

Canada: The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 - 25 September 2018



Black Bear by Peter Dunn



Orca by Peter Dunn



Roosevelt Elk by Andrew Lapworth



Brown (Grizzly) Bear by Peter Dunn

Report compiled by Peter Dunn
Images courtesy of Peter Dunn & Andrew Lapworth



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Summary

The 2018 Naturetrek 'Canada – The West' tour group spent two weeks in stunning scenery visiting the Vancouver area and Vancouver Island, where we enjoyed fantastic vistas and wonderful wildlife. There were many highlights including close encounters with Black and Grizzly (Brown) Bears, cute Sea Otters, Grey and Humpback Whales and Orcas. Not only was the wildlife first class but we stayed in some lovely places, enjoyed delicious food and encountered excellent hospitality. The weather was generally kind to us but we did have a wet zodiac ride in Ucluelet, but the bear sightings still came. We also had a period of rain at Great Bear Lodge but, on the positive side, we did experience the real rain forest! This tour is designed to offer a whole range of wildlife experiences and we maximised the opportunities and shared wonderful experiences whilst having a lot of fun, with everyone taking home a wealth of happy memories.

Day 1

Wednesday 12th September

Fly London Heathrow to Vancouver then drive to Tsawwassen

The ten group members flew from London Heathrow and landed at Vancouver's International airport a few minutes late and all met Peter and Duane waiting in departures. We made the short train journey to the car park where the two vehicles were loaded and we were soon en route to our comfortable hotel in Tsawwassen and checked in at The Coast Tsawwassen Inn. Due to the hour and body clocks suggesting it was 5 am in the morning most went to bed after we had discussed the arrangements for some pre-breakfast birding the next day.

Day 2

Thursday 13th September

Ferry crossing to Vancouver Island then drive to Ucluelet on the west coast.

Six met Peter and Duane at 7am and we drove to Boundary Bay for our first North-west birding experience. After parking in the car park we walked down the track to the sound of Northwestern Crows flying over and we saw our first Black-capped Chickadee in the entrance bushes. The tide was coming in and both American Wigeon and Northern Pintail were moving about in the bay with flocks of 'genuine' Canada Geese heading off for inland feeding. Killdeer and Greater Yellowlegs fed on the marsh or waters edge and a huge red-billed Caspian Tern sat amongst a flock of Glaucous-winged and California Gulls. As we watched Dave commented on a fox or dog on the marsh and we watched a Coyote flush the gulls as it ran along the waters edge. A good sighting.

On the dryer side of the path we were able to sort out the difference between Savannah, White-crowned and Rusty looking Song Sparrows, and House Sparrows reminded us of home. Chattering and whistles alerted us to flocks of feeding American Blackbirds in the brambles and fields, some showing nice red bellies in the morning sun. Two species of woodpecker were recorded, diminutive Downy Woodpecker and noisy Northern Flickers, while red flushed male House Finches showed well and both Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers and Common Yellowthroats were logged.

Time was moving on and we had to return to the hotel for breakfast before loading the van with luggage and heading for the ferry terminal. We didn't wait long before we boarded the ferry and we gathered on the top deck

to look at the Pelagic Cormorants, Black Oystercatcher and Turnstones at the moorings and Surf Scoter in the bay.

We set off in good weather and visibility and watched more Surf Scoter and Harlequin Duck fly by with good numbers of Harbour Seals in the water. Salmon were continuously jumping and splashing and we managed to see a small group of Harbour Porpoise during the sailing.

Soon we were disembarking and heading away from Nanaimo, north and then west towards the Pacific Rim National Park. During the journey we spotted numerous Turkey Vultures. We stopped for lunch at Little Qualicum Falls Park, where Duane prepared our picnic whilst Peter took the group to see the Upper Falls. The views were marvellous and the depth and amounts of mosses and lichens was amazing, although no bird life was heard or seen today. We then enjoyed our first picnic lunch of the tour.

Once back on the road we made good progress. Driving through Port Alberni, with occasional Ravens overhead, and onward towards Ucluelet pausing for a comfort stop at the Taylor River Rest Area.

We arrived at Ucluelet at 5.30pm and checked into our home for the next three nights at the Bayshore Waterfront Inn, where we quickly freshened up, as our dinner reservation had been changed to 6pm. We met at 5.55pm and walked into the village for dinner at Heartwood Restaurant. As we walked back to the inn, plans for the next day were outlined before we adjourned after a wonderful first full day in Canada's magnificent scenery.

