

Canada: The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 25th September 2022



Sea Otters



Black Bear



Grizzly Bear and cub



Bald Eagles

Tour report and images by Barrie Cooper



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Summary

This 2022 Naturetrek 'Canada – The West' tour group spent almost two weeks in stunning scenery with excellent weather. We visited the Western British Columbia area and Vancouver Island, where we enjoyed great views of some special wildlife. There were several highlights including close encounters with Black and Grizzly (Brown) Bears, Sea Otters, Humpback Whales and birdlife. The wildlife in this part of Canada is particularly interesting and we were fortunate to enjoy good views of much of it. The weather was mainly sunny and warm with very little rainfall which is a surprise at this time of year. Although the good weather makes wildlife watching more pleasant, the absence of rain possibly restricted the numbers of migrant birds we saw. The lack of rain certainly made the river levels low and this, coupled with a particularly large number of salmon in the river at Great Bear Lodge, resulted in fewer Grizzly Bears being seen this year although we still had some excellent views. A special thanks to Chris for his expertise and support during this trip and, of course, the staff at Great Bear Lodge, it was a great experience for us all.

Day 1

Monday 12th September

Fly London Heathrow to Vancouver then drive to Tsawwassen followed by bird watching at Boundary Bay

All the group departed Heathrow on an Air Canada flight to Vancouver. We arrived around midday and by the time we'd cleared Immigration and collected a vehicle, it was 2pm when we arrived at our hotel. After a break to sort out our gear we took advantage of the warm sunshine by driving the short distance to Boundary Bay Regional Park. The tide was out but we still saw a fabulous quota of birds to get our trip off to a good start. The photographers immediately focussed on the confiding Greater Yellowlegs and there was a few to choose from. Several Killdeer also competed for space on memory cards. One Western Sandpiper, a Pectoral Sandpiper and seven Least Sandpipers added to the shorebird list. Possibly the best wader was a Long-billed Curlew that looked immaculate with its cinnamon-coloured breast but was just too far away for an award-winning photo. However, four American Avocets eventually woke from their slumbers to walk close to the track and looked immaculate in the afternoon sunshine. Some close Great Blue Herons provided an opportunity to familiarise with this species. Although the waders/shorebirds stole the show, there was a fine supporting cast. California, Glaucous-winged and Ring-billed Gulls, American Wigeon, Pintail and Green-winged Teal were on the water. Passerines included American Pipit, Savannah Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and House Finch. A juvenile Peregrine posed on the mud for a few minutes and a juvenile Northern Harrier did a fly past with the light showing it to perfection. Despite our body clocks telling us it was after midnight we returned to the hotel for a brief rest before going out for dinner at the restaurant next to the hotel.

Day 2

Tuesday 13th September

Beech Grove Park, Tsawwassen. Ferry crossing to Vancouver Island then drive to Ucluelet on the west coast.

Seven of the group came on a brief pre-breakfast walk to Beech Grove Park. Things were a little slow at first with an old Bald Eagle nest, a group of Black-capped Chickadees and a Spotted Towhee providing

the main interest. Eventually things picked up and several Anna's Hummingbirds were seen during the visit with some of them perching up and showing well at times. We came across an open area with bushes that proved to be the most productive spot during our brief visit. New birds for the trip included Hermit Thrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, American Robin, Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Not a bad collection for such a brief visit before breakfast.

After breakfast we made the 10-minute journey to the ferry for our transit to Nainamo on Vancouver Island. Some interesting birds were seen while we waited to board the ferry. A few Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers were passing through some trees in the car park while on the sea were Surf Scoter, Common Loon, Horned and Red-necked Grebes, Pelagic, Double-crested and Brandt's Cormorants. Early on during the crossing a Harbour Porpoise came relatively close to the ferry, however that was outdone by two Humpback Whales that were approximately 50 metres from the ship at one stage. We later had a single Humpback, then a mother and calf with mum doing some fin slapping that kept us entertained for a few minutes. Four Rhinoceros Auklets flew past and a total of four single Marbled Murrelets drifted past as they sat on the sea. It had been an eventful two-hour ferry crossing that kept us alert throughout. Once on Vancouver Island our first mission was to find a supermarket to buy lunch which we ate at Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park. It was very quiet for wildlife with only an obliging American Robin being seen and Douglas Squirrel heard. We completed our journey to Ucluelet and checked into our hotel next to the marina. Cameras were soon in action with a very tame male Mule Deer just a few metres from our rooms being the attraction. Dinner at Howler's restaurant completed a fine day.

