

# Canada: The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 - 25 September 2016

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Anna's Hummingbird Martin Oliver



Fighting siblings Roger Hanauer



Spy-hopping Orca Paul Goodliffe



Ucluelet Harbour Penny Oliver

Report compiled by Terry Goble  
Images courtesy of Martin & Penny Oliver, Roger Hanauer and Paul Goodliffe



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Terry Goble (leader), Ken Walker (local guide) and ten Naturetrek clients

## Summary

This was an exceptional trip for many reasons, not least because of the sense of fun and humour of a group that gelled well together. However, we also enjoyed some rare and incredible wildlife moments. It's hard to pick the highlights out of a tour that produced so many memorable sightings. However, a Humpback whale surfacing a few meters from the Skiff in Zeballos was awe inspiring, especially when it then swam under the boat. The Orca's porpoising next to the boat in Port McNeil brought squeals of delight and surprise! The bears walking a few feet away from the platform at the bear lodge was exhilarating, particularly seeing the big male (Sleeping Bear) at such close quarters. There were many other outstanding moments on this truly wonderful tour.

### Day 1

**Monday 12th September**

We flew from Heathrow to Vancouver City the approach to the city was quite spectacular with snow-capped peaks and vast pine forests below. We landed after a mostly smooth flight in calm and sunny conditions. After a little wait for our bags to arrive we all met up and went out to meet our local guide Ken Walker.

After we greeted Ken, Terry went to get the hire car, whilst Ken drove to the petrol station in the airport. We rendezvoused there before driving on to Tsawwassen Coastal Inn. When we arrived most went to their rooms to rest whilst Roger and Sue went for a meal. Martin and Penny had already left to eat so we arranged a bird walk and formal introductions at breakfast.

### Day 2

**Tuesday 13th September**

A group met at 6:45am to drive to Boundary Bay for a quick pre-breakfast ramble. Unfortunately, the position of the sun meant that it was difficult to look out into the bay. Although we recognised a few Killdeer and some Canada Geese identifying some of the distant wildfowl was very tricky. The walk around some of the paths however, proved very productive, with a variety of sparrows, finches and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The highlight was definitely the Anna's Hummingbirds, which were brilliantly scarlet in the sunshine.

We soon had to head back for breakfast, where we all introduced ourselves and discussed the days ahead. After breakfast we got packed up and met in the lobby to drive to Tsawwassen to get the 10:15am ferry to Nanaimo (Duke's Point). At the ferry terminal we had some great sights of Surf Scoter and Common Loon (Great Northern Diver) as well as a few other seabirds. However, we were requested to return to our vehicles as the ferry approached.

We were soon underway and an early sighting of Harbour Porpoise was to be our only cetacean sighting despite ideal conditions. A few gulls were seen mainly Glaucous-winged, but a few American Herring Gulls. The crossing was otherwise quiet for wildlife, but a delightful sighting of two River Otters as we docked was a welcome bonus.

We met up briefly at a visitor's centre, before driving on towards Little Qualicum Falls. Wildlife here was very quiet, with a sighting of an Autumn yellow-winged grasshopper and Northern Red-backed vole being the best we

could manage on the walk. However, whilst enjoying Ken's vast and delicious lunch we finally saw a Red-breasted Sapsucker and a little while later a Red Squirrel was seen well.

We stopped briefly at the Taylor River rest area for a comfort stop. There was not much in the way of wildlife just a ruddy darter 'type' dragonfly and a possible American Dipper but this was not confirmed. We set off again and stopped a little later to view a 'padlock love fence' and walked around some river boulders for a leg stretch. We then made our way to Ucluelet for the final leg of the journey.

We finally arrived at Ucluelet around 18:30 and sorted out our rooms at The Bayfront Hotel. We had a little time just to spot a Harbour Seal and a Belted Kingfisher before it was time to get ready and head off for dinner at the Offshore Seafood Restaurant. In a relaxed and chatty atmosphere, we enjoyed a lovely meal before we retired back to our hotel rooms for a goodnight's sleep.

## Day 3

## Wednesday 14th September

Some of the group met at 6:30am for a pre-breakfast walk. It was just about light enough as we set off around the harbour, stopping to scan for wildlife. We managed to pick up a few birds, Belted Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron and our first Bald Eagles of the trip. Roger spotted a distant Black Bear, which we managed to get telescope views of, but was not very discernible. A large marine mammal seen briefly was thought to be a Californian Sea Lion and was later confirmed by other members of the group that saw it.

We then turned in towards town and walked down Bay Street, this was not as productive as it has been previously but we did get good views of a Northern Flicker, Steller Jays and American Robins before we had to return to the hotel to meet up for breakfast.