Day 3

Friday 14th September

Bear-watching from Ucluelet and walk around the Pacific Rim Reserve (Amphitrite Point)

Today dawned overcast and we had showers of rain all day but this did not deter us on our first quest for Black Bears. After an early breakfast at The Blue Door, we assembled down on the quay near to Jamie's Whale Watching Centre in Ucluelet. We had a short walk along the wharf and saw our first California Sea Lions, a magnificent Bald Eagle and a Belted Kingfisher.

We got well prepared in the whale watch centre getting suited up in our floating one piece suits and supplemented with huge orange waterproof coats to protect us from the rain in the open zodiac. Once prepared we got into the boat, skippered by Benj and slowly made our way out of the harbour towards the Pacific Ocean where we gained speed and headed south towards the islands, pausing to watch some Harbour Seals. It had started to rain heavily at this point but as we approached the mainland it started to ease and then we saw our first Black Bear feeding along the shoreline. Our skipper skilfully approached and did not frighten the animal, which casually looked up at us and continued grazing on the clams and barnacles. We judged this to be a big female and she was skilfully moving huge boulders with her strong front paws to find food. We carried on, passing a few Common Loons (Great Northern Divers) and found another smaller bear standing on a log. As we approached it casually laid down with its paws crossed over the log as if it was watching us!

More searching and two more bears were found, one busily feeding on clams while the other was a little smaller and skittish and headed back into the woods. This had been an excellent, albeit wet, first morning and flushed with success we headed back into Ucluelet, pausing for an Osprey in a tree, and enjoyed some hot beverages after removing our wet outer clothes. Everyone had experienced some leakage so we returned to our hotel to dry

off and warm up before we were transported to a wooden picnic shelter on the Wild Pacific Trail, where Duane and Peter had prepared a picnic. We completed our checklists for the last two days while we were sheltered here.

The afternoon was spent by most relaxing back at the hotel looking for River Otters, as some had been seen just before lunch, whilst two of the group accompanied Peter and Duane down to Amphitrite Lighthouse where we had two species of scoter and Sooty Shearwaters offshore, a Peregrine chasing gulls and three Cedar Waxwing, a Golden-crested Kinglet and brief views of a Black-throated Grey Warbler.

We dined that night at Norwood, a special sort of restaurant with an open kitchen where you could watch the chefs prepare your food, all of which was delicious and an experience not to be missed. We retired back to the hotel by 8.30pm with the promise of a later start the next morning.

Day 4

Saturday 15th September

National Park Centre & Tofino (Whale-watching tour)

A few met on the jetty near to the hotel for a pre-breakfast watch, where a Belted Kingfisher stole the show with Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow as extras. Everyone then met at 8.15am 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 breakfast we headed north to the Pacific Rim National Park and stopped at the visitors centre at Wickaninnish Beach. Most spent the next 40 minutes on the deck watching the sea and we amassed a pretty good total of species. Red-necked and Slavonian (Horned) Grebe, three diver species including a few Pacific Divers (loons). Lots of Surf Scoter, two Harlequin Duck, American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal and two Sooty Shearwaters flew by, while some of the group also saw another Bald Eagle here.

At 11am we departed for Tofino. Although overcast it was dry and after a short visit to the supermarket to pick-up our lunch, we called at Jamie's Whaling Station to use the facilities and prepare for our cruise. At 12.30pm we boarded the Chinook Princess, skippered by Captain Steve with Greg and Dee as the deck hands. After a safety briefing we were on our way, pausing briefly to look at two Bald Eagles in a tree. Our route took us along Calmus Passage and into the Brabant Channel. To our delight, we found many Sea Otters which were a joy to watch. Conditions were perfect for watching these much appreciated animals, with no wind and little swell. Many Red-necked Grebes drifted along with the tide and rafts of Surf Scoter and Pigeon Guillemots were common.

Between Whale Island and Lawrence Island we came across a Gray Whale. This species feeds along the sandy sea bottom and prefers shallow waters. Here the sea was about 50 feet deep and we spent about 40 minutes watching it surface several times before going down to feed, and it would regularly show its tail flukes as it went for its longer feeding dives. Another Gray Whale was also seen in the distance and a large male Steller Sea Lion swam past the boat. We were just about to go in search of more seals when Greg asked if we were happy to extend the trip slightly as Orca had been seen. He needn't have asked as we were champing at the bit and we set sail for the ocean. We came across a few other boats and soon could see the huge tell-tale dorsal fin of a large male Orca. He was accompanied by a smaller finned female and together they were checking out the island edges looking for seals. What a great way to end a superb trip. Spirits were high on the way back as we discussed our sightings and we got back to Tofino around 4:30pm, in time for a short walk into the town whilst the leaders sorted lunch for the next day.