Day 3

Wednesday 14th September

Bear watching boat trip and the Pacific Rim National Park (Wikaninnish Beach)

It was an early breakfast before we made our way to Tofino for our 9.30am bear watching boat trip. A Belted Kingfisher and six Crossbills were seen from the hotel carpark before we set off. Soon after the boat left the harbour, we saw our first Bald Eagle and Short-billed Gull was also new for the trip. The mist that hung around didn't restrict our views of the shoreline and visibility did improve during the trip. Our first Black Bear was only seen by some of the group as some kayakers had approached to close to the bear and it had moved away into the forest. Fortunately, our next encounter was more successful, and we watched a male Black Bear feeding on crabs and other creatures hiding under rocks which he moved as though they were pebbles. Soon after, another male Black Bear was found in Fortune Channel. This character was up a tree when we first arrived which provided an interesting alternative perspective. After a few minutes he came down and made his way to the shore to voraciously feed on the marine life which was hiding under the rocks. Other wildlife seen from the boat included Harbour Seal, Harbour Porpoise, Surf Scoter and Western Sandpiper. After a successful boat trip an interesting and colourful caterpillar of the Spotted Tussock Moth was found in the car park.

Lunch was picked up from a local supermarket and eaten at the picnic tables of a local park. In improving weather, we made our way to Wikaninnish Beach in the Pacific Rim National Park. Most of the birdlife was on the sea with Common and Pacific Loons, Red-necked Grebe, Rhinoceros Auklet and Surf Scoter.

An adult Bald Eagle was perched in a tree behind the visitor centre before we went for a walk along a coastal trail. Song, Fox and Savannah Sparrows, Crossbill, Pacific Wren, Steller's Jay and Orange-crowned Warbler eventually revealed themselves. On a sheltered beach, several Spotted Sandpipers and a Western Sandpiper searched for food in the seaweed. In pleasant, warm sunshine we made our way back to the hotel for a rest or to explore Ucluelet.

Day 4

Thursday 15th September

Black Rock Resort. Whale watching trip from Tofino. Pacific Rim National Park (Lighthouse Loop Trail)

A pleasant breakfast was enjoyed at Black Rock resort with the dining room overlooking the Pacific Ocean. We had time to enjoy a brief walk around the area and had a good selection of birds. Black Oystercatchers were on the rocks, six Vaux's Swifts flew over while trees around the car park had Townsend's and Orange-crowned Warblers, Anna's Hummingbird, Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet and American Robin. We then made the drive to Tofino for our whale-watching trip. Several Short-billed Gulls were one of the first birds we saw as we made our way to the ocean and numbers of Red-necked Grebe and Common Guillemot started to accumulate. A Harbour Porpoise and a Sea Otter were our first mammals. The boat was making rapid progress in search of whales, so bird sightings were for those with quick reflexes, but some interesting species were seen during the trip. Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot, Heermann's Gull, Pacific and Great Northern Divers were some of the highlights. A Humpback Whale was watched for approximately 10 minutes, but it was rather distant and wasn't performing some of the entertaining behaviour this species is known for, so the captain decided to move on. It was clear that it was becoming difficult to find a Grey Whale as we moved, at speed, on the edge of the ocean. We eventually reached a bay where a Grey Whale was feeding in the shallow water, much to the relief of everyone including the crew. She was a known individual of approximately 50 years of age and we enjoyed her company. Grey Whale is the main target for boat trips out of Tofino and after the rather lengthy journey to find one, it was time to return to port. As we made our return to calmer waters, Sea Otters became more numerous and we reached a raft of approximately sixty individuals, enjoying decent views of these quite endearing animals. A Bald Eagle at the top of a tree and an Osprey over the harbour provided a perfect ending to the trip.