The group set off together to go to The Fetch for a delicious breakfast in glorious surroundings set amongst the rocky coast. As we were parking we saw Ravens and some common birds. We enjoyed the food and ambiance of the place and had some brief walks outside to enjoy the views. On our way out a few people managed to watch a quick flying Sharp-shinned Hawk as it was being mobbed by Northwest Crows. We then made our way to Jamie's but found out our trip was scheduled for 14:00pm. We decided to go on the Lighthouse Loop walk, which is part of the Pacific Rim Trail. We did a little shopping for lunch and then set off.

The trail was a little busy and wildlife sightings were few, although some of the group were lucky to get a Cooper's Hawk as it flew through. We did however enjoy the fantastic views of the rock strewn coast. We did note an ominous bank of fog that seemed to be rolling in! After our walk we made our way to a picnic spot outside Jamie's and enjoyed the last of the sunshine before we boarded the boat.

Almost as soon as we left the harbour the fog rolled in and we lost the warm sunshine. A Californian Sea Lion and Harbour Seal were nice to see as we made our way out of Ucluelet Harbour. There were many gulls around, mostly Californian and Glaucous-winged Gulls but a few Heermann's Gulls were very much enjoyed. A little further out a large flock of Common Murre were encountered and with them were about four Rhinoceros Auklets, which were another welcome addition.

We continued following the shores of Vancouver Island and got as far as the Stopper Islands when a full breaching Humpback Whale caused a few gasps as it created an enormous splash. We followed the whale ('Pinky') for a while. We saw her dive raising her flukes on several occasions, but she did not breach again and kept her distance from the boat. After about 45 minutes we headed off to look for Harbour Seals and seabirds. We encountered a few Black Oystercatchers and saw large flotilla of Common Murre. Other avian highlights included Bald Eagle, Black Turnstone, American Widgeon and a great sighting of Artic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) chasing a gull on the return journey. Back at the harbour we thanked the crew for a lovely trip and went back to the hotel to relax. However, a feeding Californian Sea Lion was too good an opportunity to miss and some of the group watched it diving and resurfacing eating fish for a while, before the group got ready for dinner at Maddison's. We enjoyed the warm hospitality and lovely freshly cooked food at Maddison's then walked back to our hotel to get some welcome sleep.

## Day 4

## Thursday 15th September

Some of the group met in the morning for a pre-breakfast walk around the harbour and wooded streets of Ucluelet. On this morning we managed two distant Black Bear's, although one was much more discernible than previous sightings, being closer and in reasonable light. We were entertained by squirting clams for a while, although a sighting of two Bald Eagles was also enjoyed. We then moved on to Bay Street and turned into a cul-de-sac. On this road, which was extensively wooded we found a Brown Creeper, Hutton's Vireo and several Golden-crowned Kinglets, before returning to meet up for breakfast at The Blue Room.

After a hearty breakfast we briefly returned to our rooms before setting off again to Longbeach Information Centre. The birdlife at the centre was excellent with scoters, grebes and divers off shore and a party of Red Crossbills seen very close. After looking out from the centre and identifying the birdlife we elected to go for a walk along the Nachalnitz Trail. This proved productive as in one bay we manage to find a Least Sandpiper, Semi-palmated Plover, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper and many Savannah Sparrows. We all reconvened at the visitor's centre before having a picnic lunch at a near-by picnic site.

After an excellent picnic we decided to walk the Bog Trail, however on arrival we found out that the trail was closed. A sighting of a Mink was some consolation as we left to explore Incinerator Beach as an alternative. This was very busy, but enjoyable in the increasing warm and sunny afternoon. A flock of Cedar Waxwings were not seen well and only one was briefly seen by Penny. As we were considering leaving we found a large flock of mixed waders. Predominately they were Sanderling, but there were a few Western Sandpipers and at least one Dunlin amongst them.

We then set off for Tofino, one group explored the town, whilst another group stopped at a Visitor Centre and did some more birding, finding mostly common species, but a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Fox Sparrow was a bonus. We all then met up at Jamie's Whale Watching Station and after a group photo all headed down to the rib to embark on the Bear watching Tour. As we headed out we saw a few different birds including two bald Eagles and a flock of Common Merganser. We were later to have some fantastic sightings of a variety of Black Bears including a mother with a yearly cub a large male and an orphaned cub that had managed to survive on its own. The evening was rounded off by sightings of Harbour Porpoise and Harbour Seal. A large male bear standing on its hind legs was a last treat before we had to speedily return a little later than intended to Tofino Harbour. We thanked the rib driver for an excellent trip with some memorable sightings before we headed off again back to

Ucluelet and had an unscheduled meal at Howler's. Ken and Gill were feeling a little tired and went back to their hotel. The rest of the group enjoyed the customary huge portions in a relaxed setting. We then dispersed to our rooms in preparation for an early start as we were moving on to Zeballos the next day.