We returned back to the hotel and that evening we dined at Howlers Restaurant on more traditional Canadian food, in a lively family atmosphere.

Day 5

Sunday 16th September

Ucluelet to Port McNeill

Due to heavy rain following the devastating fires around Zeballos earlier this year, there was a fear of avalanches and mud slides so the whole town had an evacuation order and we had to change plans. We were to stay some extra nights in Port McNeill and continue our adventures from there. We had a reasonable distance to cover to get to our next stop, so the vehicles were loaded with our baggage at 6.45am before we went to The Gray Whale for breakfast. We left Ucluelet at 8am, initially retracing our route across the island. We had a comfort stop at a gas station near Port Alberni, where we saw both Audubon and Myrtle Warblers in the surrounding trees together with a nice Black-throated Grey Warbler. Overhead Vaux's Swifts passed over and a nice dark Merlin landed in a tree before giving fly-by views. Next stop was Cathedral Grove, where we walked the trail through some ancient trees, including an 800-year-old Douglas-Fir standing 76 metres tall and with a girth of nine metres. During the walk, the only wildlife we saw was a Pacific Wren hunting insects in the ferns.

Moving on, we drove to Miracle Beach Provincial Park on the east coast for our picnic lunch. Whilst Duane prepared lunch, Peter went with the group for a walk along the shore where the water held Great Northern Divers and a nice party of Harlequin Duck. A Western Wood Peewee was flycatching from a perch whilst American Robins fed in the tide wrack together with Grey (Black-bellied) Plovers, Black Turnstone, Killdeer and a single Dunlin. We then returned to the picnic tables to enjoy a delicious lunch.

After lunch we still had a distance to travel so we pressed on, making a stop just before Sayward Junction to photograph a nice pair of Roosevelt's Elk in a roadside field then on to the junction for ice cream!

The weather had started wet in the morning with fortunate breaks during lunch but by the time we arrived at our hotel the sky had cleared and the sun was out. We sorted our rooms then gathered to complete a checklist before driving to Telegraph Cove for supper at Killer Whale Café.

Day 6

Monday 17th September

Port Alice (Sea Otter boat trip and wildlife drive)

It dawned clear and slightly cooler but the good weather was great news for our new venture down at Port Alice for Sea Otter viewing. This was to replace the Zeballos days and after a buffet breakfast we headed to Port Alice on a well maintained road. On arrival in the town we headed to Rumble Road Marina where George our skipper met us. As the boat could only take six, half would go out and the others would explore the town and surrounding area and also were treated to tea and cakes.

Both trips did the same route and both were equally successful. In mirror calm waters George took us out towards the sea until we started to find sea kelp and then we noticed Otters. A few were seen and photographed on route but the vast majority were around the kelp. They were mostly females with large young, some still suckling and some where the mother was trying to wean then. This made for great entertainment as we sat with

no engine, listening to all the communications between the female and the young, sounding almost like belligerent teenagers! One or two large males were also in the area as this was nearly the time for mating and one group witnessed a power struggle by three young males fighting for domination over a few females. Both groups stated this has been a fabulous experience and the size of the area and peace and quite was so calming.

George even managed to entice one of the resident Bald Eagles to come down and catch a dead fish he had thrown out on the water for one group, but the bird was not hungry the second time. However that apart, we all saw Steller Sea Lion in the inlet and Surf Scoters, Red-necked Grebes and Great Northern Divers were common.

Duane had prepared a nice picnic in the fine weather between the two trips and at the end of it all, we thanked George in the usual manner for giving us a close insight into his world and the life of these particular Sea Otters

A bonus on the way back to the hotel was a nice view of a Black Bear on the side of the road in bright sunshine, rounding off a successful day.

Following our checklist we dined at the Northern Lights restaurant across the road from the hotel, recounting tales of the youthful sea otters.

Day 7

Tuesday 18th September

Port McNeill. Whale-watching trip.

Breakfast was available from 6.30am and some of the group met Peter for a short walk behind the Inn to look for birds at 8am. We saw a good Fox Sparrow and a Golden-crowned Warbler but two Townsend Warblers eluded most. Steller's Jays were numerous and easier to see than previously and we spooked a Mule Deer.

