to say fond 'farewells' before going our separate ways with fond memories of a super time spent in Western Canada.

A Group is only as good as the people who form it and thanks must go to all members who got on well together, joined in the fun, shared knowledge and expertise and enhanced the overall enjoyment of the trip. We shared an enjoyable time in Canada seeing many new species and sharing many new experiences in a spectacular environment.

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Bald Eagle by Ian Woods

Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only; RK = road kill)

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>						2						
2	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>						8	6					
3	Common Loon (G N Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>	1	2			2	14				2	1	
4	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>											2	1
5	Horned (Slavonian) Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1											
6	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	1		20	2	1	3			1	1		
7	Eared (Black-necked) Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>										1		
8	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>		3										
9	Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma furcata</i>						40						
10	Leach's Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>						3						
11	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	50+	100+	25	6	100+	25+	25+			20	30	3
12	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>		1	1									
13	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>	10	100+	25		100+	25+	25+				20	
14	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	2	2	5	4	1	2	2	1	3	2	2	11
15	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	7			17			1				7	
16	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>						10		10		3	6	
17	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	50+	1000+	6	20	10	20	20		30+	75	87	25
18	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>									1	2		
19	Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		3										
20	Snow Goose	<i>Chen caerulescens</i>												12
21	Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>										1		
22	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>											2	2
23	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>											6	30

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October													
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6		
24	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>	50+									6	12	45	70+	
25	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	50+	1				3				6	10	10	500+	
26	American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>	24						4							
27	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>														
28	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>							4						70+	
29	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	25									2			20	
30	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	6				1	100			4			6	10	30
31	Canvasback	<i>Aythya valisineria</i>														2
32	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>													35	20
33	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>		8					9							
34	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	40	12				50	30						1	25
35	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>					2		40						1	
36	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>							3						3	3
37	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>				2			1							
38	Common Merganser (Goosander)	<i>Mergus merganser</i>					19	44		9	24	20	40			
39	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>		6				9	7	7	4	9	18			1
40	Northern (Hen) Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>														4
41	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>									1	1	1			
42	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>									1					
43	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>					1			1						2
44	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	1													
45	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>					1						1			
46	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>														1
47	Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>								1						
48	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>													1	11
49	Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					4	1								

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6
50	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	3	16			1							
51	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>		2			2							
52	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>		8										12
53	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>		3		3					1			
54	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>				6	14					41		
55	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>					1							
56	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>												150
57	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>		11			1	400						
58	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Larus philadelphia</i>	✓			✓		✓		✓		✓		
59	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>		12	2									
60	Mew (Common) Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
63	Thayer's Gull	<i>Larus thayeri</i>					1						1	
64	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>			1					1			4	
66	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>											1	
68	Common Murre (Guillemot)	<i>Uria aalge</i>	10	200	1		30	500+						
69	Marbled Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>						6						
70	Ancient Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>						3						
71	Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>						12						
72	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	2	3				4						
73	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	6		20	6							2	20
74	Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Columba fasciata</i>	2											
75	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		2		2	2							30

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6
76	Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>											1	
77	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>		2	6		6	2	2		1	3	1	1
78	Red-breasted Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus ruber</i>	1											
79	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>												1
80	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>			2	2				1				3
81	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	1	2	8	2	6	2	4	2			3	
82	Northwestern Crow	<i>Corvus caurinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	8			3	2		2			2	9	
84	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	1											20
85	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>		10										
86	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>				H								3
87	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>		1										
88	Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>		H	1	1					1			
89	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>							2	5	2	1		
90	Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>		4							H	H		
91	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	4	2		2				1				8
92	Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>								1	2			
93	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	200+		8		3		8				30	500
94	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>		3										
95	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>			6	5								30
96	Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>									1	5		
97	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Wilsonia pusilla</i>		1										
98	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>											3	6
99	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>							1					4
100	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>		4	2	1	4	8	6	4		1		1
101	(Sooty) Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>		2					2					

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October												
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	
102	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		2		2			4	2		1	1	1	5
103	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>		2											
104	White-throated Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>		1											
105	Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>								2					
106	Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>				4				1					15
107	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	1												36
108	House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>			4										6
109	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>							2						
110	Pine Siskin	<i>Carduelis pinus</i>			12				8						
111	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			1										10

Mammals

1	Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>			7	1	9		2						
2	Brown (Grizzly) Bear	<i>Ursus horribilis</i>							6	10	15	7			
3	Northern Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>				RK									
4	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>							1	2					
5	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>					31								
6	North American River Otter	<i>Lutra canadensis</i>									8				
7	Vancouver Island Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus crassodon</i>			2										
8	Steller's Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>						85				2	2		
9	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		4											
10	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		6	52		22	15	1	2	3	22	10		
11	Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>				2			1						
12	Douglas Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus douglasi</i>								1					
13	Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>											1	1	
14	North American Deermouse	<i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i>							1						

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Roosevelt Elk	<i>Cervus canadensis roosevelti</i>				6								
16	Mule (Black-tailed) Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	2	2		1			2			2	2	
17	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>						10						
18	Orca	<i>Orcinus orca</i>		7			5	6					3	
19	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			6		3	2						
20	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		2			1	15	2			2		

Butterflies and Moths

1	Cabbage White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓	✓							✓	✓
2	Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>				✓								
3	Woolly Bear Caterpillar	<i>Pyrrharctia isabella</i>											✓	✓

Dragonflies and Damselflies

1	Paddle-tailed Darner	<i>Aeshna palmata</i>	✓											
2	Common Green Darner	<i>Anax junius</i>												✓
3	Variegated Meadowhawk	<i>Sympetrum corruptum</i>			✓								✓	
4	Dragonfly sp.					✓						✓	✓	✓

Fish

1	Chinook Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha</i>			✓									
2	Coho Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus kisutch</i>										✓		
3	Chum Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus keta</i>					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Pink Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus gorbuscha</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
5	Carp	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>												✓

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6

Others

1	Banana Slug	<i>Ariolimax sp.</i>		✓		✓					✓		✓	✓
2	Black Slug	<i>Arion ater</i>								✓				
3	Western Painted Turtle	<i>Chrysemys picta</i>											✓	
4	Tapeworm	<i>Cestoda sp.</i>									✓			
5	Jellyfish				✓	✓								
6	Grasshoppers					✓								✓



Steller's Jay by Alan Miller