## Day 5

## Friday 16th September

We had an early breakfast at The Gray Whale in preparation for the long drive ahead to Zeballos. After breakfast we set off East to connect with the road running North. We made a first stop at Cathedral Grove, which hosts some of the biggest trees on the Island. Some of the trees dating back over 800 hundred years. We talked a little about the ecology of the forest, noting the 'nursery logs', which give the emerging vegetation a boost in the nutrient poor environment.

After we walked the trail we set off again, the rain was beginning to fall more heavily as we left. We had a brief stop for petrol at Alberni, which proved quite productive. We spotted a raptor that proved challenging, but was resolved at a 'Richardson' type Merlin. Ken also spotted a Raccoon, which was our first on the tour. We then set off for some shopping after filling the cars with fuel.

We stopped in Comox to shop for lunch and then made our way to Miracle Beach for a picnic. Wildlife highlights were few but we had seen a number of Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawk and numerous Black-tailed Deer on route. The weather was unhelpful as it rained almost continuously. At Miracle Beach we saw a few seabirds and wildfowl, including our first male Harlequin Duck, which was a handsome addition to our sightings. After Ken's delicious spread we packed up and were on our way again this time for a promised ice cream at Sayward Junction. We had hoped for sunnier conditions when we decided to go for ice creams, however everyone enjoyed their treat in the rain! We had a quick look at the frankly disturbing 'art' gallery and watched the wood carver go about his craft. It was getting late so we soon pushed on and headed towards Zeballos. The weather put paid to any sightings apart from a brief stop for Barrow's Goldeneye at the two lakes. The hoped for Beaver did not show. We finally arrived at Cedar Hotel around 7pm and had a late dinner before most went for an early night. Penny and Martin decided to take the option of a night drive. We had a good start spotting a lovely Barred Owl, but after this we had little else except a frog enjoying the rain! We returned to the hotel and got some rest for the next day's trip out in the skiff.

## Day 6

## Saturday 17th September

We started the day after breakfast with a walk down to the harbour. On route we saw a few birds the highlight was a flock of about ten Red Crossbills showing well. We all met up with Dan at the harbour and boarded the skiff. The weather was inclement, but the slight wind meant that spotting conditions was actually pretty good.

We were not long out when we saw a Californian Sea Lion, however it quickly dived and disappeared. The mammal count was boosted by a brief view of Harbour Porpoise, but as usual they dived and disappeared. We then had a spectacular encounter with Humpback Whales. One surfaced right by the side of the boat and stayed around thrilling everyone on board. At one point we watched it dive underneath the boat tracking its black and white form a few meters below. As we were in only a small skiff it was both exciting and unnerving to see such a huge animal glide just below us!

We were just recovering from the excitement when we started to encounter our target species, Sea Otters. These were a little skittish, but we had great sightings of a mother and a cub (Cuteness overload!!). We later encountered a large raft of otters nearing the open sea and spent some time watching and photographing these until it was time to leave them in peace and visit the near-by island for a comfort stop. Two Sea Otters decided to have a spat as we approached the island, showing a different more aggressive side to their nature as they bit each other. We managed another mammal species as a family of Black-tailed Mule deer were grazing on the island a Red-winged Blackbird (female) was a welcome addition to the bird list.

We then headed back to harbour but stopped briefly for our second Black Bear up on the rock face showing well, but clearly nervous and it soon disappeared. Two Steller Sea Lions were also spotted, but again disappeared quickly. During the journey we also had a number of Harbour Seals to add to our mammal sightings. We ended the morning in the harbour, having enjoyed an exhilarating exploration of the wildlife in Zeballos.

The rain began to fall heavily so some went back in Ken's minibus although a few foolhardy souls walked back to the hotel and were soaked by a heavy downpour, with only a few Crossbills to show for their adventure. Back at Cedar Hotel we had a warming lunch and dried out as best as possible. Ken organised a trip to Resolution Park where we drove along the causeway. On route a Black Bear ran in front of the minibus and disappeared into the undergrowth. The rain had eased a little so we did venture out only for the rain to return. We saw a few Belted Kingfishers, Common Mergansers and a few frogs hopping around, but drifted back to the bus for shelter and to continue on to the park.

Apart from a Pacific Wren and a Harbour Seal there was little wildlife around so the group entertained themselves by skipping stones across the water. After this we made our way back to the hotel to get ready for an early dinner. A second Black Bear wandering down the Zeballos River was a nice surprise and a lovely way to end the afternoon.