At 9:30am we gathered on the dock in Port McNeill ready to board the Naiad Explorer for a whale-watching trip on the north-west side of Vancouver Island. In the small bay were a group of Hooded Merganser. Captain Bill from Mackay's Whale Watching Tours welcomed us aboard, and at 10am we departed Port McNeill Harbour and headed east. There was a cool feel to the air which was accentuated by the speed as we powered along in search of whales.

A few Rhinoceros Auklets started to appear and we added Black-legged Kittiwake to the list also. Blows in the distance indicated Humpback Whales but we passed these in search of some Orca, with a promise that we would return that way. Eventually after about 40 minutes of speeding along we reduced power and two blows ahead of us indicated a cetacean. As we were looking for Orca we thought this was they but as we came closer it was evident that they were Humpbacks and from her tail pattern one was identified as a female known as 'Big Mama' who normally hangs around Victoria in the south of the island, which excited Marika the deck hand. We searched a little while longer but no Orca were seen, so we started to return north west.

Dave spotted a nice flock of Sandhill Cranes which flew over the boat as we cruised along the coast of one of the many islands then we came to a fair sized haul out of Steller Sea Lion which posed for photos. Ahead were the Humpbacks we had passed earlier and we spent some time stationary in the area watching them blow and fluke. All the time we were surrounded by Common Guillemots and Rhinoceros Auklets. Both Great Northern

and Pacific Divers were regular, as were flocks of Surf Scoter with a few White-wings thrown in. As the sea was calm here we were also served our lunch of soup and a roll and juice.

After lunch and having taken many hundreds of photos of Humpbacks we continued in search of Orca and within 30 minutes we saw the tell-tale dorsal fin of a male. Then there were more and we had come across a pod of resident Orca known as the A clan. There were two big males and various females and young, totalling eight individuals. We spent the next hour with these animals watching them surface and spy-hop. One of the young ones breached and they seemed to 'play' in the kelp. A magical moment for all. While all this was going on, other species caused a momentary distraction; a Fork-tailed Storm Petrel, flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes and three close Dall's Porpoise.

Eventually we had to drag ourselves away from this area of wonderful experiences and head back to Port McNeill, berthing at 3pm.

After thanking Captain Bill and Marika for a superb trip, we headed back to the Inn for some free time and a chance to pack for our adventure to Great Bear Lodge the next day.

We met again at 6.10pm to complete our checklist then crossed the road again for another superb dinner at the Northern Lights Restaurant.

Day 8

Wednesday 19th September

Telegraph Cove; Quatse River Hatchery; flight to Great Bear Lodge

Today we were to fly to Great Bear Lodge in a Grummond Goose aircraft, on which we were only allowed 13kg of luggage per person. After breakfast a few joined Peter on a short bird walk where sparrows were in evidence. We saw both Sooty Fox and Song together to compare and also Golden-crowned and Savannah. We loaded the vehicles and departed at 9am.

We drove a short way south and turned off towards Telegraph Cove where we stopped at a viewpoint to see the massive logging operation in Beaver Cove. As we arrived we found a small flock of Cedar Waxwings that showed well before flying off and in the estuary six Bald Eagles sat on the river bank. At Telegraph Cove the group were given an hour's free time to visit this preserved settlement around a small harbour, with many buildings being on stilts over the water. Yellow Warblers flitted in the trees and Deborah and Jane saw an American Marten on one of the boardwalks. A few visited the whaling museum, whilst others partook of refreshments.

Leaving Telegraph Cove we called at Subways to collect a sandwich and drinks and then drove to Quatse Salmon Hatchery at Port Hardy. We enjoyed our sandwiches beside the river and under a shelter because of a rain shower and then we were shown around the Quatse Salmon Stewardship Centre by the manager, who explained about the process of rearing salmon to provide stock for three local rivers.

At 1:30pm we drove to Port Hardy Seaplane Base where we said goodbye to Duane. After completing personal paperwork and stowing excess baggage, we were taken to Port Hardy airport to be transported in two groups in a single 'Goose' flying boat (capable of take-off and landing on both land and water) to Great Bear Lodge. By

4.30pm both groups had arrived and were greeted by owners Tom and Marg and the staff. With rooms allocated, and warm onesie-type suits issued, we were soon having refreshments whilst Sabina briefed us on lodge etiquette and bear safety.