Lunch was acquired from a local supermarket and eaten in a local park. A brief visit to Tofino Beach was unproductive due to the tide covering the mudflats, so we returned to Ucluelet. Our aim was to watch the Californian Sealions that we'd been hearing ever since arriving, but they remained out of sight as they were hauled up on the wrong side of fish processing factory, however we did see a few Barn Swallows. Some of the group decided to return to the hotel for a rest while the rest had a walk along a part of the Lighthouse Loop trail. The coastline here is rocky and spectacular and we found one spot that proved to be highly productive for wildlife. A group of Black Turnstones were roosting on some rocks below our viewpoint, and on closer inspection, a Wandering Tattler was found with them. Unlike the Turnstones, the Tattler walked around the rocks and gave us closer views and was appreciated by all. A family of North American Otters was first found swimming in the sea before they hauled themselves out onto the rocks. Initially, three were sighted, but a few minutes later the group became five. We watched the otters for the remainder of the time we were there including fine views of them eating some type of fish with spiny fins. It was quite entertaining to watch them gorge themselves on their fish dinner. Meanwhile, out

in the ocean, a Minke Whale had been slowly progressing south with occasional appearances at the surface. To end the session a male Belted Kingfisher flew onto the rocks in search of his fish dinner. An excellent day of three species of whale and two species of otter was completed with another fine dinner at Howler's.

Day 5

Friday 16th September

Ucluelet to Zeballos via Miracle Beach

It was an early start today because we had a long journey to Zeballos. Breakfast was taken at a local café before we set off. A stop in Port Alberni to pick up lunch gave an opportunity to see Black Vulture and Raven. Our next stop was at Macmillan Provincial Park for a pleasant walk around the Cathedral Trail with its ancient trees including an 800-year-old Douglas Fir which is approximately 76 metres high. The first few minutes of our walk were in rain, which was the first we had encountered on the trip. Pacific Wren, Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Crossbill were seen here. Some mushrooms were identified as Trooping Crumble Cap which is a great name that should be attributed to someone from Middle Earth. The drive continued to Miracle Beach Provincial Park where we ate lunch. The sea held a good selection of birdlife including Harlequin Duck, White-winged and Surf Scoter, Bonaparte's Gull, Marbled Murrelet, Pacific Diver, Goosander, Red-necked and Horned Grebes. After lunch, we went for a walk along the coastal trail. The forest was quiet although some of the group did see a Douglas Squirrel. A small estuary and another muddy area had Black Turnstone, Grey Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs and Great Blue Heron. A female Belted Kingfisher posed in a tree overlooking the river, providing us with our closest views of this species. Unfortunately, we had to leave this beautiful place to continue our journey, with the occasional shower on the way. A few kilometres before we reached Zeballos a Black Bear was grazing on grass next to the road. It was relatively small, perhaps three or four years old and was clearly hungry because, despite the occasional passing car, it continued to feed with an admiring audience in our vehicles watching it for around 15 minutes before we completed our journey after a long drive.

Day 6

Saturday 17th September

Zeballos and Sea Otter boat trip

It was cool and clear as we walked down from the hotel to the marina in Zeballos. A few birds were around including Black-throated Grey Warbler, Robin, Crossbill, House Finch and Steller's Jay. The first of several Bald Eagles and Belted Kingfishers were seen before we boarded the boat. Some of the avian highlights of the boat trip were close views of Surf-bird, Black Turnstone, Wandering Tattler, Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet, Horned Grebe, Surf and White-winged Scoters and a Peregrine that was half-heartedly going for the gulls. Our first Humpback and Sea Otters were seen in Hecet Channel, as were a couple of individual Black Bears that were moving rocks in search of crustaceans. As we made our way around the coastal water, two more Black Bears were found as was another Humpback. It took us some time, but we eventually found a raft of approximately sixty Sea Otters. Only a few had young ones balancing on their fronts, but it was satisfying to see them even though the boat was rocking as were on the edge of the ocean, rather than in a sheltered channel. We made our way back to Zeballos but were delayed by a mother and calf Humpback who did a couple of perfectly timed synchronised dives. Back

at the marina, Lion's Mane Jellyfish were close to the boats, but perhaps not the highlight of a successful trip.