We met back for a delicious home-cooked dinner and we relaxed chatting and later we caught up on the checklist. After this most people drifted off to their rooms, but Paul, Sue and Roger decided on a night drive. As we started off it was decided to go East to Nomash, however we met another driver who had just come from Resolution Bay and had seen a Cougar crossing the road. We sped off to see if we could locate it, but had no luck, but it was exciting to know a Cougar had been there only a few moments earlier. Some of the group retired for the evening, however, Roger wanted to continue so we made our way to Nomash for a look around. In the heavy rain it was a very quiet night but we did manage two owl species, having a glimpse of Northern Pygmy Owl and a fantastic sighting of Barred Owl. It was now getting late and time for us all to catch up on our sleep.

## Day 7

## Sunday 18th September

We had an early breakfast at 7am and left promptly after thanking Christina for her warm hospitality. We intended to stop at the Beaver Lake on route, but the heavy rain and little activity on the lake meant we didn't stop long and continued to Port McNeil. We arrived for our scheduled whale watch a little earlier but spent a little time birdwatching in the harbour. There were many common species, but new for the trip were Northern Pintail and Short-billed Dowitchers. We then boarded the boat and went through our welcome and safety briefing with the irrepressible Captain Bill!

We set off with hopes of seeing our target species Orca, we had no idea what a spectacular display we were about to witness. Firstly, we went across to the Stellar Sea Lion bachelor colony. These are huge seals and we listened to them growling and we watched a few frolic in the water near the boat. Next we encountered many Humpback Whales and we were again treated to some flukes and whales surfacing very near the boat. It was estimated that there were at least nine Humpbacks, but at times there seemed to be spouts everywhere.

We were picking up some excellent birds as well including Rhinoceros Auklet, Sooty Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm Petrol and many other species. However, after lunch we began to see Orcas, although a little distantly. There were many around but spread out over a large area. Captain Bill manoeuvred the boat to try to get a little closer. We also noted groups of Pacific White-sided Dolphins with the Orcas. The natural assumption that the Orcas were hunting the dolphins was turned on its head when we learned that these were resident Orca that only preyed on fish. What was actually happening was that the dolphins were biting and harassing the Orca in order that they gave up their fish, which were then snatched by the dolphins!!! This made for some spectacular viewing as the Orca's tried to evade the bounding dolphins. At one point the Orcas came right to the side of the boat to avoid the dolphins, causing gasps and great excitement as the Orca surfaced a few feet away.

The excitement settled down for a while but it was still hugely entertaining to watch the dolphin and Orcas interact. We stayed and watched them for about an hour although that soon sped past and it was time to return to the harbour. There was however one last treat before we left as the Orcas displayed their true dolphin nature and began to leap and 'play' in the wake of the boat within touching distance of the spectators looking on in awe. What a fantastic end to what had been a great trip. Ken and Sue were thrilled by the display and for a few of the group this was their first sightings of Orca.

Back at the harbour the group went off for a coffee as the rain began to fall heavily, but that couldn't dampen the spirits after that wildlife spectacle!

We regrouped to drive to Cluxewe for our dinner, stopping to look at a famous, large burl on route. At Cluxewe we had a little stroll along the coastal shore, picking up some handsome Harlequin Duck and a few common species. We then took up our reservation at the restaurant and enjoyed a delicious meal followed by some excellent ice cream, 'Tiger, Tiger' seemed to be a popular flavour! (liquorish and orange). After dinner we drove back and said goodnight to each other after a remarkable day.

## Day 8

## Monday 19th September

After yesterday's fantastic wildlife sightings, it was going to take a special day to live up to the standard set, however this day might just have done just that. After a little gentle birdwatching in the morning we managed to add the gorgeous Hooded Merganser to our list of sightings before returning for breakfast. Despite being overcast we did at least have a dry day and the sun was threatening to come out.

Given the different interests of the group it was decided to offer two activity options, one group went to Telegraph Cove to see the historic village and whale museum. The other group went to explore the Quatse River Trails around Port Hardy. Both groups enjoyed excellent mornings. The group at Telegraph Cove witnessed a group of Transient Orcas chasing Pacific White-sided Dolphins, in total contrast to yesterday's cetacean behaviour.

The Quatse River group watched a Mink out in the open and saw a few seals, they had great views of Bald Eagle and manage to find some new birds the best being a Hermit Thrush. As we returned to meet with the rest of the group we enjoyed excellent sightings of Cedar Waxwing and Yellow-rumped Warblers, which competed for one of the best moments of the day. We then met up with Ken and his group at the Quatse fish hatchery.

One group then went inside the fish hatchery to learn about fish rearing techniques (Which Paul enjoyed more than most!), whilst the other group continued their walk around the Quatse River Trail, this time finally connecting with Chestnut-backed Chickadee. We all then met up again to drive to Port Hardy. Here we checked in for our flight to the Great Bear Lodge and said our 'good byes' to Ken, who was off to get some rest and relaxation before we see him again in a few days. The rest of us were bused down to Port Hardy Airport to catch 'The Goose' to the Lodge.