Around 5pm we boarded the lodge bus (an old school bus) and set off along the old logging track running alongside the Nekite River. As we approached the covered blind (hide), four bears were seen on the shingle bank opposite the hide. We quickly and quietly exited the buses and were soon safely seated in the blind overlooking the river and shingle. Four Grizzly (Brown) Bears, a mother and two young cubs and a young male were opposite either busy trying to catch or feeding on Salmon. The cubs entered the water and were soon being transported downriver right past the blind to the sound of cameras and they were quickly followed by the female, galloping along the river bank, after them. Meanwhile the male was successfully catching and eating huge Chum salmon. A little while later a small female appeared from upstream but she seemed unsettled with the male's presence and soon left in the same direction.

As the evening light diminished we had three more bears move through the area, including a huge male who we left eating a salmon opposite the blind. Add to this gulls, Goosander, five Bald Eagles, a Spotted Sandpiper and a Sharp-shinned Hawk harassing crows, this was a superb start as we sat speechless in the blind for about two hours.

With light fading fast, we re-boarded the bus and made our way back to the lodge, where the silence was broken with chatter about this amazing experience over a delicious salmon dinner, before we all retired in anticipation of more exciting sightings tomorrow.

Day 9

Friday 20th September

Great Bear Lodge

Although the forecast was for a day of rain it did hold off until after lunch. The day dawned still with a little mist on the hills and a salmon pink sky, making it very atmospheric. A few wandered around the decking before breakfast where Harbour Seals were on the logs and in the water.

At 8am we set off in the bus and this time went to the open platform just past the enclosed hide we had been in yesterday. Brown Bears were the aim and this morning we had three feeding on and off during the time we spent on the platform. Two spent most of the time catching and eating salmon whilst the third crossed the river and disappeared into the forest. In between watching the bears we saw a number of Bald Eagles of various ages feeding on salmon and groups of Goosander and a single Common Goldeneye were diving and eating salmon eggs. Soon it was time to get back on the bus and return to the lodge for a filling bowl of soup and salad.

In the afternoon we walked along the roadway with regular stops where lodge guides Ester, Marlo and Eric explained the forest, its trees and the ecology of the area. We also found some Banana Slugs and learned about their interesting lifestyle and the effects of the slime – demonstrated by two of our guides! We then turned off along a bear trail where we were shown a bear rubbing post, and the usefulness of decomposing salmon and vegetation was explained. We retraced our steps to the road where the lodge bus was waiting to take us back. Once back at the lodge, we had the chance for a short relax and afternoon tea before heading out again.

At 4.30pm we set off along the old logging road again, and as it was raining we returned to the roofed blind (hide) where we took our seats to watch a multitude of bears. A large male was already feeding when we arrived and then another arrived. A third came down our side of the river and walked right under the front of the blind pausing to examine a dead fish. This continued throughout the evening with further bears arriving to catch fish. One had a distinctive blond face and another was an old scarred male. Another Bear passed close by the blind and some bears didn't stay long as they seemed wary of the larger males. All in all we reckoned on nine different individuals this evening together with the usual supporting cast of birds. Together with the usual ducks, Eagles and gulls we saw Spotted Sandpiper and Audubon's Warbler.

It was almost dark when we left the blind and we drove back to the lodge, where we enjoyed a dinner of lamb shank and custard pie, before retiring to recharge our batteries for the next day.

Day 10

Saturday 21st September

Great Bear Lodge

Today dawned with heavy rain which had started overnight. A Belted Kingfisher and Harbour Seals were around the lodge and a Savannah Sparrow fed around the flower tubs.

After a breakfast of poached eggs on muffins we geared up in our warm onesies ready for a session in the covered blind. We set out at 8am, boarding the lodge bus for the journey to the blind. This morning we had three or four bears visit the gravel spits to catch salmon which was our main objective, however the rain had dropped a lot of birds into the river system and flocks of yellow-rump Audubon's Warblers moved along the river bank. The small island in front of us also held Song and Savannah Sparrows and single Swanson's Thrush and Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco.

With the rain continuing we left the hide a little early so Sabina and Ester could show us two bear features along the road. At the first stop we were shown a rub tree (for back scenting) and a bear highway (a cut to the next river system). At the second stop we were shown a wallow used by bears in the spring to mud bathe and leave scent and a stomp trail (for foot scenting). We returned to the lodge for lunch of various pizzas.