After a fine lunch at the hotel and a short break, everyone went out for an afternoon drive and walk up the coast from Zeballos. A distant female Sea Otter with her young was the first animal of interest, with a few Harbour Seals and Canada Geese viewable from the same spot. Further along the road, a short walk brought us a small group of Chestnut-backed Chickadees with a Townsend's Warbler adding some alternative colour. Unfortunately, apart from that group, it was relatively quiet, so we returned to the hotel for a break before a short drive up the road in search of American Beaver. We stopped at a pond that looked promising and it certainly delivered. An adult male American Beaver came to our side of the pond and swam up and down just 15 metres away and below us. Another Beaver was exploring the corner to our left, while a young one swam on the far side of the pond. It was a quite fantastic viewing session, a real privilege to experience. Satisfied, we made our way back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 7

Sunday 18th September

Zeballos and Whale-watching trip off Port McNeil

Another cool, cloudless start to the day. Shelagh and John spotted two American Dippers on the river in Zeballos before breakfast. The drive to Port McNeil was broken by a couple of stops, first at a lake where Beavers have been seen in the past, but it was quiet. The second stop near another lake was more productive with a couple of American Dippers showing well, as did a Pygmy Owl – our first owl of the trip. On arrival in Port McNeil, we checked in for our boat trip that was scheduled for midday. A couple of Hooded Mergansers were on a tidal pool next to the marina as we walked to the boat. Some of the usual seabirds were found soon after we set off, including Common and Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet and Red-necked Grebe. The first Sea Otters were individuals before a raft of them was found. Sea Otters have started to colonise Johnstone Strait in the last year, and these were all males: overall, we saw around 70. A few groups of Red-necked Phalaropes were seen before a group of Steller's Sea Lions were found on some rocks, including some impressive males. Two Dall's Porpoise were a good find before we eventually found our first Humpback Whale. In total, we saw thirteen Humpbacks including a mother and calf. Because of the unique tail patterns, most Humpbacks are identifiable and one of those we saw was a male of at least 15 years of age. Captain Bob got a call that some Pacific White-sided Dolphins were further south, so we made our way there. Approximately 100 dolphins were seen and these were in a relaxed mode travelling relatively slowly for the benefit of everyone including the photographers. Another highlight of the trip was the sight of two Arctic Skuas harassing gulls that were having a feeding frenzy. After a very enjoyable four-hour boat trip we returned to the marina and drove the short distance to our hotel to check in.

Day 8

Monday 19th September

Port McNeil. Port Hardy. Quatse River Estuary. Flight to Great Bear Lodge

A Peregrine was seen while we ate breakfast to give us a good start to the day. After breakfast we went for a walk along the shoreline at Port McNeil with two Great Northern Divers close to the shore and Pigeon Guillemots further out. Bald Eagles, Hooded Mergansers and a Harbour Seal were around the

marina. A Merlin flew over as we walked back to the hotel. It was a short drive to Port Hardy where we picked up lunch from a supermarket and ate it at the Quatse River Estuary. Six species of gull were in view – Thayer's, American Herring, Ring-billed, Glaucous-winged, California and Short-billed. Four Hooded Mergansers included a splendid male, while Black Turnstones and Greater Yellowlegs were also around. 1pm was Canada's designated time to pay respects to the Queen, so the group observed a minute's silence and reflection with the sound of gulls, Black Turnstones and a Bald Eagle in the background. We moved to the other side of Port Hardy where the shore included more good shorebirds including Short-billed Dowitcher, Surfbird and Grey Plover. The sea had more good birds including Red-throated Diver, Western, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, Harlequin Duck and a few Sea Otters. It was then a short drive to the Seaplane Base. After the formalities we were taken to the airport where we boarded two 'Flying Goose' seaplanes (capable of take-off and landing on both land and water) to Great Bear Lodge. Only three of these planes remain and all are here, making a beautiful sight. We had good weather for the flight over, but no whales were spotted. After a briefing with coffee and cake, we were allocated our rooms before boarding the buses for a 35-minute drive to an observation hide overlooking the Nekite River. There was already a Brown (Grizzly) Bear feeding at the river and we didn't have to wait long for a second one to appear. That female soon caught a salmon, swiftly followed by two more. She then moved to the gravel to dig up salmon eggs and gorged herself for quite some time. In total we saw four bears with the final one walking along the edge of the river right in front of the hide, providing a perfect finale. A few Bald Eagles, Goosanders and Raven were seen, plus a Spotted Sandpiper and a couple of Belted Kingfishers. A fine meal completed an excellent day.