The flights were spectacular, with clear skies and flying over a 'glass mirror' sea and extensive pine forests stretching for miles in all directions. We then passed the lodge before banking around and landing with a flurry of water on the estuary. We all watched the planes take off again after delivering us safely. Then had a coffee and snacks before our briefing.

After our briefing it was time for our first adventure into bears country, we boarded the buses and we were heading for the first hide (Blind). The first bus hadn't even reached the hide when it encountered their first bear before it melted back into the forest. At the hide we settle in and waited, enjoying some of the birdlife whilst hoping the bears would appear.

We did not have to wait long before a very large female appeared, who may have been pregnant judging by the size and shape of her belly. Slowly more and more bears emerged and we were soon watching up to nine bears, remarkably a one point at least seven were sharing the fishing grounds. This was quite unusual as bears are wary of each other and will usually avoid other bears. One of the explanations was that some of the bears may have been related. Also as there was good fishing there may be less competition for food and more tolerance. Whatever the reason it was quite a remarkable number of bears that we enjoyed. We were able to witness different fishing techniques and different behaviours as two younger siblings manage to move an older bear from his salmon kills. They moved in and devoured the fish he had caught!

After a magical two hours of watching Brown Bears it was time to leave and get some dinner. After a delicious dinner Wild Salmon on an Alder Plank, we chatted in good humour, before completing the checklist and then getting some sleep after another spectacular day.

## Day 9

**Tuesday 20th September**

Penny and Martin were up at first light to try and find the River Otters that are resident on 'Jap' Island opposite the lodge. This morning they did not manage to see them. There were however a small flock of American Widgeon close to the dock.

We all met for breakfast before setting out on our first bear watch of the day. Just before we left we learned that we were going to the BBC photographic hide. This was particularly exciting as the bears can pass very close to the platform, which is open and so in effect you are just out there with the bears, often a thrilling experience.

However, the nature of the situation requires that noise and movement needed to be kept to a minimum as the bears have been habituated to the platform and unusual behaviour can make them wary again. I was pleased that the group was impeccably behaved and enjoyed a fantastic morning with the bears. The highlight was possibly a young bear passing within a few feet of the spectators at the front as the sun emerged from over the mountains, a glorious sight! There were also bears passing close behind the group and one had to be firmly told to move over as they can get too close to the group. The bear responded by moving away an exhilarating experience, which everyone enjoyed immensely. Gill was quite emotional after seeing the bears at such close quarters. George, who is a keen photographer was very pleased with proximity of the bears and in reasonable light. Sue also expressed her delight at the bear sightings and were a highlight for her trip. An American Dipper was finally seen, whilst we were watching the bears, which was a bird a few were keen to see. We returned to the lodge for lunch a very happy and excited group.

After lunch we spent a little time looking out for wildlife and found two Common Goldeneye and a few Harbour Seals around the lodge. Our next activity was a hike to the bear trails in the Temperate Rainforest. We set off in lovely sunny conditions and enjoyed a lovely walk down the logging road. The walk was illustrated by the lodge guides discussing the ecology and geology of the rainforest. We also spotted some wildlife including Red-breasted Sapsucker, Lincoln Sparrow and a Varied Thrush. We also saw a few butterfly and dragonfly species, including a lovely Lorquin's Admiral.

Ally (One of the GBL guides) discussed how important Salmon were to the nutrient cycle of the forest as they were often brought into the forest by bears and then added to the Nitrogen load helping trees and shrubs grow in poor soils. Sarah (GBL guide) then discussed the ecology and behaviour of the Banana Slug a fascinating invertebrate with an eye-watering sex life!

Most of the group walked back and some came back on the bus meeting up at the lodge for some afternoon snacks. Our next outing was at 17:30 when we returned to the BBC platform. We again watched a variety of bears feeding in different ways around the gravel bar. Some were digging up salmon eggs uncovered by the falling water level, others were catching salmon and some were eating dead salmon. All the bears seemed to be enjoying the feast and again being very tolerant of each other as about seven bears shared a relatively small area.

We were again treated to an exhilarating 'walk-by' this time by the large and imposing 'Sleeping Bear'. On this occasion he lived up to his name as after feeding well he strolled up the bank and fell asleep close to the bus. Just before we left we witnessed to rare confrontation between two evenly matched female bears. They emitted a low rumbling growl, and bared their teeth. Neither seemed willing to give way as they circled each other with their heads low and ears pinned back. Just as it seemed the confrontation may get physical they simultaneously backed away, wandering off in different directions and so avoiding a potentially lethal clash. It was now getting dark and time to head back to the lodge after another fantastic session.

We enjoyed a delicious lamb dinner (stuffed mushroom for the vegetarians) and chatted amiably. We just had enough time to complete the list before lights out and we went up to get some sleep.