Our next activity was a boat outing around the inlet. However owing to the continuous rain only four hardy souls from Naturetrek went out with Peter and Eric. Wearing full waterproofs we assembled for a briefing and then boarded the lodge boats. First, we moved around the inlet and into the large area of sedges. Here we saw Canada Geese (the dark Dusky variety) flocks of American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal and few Northern Pintail. A nice sighting was a young Northern Harrier which we saw three times around the sedge beds, whilst overhead many Bald Eagles soared in the slowly clearing sky. We were searching all the crab apple trees for Varied Thrush but found more and more Audubon's Warblers. A chance find was a Western Wood Peewee fly catching from a low perch.

Continuing our search we headed up river with Belted Kingfishers all around and we came across a mixed flock of warblers and kinglets. Most were Audubon's Warblers with a few America Yellow Warblers and a number of Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Scanning through the flock in the rain was not easy but eventually most managed to see the Townsend's Warbler which Peter had found.

As we headed back towards the lodge the sky looked brighter and the rain had stopped by the time we arrived. We were a little wet but happy that we had made the trip.

Once our clothing had been dried in the lodge driers we geared up again, after an afternoon snack, for our final evening session at the covered hide. Driving to the hide we had to wait on the road at one point to allow two bears to pass ahead of us. Once we arrived at the hide we were amazed to see that there was no gravel visible as the rain and tide had caused the river to rise significantly. However we saw another six bears, some swimming in the river, being carried downstream in the fast flowing current, others including a young bear and the blond faced one successfully catching salmon in amongst the flooded willows. Audubon's Warblers were in evidence again and this time we watched a very rufous-tailed Hermit Thrush feeding in the bank vegetation opposite.

At dusk we headed back to the lodge with eight bears 'under our belt' and over a 'duck' dinner, we recounted our favourite moments of a day which had been full of memorable sightings and experiences. After dinner we were shown a number of video clips taken from remote cameras set up around the lodge.

Day 11

Sunday 22nd September

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

Today was our last day at Great Bear Lodge. After the heavy rain of yesterday the day dawned cloudy with a little drizzle. Harbour Seals were around the lodge and Peter identified a Yuma Myotis bat flying around the lodge using a detector.

After breakfast we again boarded the lodge buses and made our way to the covered blind. The river had dropped since yesterday and the gravel spits were now showing and straight away we had a small female looking for salmon. Although she was successful she was not happy with eating her catch there and she swam across the river towards us with the salmon in her mouth and then disappeared up the bank and into the forest. As far as bears were concerned it was quiet with only one other large female who came to hunt salmon for a short period before moving down stream. However other wildlife kept our interest. An American River Otter swam past showing three times right in front of the hide as it went downstream with the flow, whilst an American Dipper flew fast the other way. A few waders flew past including a party of four which looked like Least Sandpipers as they landed momentarily whilst two others were bigger, white underneath and quite ginger in the scapulars so were adjudged to be Western Sandpipers. One of two Sharp-shinned Hawks that were harassing the local Northwestern Crows took a fancy to the Least Sandpipers and was a whisker away from catching one.

It was finally time to leave the blind for the last time so with a touch of sadness we lined up and entered the school bus for the trip back to the lodge. The journey was going quite smoothly until a Pectoral Sandpiper decided to feed in the puddles in the road oblivious to the bus and although we edged forward it would not move. This allowed a good view of what is a rare occurrence in Smith Inlet before Eric had to leave the bus and gently persuade it to leave!

Over the lunch break we packed our bags before our last mystery activity; a boat trip to Walkum Bay and Creek. This time we were spread across three boats. The rain had stopped and the inlet was calm and mirror-like with good visibility. Some found a small flock of obliging Cedar Waxwings and there were some huge jellies in the

bay. The creek was a magical place to sit quietly and watch salmon making their way upstream and Bald Eagles flying over. Soon it was time to return the lodge for tea and biscuits before the amphibious Goose plane arrived

At 3.30pm the aircraft arrived and we were to do back to back flights again, so we said our thanks and goodbyes to Marg and the staff before we were loaded onto the flying boat for the return flight to Port Hardy airport. We had good flights enjoying the views, but there was a little sadness at leaving such a unique and wonderful place. All the group met up at the Black Bear Resort in Port McNeill and after a quick freshen up we headed out for our last evening meal on Vancouver Island at the Cluxewe Resort. The restaurant had a good choice of food, good drink and we all enjoyed good company. Tomorrow we would head south, eventually boarding the ferry.

Day 12

Monday 23rd September

Port McNeill to Tsawwassen via Vancouver ferry

The day dawned clear and still and, although mainly a travelling day, our list of sightings increased dramatically. We had breakfast at the Resort, packed the vehicles and were on our way by 8:30am. The roads were quiet and we made good progress stopping at a rest area for a comfort stop and then Saywood Junction for refreshments, where we saw Northern Flickers.