Day 9

Tuesday 20th September

Great Bear Lodge

A Harbour Seal was laid out on a log next to the lodge to give the photographers an early opportunity to flex their shutter digits, meanwhile everyone else enjoyed looking at the attractive animal. Immediately after breakfast we boarded the school bus to do some more bear watching. The track to the hides was blocked by a landslide a few weeks ago, but fortunately the debris had been cleared in time for the salmon run; however, it can still take over 35 minutes to get to the first hide. There was already a bear on the river in front of the hide, but it disappeared as the group entered the hide. We then had a lengthy wait until one appeared further down river and it moved into the water to grab a salmon or two. The usual supporting cast of birds were on view, and on this occasion, a Sharp-shinned Hawk appeared. The hawk entertained us for half an hour as it made several half-hearted attempts to take one of the American Crows, frequently perching in trees on the other side of the river before dropping down in a forlorn attempt at grabbing a crow. The river level was low enough to allow very good views of the salmon as they moved up river or took the opportunity to spawn. It has been a very good salmon year with many fish making it upstream as was evident by the numbers of live and dead ones in front of the hide. After a relatively quiet session with only two bears, we made our way back for lunch.

The afternoon session was a walk up the trail so that we could learn something about the forest. We learned that the Red Alder is a pioneer tree that is usually the first coloniser of bare ground before the cedar and spruces move in. We had some tree identification lessons and were shown some of the berries and berry bushes. A fallen Western Red Cedar provided the opportunity to examine tree rings that demonstrated that during good salmon years, the tree growth tends to be better. Some of the group

followed a bear trail to examine trees where bears have been rubbing against them. We also had an opportunity to examine some bear footprints. It was interesting to look at trees covered in hanging moss. The moss kills lower branches which results in the tree spreading nutrients towards the top to assist in its growth. A few birds were heard but not seen, those that were included Fox and Savannah Sparrow and Steller's Jay. A Douglas Squirrel was seen by some of the group. The warm sunshine brought our first Mourning Cloak (Camberwell Beauty) butterfly.

The evening session was at a different hide and in a particularly picturesque location where two rivers merged. Two American Dippers made occasional appearances to keep us alert, but unfortunately no bears were seen which was rather frustrating. Bald Eagles and the usual gulls were regularly in front of the hide, but the main highlight was observing the behaviour of the salmon as they made their way up river or spawned in front of us. With the river being relatively shallow it made observation of the salmon relatively easy this year. A few amphibians and small mammals were seen on the way back in the dark.

Day 10

Wednesday 21st September

Great Bear Lodge

It was another cloudless, sunny start to the day and after breakfast we embarked on the drive up the track to the first hide. Two bears were in view near the river as we made the approach and fortunately, they stayed there while we assembled in the hide. A male bear was also on the river making it a three-bear start to the day. The quantity of living and dead salmon was obvious as the bears feasted on this amazing buffet. The river levels and clarity of the water made it easy to see the large numbers of Pink and Chum Salmon making their way up river, the field of view in the binoculars could sometimes reveal as many as 12 salmon all tightly packed together. A look down river was also awesome as the large number of salmon could be seen making their way towards us. Meanwhile, the bear behaviour was always entertaining. Mum and cub would sometimes share a fish, while sometimes junior would catch his own large salmon and enjoy his catch. The interaction between the mother and her male cub was interesting to watch with the little character becoming quite boisterous at times. He was quickly learning his fishing skills and was making a good job of reaping the piscine harvest. When they tired of adult salmon, they moved onto the gravel to dig out their eggs with junior seeming to really enjoy this delicacy. The two bears remained in view the whole time we were in the hide, while the male bear eventually made its way across the river and disappeared into the forest. Although the bears occupied much of our attention, there was a good sideshow of birds to add further interest. Two American Dippers flew onto rocks in the river in front of the hide, providing good views. A Spotted Sandpiper flew in briefly to join them but had moved off before a Merlin appeared. The dark Pacific subspecies of Merlin is an interesting bird to see and this one made a few fly pasts before obligingly perching in a tree opposite the hide. When perched up, we had the chance to appreciate its distinctive plumage before it flew up river. A male Belted Kingfisher also perched up close to the hide. The time seemed to go very quickly during such an interesting and entertaining session, and we left the bears enjoying their food while we boarded the bus to make our way back to the lodge for an excellent lunch.