## Day 10

## Wednesday 21st September

Penny and Martin were up early again for their otter vigil, joined a little while later by Paul. Unfortunately, there were no otters on this occasion and we went to breakfast and to get ready for our trip out to the bear viewing platforms.

This morning we went back to the BBC platform and saw a large female bear as we approached. However, bear activity was slower than on the previous visits and we had a little wait before our first proper bear sighting, but it was one worth waiting for as it passed just a few feet in front of the spectators at the front. It was a large juvenile bear who was inspecting a few dead fish as it ambled slowly by giving fantastic views.

After this we were entertained by an American Dipper catching salmon eggs right in front to the platform. Other wildlife of note was an adult American Bald Eagle sitting high up in a cedar and a variety of gulls including a Thayer's and what looked to be a Thayer's/Glaucous-winged hybrid.

The sun was just climbing over the hills when we saw our last bear of the session, which was a large female turning rocks for salmon eggs. We left as she carried on digging for eggs. On the way back we stopped to see the 'bear highway' and a wallow pool. The lodge guides discussed the bears scent marking and mating behaviour linked to these landmarks. We then carried on back to the lodge and were ready to warm up. The tide was very low and we hoped for a chance of feeding otters. However, after a few minutes there was no sign and lunch was called. Just as we were about to go to lunch an otter emerged over on Jap Island. Penny and Martin were thrilled as this was their first River Otter. Roger also came out later and managed to see the otter climb up on to the rocks. That was a great end to the morning and we enjoyed our lunch even more!

After lunch everyone relaxed around the lodge until it was time to prepare for the boat trip down to Walkham Bay. The boat trip set off in glorious afternoon sunshine and visited Pirate's Cove, where an impressive hidden waterfall can be found. Then the trip went up through Walkham Bay. On route there were some impressive sightings. On the mammal front a large Black Bear was a highlight, but a brief sighting of a River Otter was also enjoyed as were the several Harbour Seals seen. An unusual bird record was of Surf Scoters and a few other more common species were seen well, including adult Bald Eagles. The trip arrived back to some snacks and a brief rest before we met with Tom and went on our last adventure of the day. On this occasion we were heading for Boardwalk Platform.

Boardwalk Platform is a little further on then the BBC Platform so we had slightly less time before it got dark. However, it wasn't too long a wait until two sub-adult sisters arrived on the gravel bar. They chased fish (One more successfully than the other!) a few meters away, giving great views. Whilst they were busy fishing a third bear was seen at the back of the river. This bear looked a little bigger with a light coloured head. It didn't stay around long and drifted into some scrub out of sight. Soon the sister's also wandered downstream and out of sight. It wasn't long before a large female came in and demonstrated efficient fishing skills catching three salmon in quick succession. Another bear swam along the back of the river and didn't stay long and this concluded our time at the platform. We did manage two more bear sightings on the way back to the lodge, making a grand total of seven bears this evening.

We arrived back slightly later than usual and hurried to get ready for a lively dinner, which was enjoyed in a light hearted atmosphere. After dinner we were treated to a showing of several videos and trailcam footage from around the lodge, which everyone seemed to enjoy. After the viewing everyone drifted off to their rooms tired but happy from a great day at the lodge.

## Day 11

## Thursday 22nd September

This morning was our last bear viewing session, but it turned out to be a great last session. We had a walk-by from a young bear, witnessed play fighting between a brother and sister bear and watched several bears feeding on the gravel bar. After our last but one of the best bear watching sessions we headed back to the lodge for lunch and to enjoy the afternoon sunshine.

This afternoon's activity was a boat trip up the estuary. Each boat had a slightly different route. Two of the boats had great bear views and one bear swam close to the boat, hunting for fish. Others enjoyed some birdwatching and managed two scarce birds in quick succession, ~Iceland Gull and Western Meadow Lark along with great views of a juvenile Bald Eagle.

We then returned to the lodge and sadly got ready for our flight back to Vancouver Island. We hugged the staff at the Bear Lodge, who had done a great job in looking after us for the past few days and then watched as the planes came into land. The flight to Port Hardy was mainly a smooth flight in good conditions. The first flight managed a sighting of a Humpback Whale, which the pilot kindly banked around to get better views. Unfortunately, the second flight missed the whale. Ken was waiting for us at the Port Hardy Float Plane terminal. We drove back to the Black Bear Motel and got unpacked and ready to go to dinner. We met for dinner at The Harbour Lights and enjoyed a lively evening with excellent food.

## Day 12

## Friday 23rd September

Today was mainly a travel day as we were driving down to Duke's Point to get the ferry to Tswassen. However, we had all day to make the journey and had several stops on route to make the journey interesting.