We arrived at Rath Trevor Beach Provincial Park in Parksville where Duane prepared our picnic while Peter took the group for a walk. The tide was a long way out but scanning the water we logged plenty of Pacific Loons, Red-necked Grebes, a flock of White-winged Scoter and our only sighting of a single Bonaparte's Gull. A short walk into the woods was successful with good views of a pair of Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco and two magnificent Pileated Woodpeckers. We returned to the picnic site to enjoy another great Duane picnic and on behalf of the group Glenn thanked him in the usual way.

Our next stop was Buttertubs Marsh on Jingle Pot Road, just north of Nanaimo. The sun was shining and it was warm. We spent a pleasant hour and a half walking along the track around the marsh and adding a host of new trip sightings. First was a flock of tiny American Bushtits, very similar to European Long-tailed Tits, a pair of loud Bewick's Wren's, Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebes. We also saw House Finches, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler and three Red-winged Blackbird.

We reached Nanaimo Ferry Terminal at Duke Point in plenty of time for our 5.45pm ferry and said our goodbyes to Jane and Deborah who were staying on with family. The Queen of Alberni ferry left on time and the crossing was smooth. As we set off, most were assembled at the front of the ferry but it was quite cool and windy and the only sightings were a large roost of Surfbirds on Entrance Island and a brief view of Harbour Porpoise.

After landing at Tsawwassen at 7.45pm we drove to The Coast Tsawwassen Inn, our home for the night. Rooms were allocated and we quickly freshened before going next door to Browns Social house for our last group dinner before we retired to bed.

Day 13

Tuesday 24th September

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

With an overnight flight in prospect for half of the group, we breakfasted at our leisure and packed the vehicles for leaving at 9am.

We drove to Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, arriving just after 10am. The group spent the morning wandering the circular trail with Peter whilst Duane went off to sort out provisions for our last picnic. First we fed the Black-capped Chickadees and Red-winged Blackbirds with the supplied bird food. For many, this was a novel way to photograph these species at close quarters and also get to grips again with Golden-crowned, White-crowned, Song and Fox Sparrows. Northern Harriers were regular over the marsh, with one hunting along a field edge and a roving flock of small birds included Townsend's, Golden-crowned and Audubon's Warblers with quite a few Ruby-crowns Kinglets.

We climbed the new metal tower and saw good numbers of Long-billed Dowitchers all chattering to themselves with a few Greater and a Lesser Yellowlegs and three Pectoral Sandpipers mixed in. American Coot and a few species of duck including a Lesser Scaup were added to the list before it was time to wander back to the picnic benches where Duane had produced another and our last delicious Canadian offering.

As our flight was not until 9pm we headed off to spend an hour at Stevenson beach, an historic sea front, explained by Duane, and a Mute Swan was added to the checklist.

Finally we headed past the airport to Iona Beach, a nice piece of flat land with pools where there were quite a few duck and sparrows to check though and a nice find was a young Garter Snake on the track which was well photographed.

Unfortunately it was time for us to head to the airport, the group were to go with Duane to departures where four were going on to Vancouver for a few extra days and the others were to check in. Peter had to return the hire car so goodbyes were said here, after a successful and enjoyable tour of Vancouver Island and the visit to the Great Bear Rain Forest.

The flight back to London was slightly delayed but once airborne, it was a smooth comfortable flight and time was made up.

Day 14

Wednesday 25th September

Arrival at London Heathrow Airport after overnight flight from Vancouver

Flight BA84 touched down at 2.20pm after a good journey. We passed through immigration and collected our baggage finally saying our goodbyes before going our separate ways.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October											
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1	Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	2										1	2
2	American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>		3				2						
3	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>	1											
4	American Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>		4				1						
5	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>							7	12	11	2		
6	Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>			1			2	✓					
7	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		5	3									
8	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	6	✓	2	10	✓	✓		
9	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>			20			60						
10	North American River Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>		4								1		
11	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>							1					
12	American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>								2				
13	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>		6	✓	2	✓	1						
14	Roosevelt Elk	<i>Cervus canadensis roosevelti</i>				2								
15	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>							12					
16	Grey Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>			2									
17	Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>			2				8					
18	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	5										1	
19	Dall's Porpoise	<i>Phocoenoides dalli</i>							3					