The afternoon session was a boat trip up the river to the estuary. The weather was perfect with no wind and a cloudless sky to show the landscape, including the mountain tops, to perfection. The idyllic location is perhaps even easier to appreciate when out on the river and it was a wonderfully relaxing experience.

Plenty of live and dead salmon were seen, while the eighteen Harbour Seals we saw were resting after taking advantage of the seemingly endless food supply. Bald Eagle, Steller's Jay, Belted Kingfisher and a few Pacific Slope Flycatchers were the avian highlights from the boat trip.

The evening session was in the same hide as this morning and a confiding Belted Kingfisher was the initial highlight, whereas a Spotted Sandpiper just gave a brief fly past. After about an hour, a female Brown Bear appeared and wandered over to the gravel to begin her evening meal with caviar. She spent quite some time rooting around a hole that had already been dug, feasting on salmon eggs. After this delicacy she moved onto the river for the main course and proceeded to feast on the abundant salmon, although it must be said that her initial attempts were rather pathetic and unsuccessful. The light was fading when this morning's mother and cub appeared. The other bear had been staring back towards the forest as she had clearly picked them up before we saw them, and it was interesting to watch the body language between all three bears. The family immediately moved to an area of the river away from the other female to avoid any conflict and they were soon enjoying an evening meal of salmon. We watched all three bears until it was time to make our move back down the track, satisfied with another entertaining session. With perfect timing before dinner the International Space Station orbited directly over the lodge looking quite spectacular in the dark star-filled sky and most people came out to see it. A series of short films presented by Emma rounded off a fine meal and evening.

Day 11

Thursday 22nd September

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

It was another clear morning and after breakfast we were soon on our way up the track for the drive to the first hide. The same female Brown Bear and her cub were on the island in front of the hide. Everyone had great views of the pair as they fed on salmon, before we had a comedy moment. Mum made her way along the shoreline of the island moving at least 50 metres from junior who was focussed on eating his food. He eventually discovered he had been deserted and realised that mum was downriver. In a bit of a panic, we had the engaging sight of him running along the shoreline giving everyone great views, before he was soon reacquainted with mum. The pair of them continued to wade down river, with mum catching the occasional salmon. At this stage, another bear appeared to our left and immediately began devouring the salmon which were ridiculously easy to catch. Eventually mum and her cub disappeared into the forest before reappearing again before we left. The birdlife was a constant presence with one highlight being when three juvenile Bald Eagles appeared at the same time and put the gulls in a real panic. Belted Kingfisher and Spotted Sandpiper showed.

After another excellent lunch we went on a boat trip, this time around a part of the Smith Inlet. We enjoyed some interesting scenery and had a relaxing time, one group managed to see an American Mink. After a pleasant trip, we returned to the lodge for the final time to grab a drink and a snack before the planes arrived to take us back to Port Hardy. We said our goodbyes to the staff after a fabulous three days in this part of paradise. Back at the seaplane base there were a few birds visible including Hooded Merganser and Black Turnstone, while a large skein of migrating geese flew very high and southwards. It was then a short drive to Port McNeill for our hotel.