The first stop was at Tammy's Place for a coffee and cake. This place has a lake out the back that has a Beaver's lodge and a variety of birds and is usually worth spending a little time here. On this occasion the weather was against us as the rain was getting heavy. We managed a few new birds, notably Pied-billed Grebe and Dark-eyed Junco. We didn't wait around long to see if the beavers would emerge due to the weather and soon got underway again.

We next stopped at The Comox Information Centre for lunch. They kindly let us have our picnic lunch inside and Greg, the manager came and gave us a talk on the wildlife and ecology of the locality. The group enjoyed the talk and engaged well with the following discussion. After lunch and the discussion, we set off again and this time had a brief stop along the Highway 19A. Ken was aware of a Californian Sea-lion haul-out site and took us to see them. There was about twenty animals on the logs in the harbour and it was great to see them at close quarters. We spent about half an hour watching them interact and swimming around and also saw a few seabirds.

Our last stop was at Buttertubs Marsh, which proved to be a productive stop. The rain eased as we walked around and we ended the walk in lovely conditions. This was represented by the birdlife we saw as the bushes were suddenly alive with thrushes, sparrows and smaller passerines, including our first Bewick's Wrens. We also saw a good number of waterfowl as well, including Ring-necked Duck, several Pied-billed Grebes and a large flock of Red-wing Blackbird was also enjoyed.

It was now time to board the ferry to Tswassen and so we drove to Duke's Point to make sure we were in time to get on this busy ferry route. The ferry ride was quiet in terms of wildlife despite calm seas. A few seabirds and Harbour Seal were our only sightings before it was too dark to see. We arrived in Tswassen on time and drove to the hotel to settle in our rooms and get ready for our last group meal in Brown's Social.

We all met again at 20:30 in Brown's and enjoyed a lovely meal together. The atmosphere was very enjoyable and light-hearted and the humour of this group was still very evident as it has been throughout the tour. We agreed it had been an exceptional tour with the wildlife sightings we had witnessed, but also because the group had gelled so well and the humour and camaraderie had enhanced the trip for all.

## Day 13

## Saturday 24th September

We began our day with a walk around Boundary Bay before breakfast. This turned into a lovely walk in good weather with some superb birding. Perhaps the highlights were a very obliging Merlin sitting on the top of a dead tree giving close views and a magnificent Great Horned Owl sitting out in some shrubs giving excellent views.

After breakfast we made our way to The Reifel Bird Sanctuary and as always this produced some wonderful birding. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful Anna's Hummingbirds around the centre and unbelievably two more Great Horned Owls in pine stands along the main trail. There were many other birds to enjoy and we had a lovely couple of hours wandering around. We then had a picnic lunch in the sunshine and watched the hummingbirds again. We then split into two groups as only some wanted to go to Stanley Park and the other wanted to spend more time at the bird reserve.

Ken left with the Stanley Park group and they enjoyed a walk around the park looking at the Totem Poles and a brief walk along the waterfront. The rest managed some more new birds including a Sora and Virginia Rail as well as spending more time with the owls. We then all met up at Iona Beach and looked for Beaver and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Unfortunately, we were unable to find either and it was now time to check in for our flight home.

We thanked Ken for his hard work in feeding and organising the group and said farewell and went through to catch our flight. We had just enough time to catch up with the checklist before we boarded.

## Day 14

## Sunday 25th September

We landed pretty much on time after a slightly bumpy flight and everyone made their way through passport control and met at the baggage carousel. We said our farewells and then made our way to our respective homes after a successful and fun trip.

## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	September													
			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
1	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>								2						
2	Common Loon (G N Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>		6	4	10	2			2	1				2	
3	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>													7	4
4	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				2				2						
5	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>		4	20	4	1			10	10				6	
6	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>			10	4										
7	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>								500						
8	Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma furcata</i>								4						
9	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>		✓	6	10									10	
10	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>		✓	2	1									10	
11	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>		4					2	6					20	
12	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>														2
13	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>		6	10	✓	3	6	1	1	2	2	4	4	4	20
14	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		30			30									
15	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		100			20				20	10	4	30	10	30
16	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>														1
17	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>													20	20
18	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>														30
19	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>			30						3	4	1	20	50	
20	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		2								6	6			✓
21	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>														20
22	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>								5	5					20
23	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			3						3				✓	✓
24	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>													10	10
25	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>					1			15	3		1	1		
26	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>		20		20	30			✓	20		4	1		
27	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>		10		4										
28	Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>							5	10					20	