Birds

1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓			✓	✓				✓	15	✓	✓
2	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>					15		2					
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>												1
4	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>											2	✓
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		8									3	✓
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>												✓
7	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	✓		✓				6		50	8		20
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>							✓		4	10		✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October											
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
9	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓								3			✓
10	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>	3		8					✓	30	8		✓
11	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>											1	2
12	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>												1
13	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	2		2	27								
14	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			5	3	5	
15	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>		7	1	7			10				8	
16	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>							3					
17	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>									1	1		
18	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>							5				1	15
19	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		4	7	2	✓			✓	✓	✓	7	
20	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>							6					
21	Red-throated (Loon) Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			3									
22	Pacific (Loon) Diver	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>			7				✓				✓	
23	Great Northern Diver (Common Loon)	<i>Gavia immer</i>	1	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			3	3	
24	Fork-tailed Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma furcata</i>							1					
25	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>		2	2									
26	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>											5	
27	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps griseogen</i>			✓	3	✓	10				2	6	
28	Slavonian (Horned) Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			2		2							
29	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	5	✓	✓	2	✓	3	1		1		1	5
30	Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓					3	
31	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>	✓	2	✓		✓	✓						
32	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>			5	1								
33	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	6			✓	3	1					✓	
34	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1	1									
35	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>								1		1	2	
36	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>									1			10
37	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>		3	4	2	10	4	10	10	12	10	5	1
38	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>				1	1			1			2	
39	Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>												1
40	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>												15

	Common name	Scientific name	October											
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
41	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>							15					3
42	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	2	✓	✓	2	6							
43	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				8								
44	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	4			5								
45	Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>	12	✓		8								
46	Surfbird	<i>Calidris virgata</i>											60	
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			25									
48	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				1								
49	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>										4		
50	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>										1		3
51	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>										2		
52	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>			1									100
53	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	1											
54	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>						30						
55	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>							1	2	4	3		
56	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>												10
57	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	5											20
58	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>						✓						
59	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>											1	
60	Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>			5									
61	Common (Mew) Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>					10		3	✓	✓	✓		
62	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	2			2		1						2
63	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>			2									
66	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	2											1
67	Common (Murre) Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓			✓						
68	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>			✓									
69	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>						✓						
70	Rock Dove (Feral)	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓						
71	Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>											1	
72	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			5		✓				1			✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October											
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
73	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>					1							
74	Vaux's Swift	<i>Chaetura vauxi</i>				4				✓				
75	Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>	2	1									1	3
76	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>		3	3	1	8	8	2	2	✓	4		
77	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	2			1								
78	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	2			1	5						✓	4
79	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>											2	
80	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>		1										
81	Merlin (Black)	<i>Falco columbarius suckleyi</i>				1								
82	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1									1	1
83	Western Wood Pewee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>				1					1			
84	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>		2			2	8	4			4		
85	Northwestern Crow	<i>Corvus caurinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1		1	15	✓	✓	✓			2	✓	✓
87	Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		3					6			6		
88	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	✓											✓
89	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>				2				✓			✓	
90	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>			2									✓
91	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>												1
92	American Bushtit	<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>												4
93	Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>		1										✓
94	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>									20			
95	Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>												H
96	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>											2	
97	Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>				1			1	3	2	1		
98	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>				1								1
99	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>												1
100	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
101	Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>									1			1
102	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>									1			
103	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	✓	1		✓	30	✓	✓	1	1		3	✓
104	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>										1		

	Common name	Scientific name	October											
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
105	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	2										2	✓
106	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	✓					1	1				8	2
107	American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>	2											
108	Sooty Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella unalaschcensis</i>							1	3	2			1
109	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	1		2	2	3	1	2		2	1	1	✓
110	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>									1			
111	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	✓										1	6
112	Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>							4					✓
113	Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>									1		5	
114	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	3	3	1		1	1	2	2	10	✓	4	2
115	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>					1							
116	Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	1										3	✓
117	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>											3	✓
118	Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>												1
119	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	3	1				1			1		1	2
120	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	3		1									2
121	American Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>							6		10			
122	Myrtle Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>				1								
123	Audubon's Warbler	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>	1			5			1	1	✓	✓	✓	6
124	Black-throated Grey Warbler	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>		1		1								
125	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>									1			1

Other Taxa

Moon Jelly, *Aurelia aurita*

Western Garter Snake, *Thamnophis elegans*

Banana Slug, *Ariolimax columbianus*

Ochre Sea Star, *Pisaster ochraceus*

Blue-eyed Darner, *Aeshna multicolor*

Cabbage White, *Pieris rapae*

Field cricket sp.

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