Day 12

Friday 23rd September

Port McNeill, Rathtowers Beach Provincial Park, Buttertubs Marsh, Tsawwassen via Vancouver ferry

A noticeable change in the weather after overnight rain, as low cloud and drizzle greeted us this morning. It reinforced the feeling that we had been incredibly lucky with the weather so far. After breakfast, we started our drive south with occasional showers before arriving in Parksville where we picked up some lunch before heading further south to eat at Rathtowers Beach. Unfortunately, it was rather breezy and cool, the tide was out, and the birds were quite some distance away. After a short walk we decided to move on to Buttertubs Marsh which is a pleasant nature reserve on the edge of Nainamo. It was rather quiet initially as the trees and bushes seemed to be largely empty of birds. The first notable bird was Pied-billed Grebe, before the pool to our right eventually revealed American Coot and Wood Duck. The occasional Song Sparrow showed, but a vocal Northern Flicker remained hidden. A few Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Yellowthroats were around, while some parties of Chestnut-backed Chickadees proved to be popular. Our walk took us to another viewpoint over the water where some American Wigeon were looking rather smart. At least three Anna's Hummingbirds were around brambles and hawthorns at one stretch of the path and seen by most of the group. Unfortunately, not as many saw an obliging Pileated Woodpecker that perched at the top a dead tree, another one that got away for some. Jim was the only one who saw a female Purple Finch and had a photograph to prove it, but a skulking Bewick's Wren only gave very brief views. After a couple of hours, we had completed our walk and it was then a 20-minute drive to the ferry terminal. The ferry to Tsawwassen departed on time and the visibility was good. Prior to departing we managed to see a North American Otter from the ship, catch a fish and eat it as we sailed away. During the ferry crossing, most group members saw three Humpback Whales, with a distant fourth one only seen by Barrie.

Day 13

Saturday 24th September

George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Vancouver Airport

After breakfast at the hotel, we drove to the excellent Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. It would be very easy to spend a full day here, sadly we couldn't, but we did have a great time in the warm sunshine. Several Anna's Hummingbirds were buzzing around the feeders near the entrance and were the initial focus of attention. The pool near the visitor centre held Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers. Sparrows were soon in evidence with Golden-crowned, White-crowned, Song and Fox being the most numerous, but Lincoln's and White-throated were also seen, plus the humble House Sparrow. A Northern Harrier flew over while some were photographing Wood Ducks, Red-winged Blackbirds and Painted Terrapins. Other fly overs included Vaux's Swift, Peregrine, Red-tailed Hawk and Barn Swallow. A group of approximately 20 Cedar Waxwings included several juveniles, a couple of Purple Finches were in the same tree as some of the waxwings. A Brown Creeper provoked discussion on the differences with our version. Spotted Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Bewick's Wren and Northern Waterthrush were also seen on that stretch of the reserve. Black-capped Chickadees proved to be popular, particularly as they obligingly came down to seed. A party of Bushtits behaved just like our Long-tailed Tits and had a couple of warblers with them – Orange-crowned and Audubon's. A solitary American Avocet was on a pool and a few American Coots and a Blue-winged Teal were seen on the way back. A Barred Owl roosting in a tree next to the path was predictably popular and there was an ever-present

crowd of visitors attempting to get a glimpse or photo of the bird. Gianpiero and Paola had done their own thing and managed to photograph a Wilson's Phalarope and two Cackling Geese.

After a pleasant few hours walking around Reifel in the sun, we drove a short distance to a North American diner for a late lunch. The group then elected to go to the airport early to sort out some seating issues on our return flight. On arrival at the airport, the group thanked Chris for his help and expertise throughout the trip.

Day 14

Sunday 25th September

Arrival at London Heathrow Airport after overnight flight from Vancouver

The flight arrived ahead of schedule at Heathrow, bringing an end to another great trip to British Columbia.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		September 2022													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>													2	
Mute Swan - I	<i>Cygnus olor</i>													2	
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>												✓	✓	
Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>													1	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓												✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓												✓	
American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	✓							✓			✓	✓	✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓				✓	✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓							✓			✓	✓	✓	
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>	✓	✓								✓		✓	✓	
Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>					✓			✓						
Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>					✓	✓	✓							
Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta americana</i>				✓										
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>							2	6			✓			
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Vaux's Swift	<i>Chaetura vauxi</i>				✓									1	
Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>	✓			✓								✓	✓	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓									✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove - I	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓						
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>													✓	
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>								1				✓	✓	
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		4				