	Common name	Scientific name	September													
			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
29	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>										2	2	2		
30	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>							1						1	
31	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>														10
32	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>									7					
33	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>														
34	Common Merganser (Goosander)	<i>Mergus merganser</i>				30	6	20	20	50	50	50	50			
35	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>														1
36	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1												
37	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>			5	6	1	6	4	10	10	20	10	2		
38	Northern (Hen) Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>														5
39	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>			1											1
40	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>			1											
41	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>					6				1				2	3
42	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>					1									1
43	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>							1							2
44	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>														1
45	Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>														2
46	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>													10	10
47	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>				1										
48	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>		10							10					
49	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>			7	15		18								
50	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>														1
51	Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>					1									
52	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>														20
53	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>														4
54	Wandering Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus incanus</i>				1										
55	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>				4				1	1	1				1
56	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>			1	20		✓	✓						30	
57	Surfbird	<i>Aphriza virgata</i>				1										
58	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				100										
59	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>			1											

	Common name	Scientific name	September														
			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
60	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>				10											
61	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				3					20						
62	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>								3	3						
63	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>															50
64	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>								5		1	1				
65	Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua)	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			1												
66	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>							2		1						
67	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>			50												
68	Mew (Common) Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		2						10	20	6	10	30			
69	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>								1	2			1			
70	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>		2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Thayer's Gull	<i>Larus thayeri</i>									1	2	1	3			
72	Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucooides</i>												1			
73	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>		4	2						1	1		1			
74	Western Gull	<i>Larus occidentalis</i>				1											
75	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	6	20	✓	✓	
76	Common Murre (Guillemot)	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓					✓							
77	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>			1					2							
78	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>			4					✓							
79	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						3	✓
80	Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Columba fasciata</i>				5											
81	European Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓							1	20	✓	
82	Great Horned Owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>															3
83	Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>				1	1	1									
84	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>		4													10
85	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>		1	2	10			10	10	10	4	10	6	2	1	
86	Red-breasted Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus ruber</i>		1							1	1		2			
87	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		1	4			1	1				1	1	2	20	
88	Cassin's Vireo	<i>Vireo cassinii</i>															1
89	Hutton's Vireo	<i>Vireo huttoni</i>				1											
90	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>		2	10	10	3	6	5	10	3	4	4	4			

	Common name	Scientific name	September												
			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
91	Northwestern Crow	<i>Corvus caurinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		20	6	4	6	6	10	5	4	6	8	20	1
93	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		1					7						✓
94	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>		2											✓
95	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>								5				6	
96	Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>												6	20
97	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>				2									1
98	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>												2	
99	Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>				1	1	2			3	1	2		
100	Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>													1
101	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>									2	6	4		
102	Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>			2	20				1				1	
103	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>				1									
104	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>								1					
105	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>		10	10	20		20	✓	✓		3		✓	✓
106	Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>									1		2		
107	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
108	Western Meadow Lark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>											1		
109	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>				30				10					
110	Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>												2	1
111	Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>		10						10					10
112	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>		3										2	20
113	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>		2											
114	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>			3	30			✓	✓			1		
115	Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>				1									1
116	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		4	1	3		4	2	4		1	2	10	✓
117	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>							1	1	2	1			
118	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>		20		2		20	1	1				4	30
119	Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>												20	20
120	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>												1	2
121	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>						1						50	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	September												
			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
122	House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>		✓											✓
123	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			6		20								
124	American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>		6											2
125	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				20									✓

## Mammals

1	Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>			1	9		4				1			
2	Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus horribilis</i>								10	17	10	13		
3	Northern Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>					1								
4	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>									1				
5	American Mink	<i>Mustela vison</i>				1		1		1					
6	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>						50							
7	River Otter	<i>Lutra canadensis</i>		2								2			
8	Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>			1			3	50				1	2	
9	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>			3	6		1						20	
10	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		1	✓	10	3	20	2	4	4	10	10	10	
11	Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>		2			1								
12	Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>													3
13	Mule (Black-tailed) Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>		2	4	1	15	3							
14	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>							30	100					
15	Orca	<i>Orcinus orca</i>							25	4					
16	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		1		4		2	2						
17	Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>							1						
18	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>			1			17	9				1		
19	Red-Backed Vole	<i>Myodes rutilus</i>		1											
20	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		3										1	1
21	Arctic Shrew	<i>Sorex arcticus</i>									1				

## Invertebrates

Autumn Yellow-winged Grasshopper, *Arphia xanthoptera*  
Water Strider, *Gerridae sp*

Banana Slug, *Ariolimax columbianus*

Whirlygig Beetle, *Gyrinidae sp*

## Butterflies and Moths

Mustard White, *Pieris oleracea*  
Spotted Tussock Moth, *Lophocampa maculata*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Lorquin's Admiral, *Limenitis lorquini*

## Dragonflies

Autumn Meadowhawk , (*Sympetrum vicinum*)

Canada Darner , (*Aeshna canadensis*)

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Red-breasted Sapsucker Martin Oliver



Group photo at Tofino



Great Horned Owl Martin Oliver