I=Introduced		September 2022													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Horned (Slavonian) Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		✓			✓	✓		✓						
Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>				✓				4						
Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>		✓		✓		✓		✓						
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	4													
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					✓			✓						
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	✓				✓			✓						
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	1													
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>							1							
Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			
Surfbird	<i>Calidris virgata</i>						10		✓						
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>							1							
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	7													
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	1													
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	1		✓	✓										
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>													✓	
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>								3					✓	
Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>													1	
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>							✓							
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>			✓					✓		2	✓			
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	✓				✓			✓						
Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>				1		1								
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>							✓							
Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>					✓		✓	✓						
Heermann's Gull	<i>Larus heermanni</i>				✓										
Short-billed Gull	<i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

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Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Thayer's Gull	<i>Larus [glaucoides] thayeri</i>								✓						
American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>								✓						
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>							2							
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓						
Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cepphus columba</i>				✓			✓	✓			1			
Marbled Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>		4		✓	✓	✓								
Cassin's Auklet	<i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i>														
Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>		4	✓	✓		✓	✓							
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>								1						
Pacific Diver	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓								
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓						
Brandt's Cormorant	<i>Urile penicillatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Urile pelagicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓							
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓	✓	✓		1	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>					✓							✓		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				1										
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>									1					
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	1													
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	✓	1											1	
Northern Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium californicum</i>							1							
Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>													1	
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>		✓											✓	
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		✓										1		
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>												1		

I=Introduced		September 2022													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1						1	1		1				
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1							1					1	
Hammond's Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax hammondii</i>													1	
Pacific-slope Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax difficilis</i>										✓				
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>		1												
Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		✓											✓	
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>					✓	✓						✓		
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>		✓											✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			1	✓									✓	
American Bushtit	<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>													✓	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>		1											✓	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>				✓										
Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>												1	1	
Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>			1	✓	✓	H			✓	✓				
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>		✓												
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>													2	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>								1						
Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>					1						1			
Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>		1									1			
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	✓		✓	✓	
American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>							4		2	✓	✓			
House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>				✓				✓				✓	✓	
Buff-bellied Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	✓													

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Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Purple Finch	<i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>		✓										1	✓	
House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>		✓				✓							✓	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						
American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>		✓											✓	
Red Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>			✓	✓				✓	✓				✓	
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>						✓							✓	
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓						✓	
Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>								✓				1	✓	
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	✓		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓			
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>		✓											1	
Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>		✓										1	✓	
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>												✓	✓	
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>		✓	✓	✓									✓	
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>		✓										✓		
American Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>		✓	LO	✓									1	
Audubon's Warbler	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>													✓	
Myrtle Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>													✓	
Black-throated Grey Warbler	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>						1								
Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>				1		1								

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	September 2022													
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
American Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>			4		1	4								
Brown Bear (Grizzly)	<i>Ursus arctos</i>								4	2	4	3			
Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>							✓							
Californian Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		H	✓	H										
Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓						
North American Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>				6								1		
American Mink	<i>Mustela vison</i>											1			
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>		✓		✓										
Grey Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>				1										
Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>				1										
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>		5		1		4	13					3		
Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Sagmatias obliquidens</i>							100							
Harbor Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		2		1		1								
Dall's Porpoise	<i>Phocoenoides dalli</i>							2							
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓											✓	
Douglas' Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus douglasii</i>		H			1									
American Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>						3								
Southern Red-backed Vole	<i>Myodes gapperi</i>									1					

Others

Common name	Scientific name
Butterflies	
Mourning Cloak	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Cabbage White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Small White sp.	
Moth	
Woolly Bear Caterpillar	<i>Laphocampa maculata</i>
Odonata	
Variable Darner	<i>Aeshna interrupta</i>
Blue-eyed Darner	<i>Aeshna canadensis</i>
Common Green Darner	<i>Anax junius</i>
Canada Darner	<i>Aeshna multicolor</i>
Unidentified Bluet sp.	
Other taxa	
Western Toad	<i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>
Painted Turtle	<i>Chrysemys picta</i>
Red-eared Slider (Terrapin)	<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>
Western Garter Snake	<i>Thamnophis elegans</i>
Garter Snake	<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>
Lion's Mane Jellyfish	<i>Cyanea capillata</i>
Banana slug	<i>Ariolimax columbianus</i>
Chum Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus keta</i>
Coho Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus kisutch</i>
Pink Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus gorbuscha</i>
Trooping Crumble Cap	<i>Coprinellus disseminatus</i>