

Canada: The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 25th September 2023



Sea Otter



Barred Owl



Orcas



Grizzly Bear

Tour report and images by Barrie Cooper



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Summary

This (Canada: The West) tour spent almost two weeks in stunning scenery with very good weather, apart from two wet days. As always, Vancouver Island was spectacular with great scenery and wildlife. We had many sightings of Humpback Whales, plus Grey Whales, two male Orcas, Dall's Porpoises and Pacific White-sided Dolphins. Close encounters with Grizzly (Brown) Bears at Great Bear Lodge were particular highlights. Sea Otters and American Beavers are always good to see, as are the various birds and other fauna and flora encountered in this marvellous part of the world. Thanks to the group participants for making this such an enjoyable trip and to Carlo and the staff of the Great Bear Lodge.

Day 1

Tuesday 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. After clearing Immigration and collecting our luggage, we met Carlo, our local guide. We arrived at our hotel around 7.30 in the evening and, due to the time difference, only a few of the group went to the restaurant next door for something to eat or drink.

Day 2

Wednesday 13th September

Boundary Bay Regional Park. Tsawwassen to Nanaimo. Neck Point Park. Taylor River Rest Stop. Ucluelet.

The time difference of our body clocks presented no problems for having an early breakfast and checking out of the hotel at 7.30 to make the short journey to Boundary Bay. A black Grey Squirrel and a few European Starlings were seen from the hotel car park before we set off. The tide was out so the wildfowl were distant and there weren't too many shorebirds, nevertheless we had a productive and enjoyable visit. A party of Black-capped Chickadees and a few Great Blue Herons were the first notable birds we encountered, with Killdeer in the channel next to the trail. Song Sparrows and American Goldfinches were common, while Pintail and American Wigeon were the most numerous wildfowl. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were in good numbers but one Least Sandpiper mingled with them to show an interesting contrast. Perhaps the star species of the visit was Northern Harrier with three individuals seen. One Harrier perched in a dead tree just sixty metres away, not concerned by the many walkers, cyclists and a Naturetrek group. A Red-tailed Hawk perched in a tree was briefly mobbed by one of the Harriers, presenting a good photographic opportunity for some of the group. Unfortunately, we had to drag ourselves away from this wonderful site as we had to make the fifteen-minute drive to the ferry terminal. While waiting to embark we managed to view some Surf Scoters, Common Loons and Red-necked Grebes in the harbour area. Once on the boat we were able to see Brandt's Cormorant, American Herring Gull and Glaucous-winged Gull on the jetty. The ferry sailing across to Nanaimo was relatively quiet with a few Harbour Porpoises being the only cetacean seen.

Once on Vancouver Island, our priority was to find a grocery store to buy lunch and then move to the picnic table at Neck Point Park. Nanaimo resident Carlo's local knowledge came up trumps for us to visit this new site on the itinerary. After lunch, we went for a walk along one of the loop trails and had a good range of birds. An adult Bald

Eagle and three species of woodpecker were a bonus – Northern Flicker, Red-breasted Sapsucker and Downy Woodpecker. Bushtits were numerous and showing very well, accompanied by Chestnut-backed Chickadees with an Orange-crowned Warbler attached to one party. A few Spotted Towhees and Dark-eyed Juncos added to the mix. On or over the sea, a group of Buffleheads was a nice surprise, but a party of Black Turnstones chose to land on the other side of a rocky island. With the prospect of the remaining drive to Ucluelet, we had to drag ourselves away from this excellent location and continue our journey. A comfort stop at Taylor River gave us the chance to see the turquoise blue waters of the river and the iridescent blue of a Steller's Jay that was clearly adept at feeding from tourists. On arrival at Ucluelet we checked in and later had dinner at the nearby Howlers Restaurant. The excellent first full day was completed by a briefing and checklist in Howard and Maggie's room.

Day 3

Thursday 14th September

Whale watching boat trip (Clayoquot Sound) and the Pacific Rim National Park (Lighthouse Loop Trail)

It was an early breakfast before we made our way to Tofino for our 10.15am whale watching boat trip. While waiting to board the boat, we spotted a large Ochre Sea Star Starfish that must have been at least twenty centimetres in diameter. Harbour Porpoise was the first notable sighting after we embarked on our journey along this beautiful stretch of coastline. Birds included Red-necked Grebe and Rhinoceros Auklet before we encountered our first Sea Otter. Pacific and Red-throated Divers were good to see, but it was Grey Whale that was the main target and we didn't have to wait too long to see our first one. This magnificent beast would repeatedly come to the surface a few times, give a couple of blows and then slowly dive and disappear for three to five minutes. These whales feed on the bottom in shallow parts of the sea, hence the reason why they are close to the coast here. We were at Ahous Bay off Bargas Island which provided a picturesque backdrop to enjoy the whale. We spent approximately twenty minutes watching the Grey Whale before moving to another part of the bay to watch another one. This second individual followed a similar pattern of behaviour, however it obligingly showed its tail flukes on several occasions which presented a challenge for the photographers. We eventually dragged ourselves away to look for some other wildlife with Sea Otter being the next priority. Unfortunately, we only found a few scattered individuals and no rafts today. However, we did have marvellous views of a male who was well known to the crew of the boat due to his relaxed behaviour when being gawped at by boat loads of tourists. A couple of Steller's Sea Lions showed well in front of the boat before we reached some small islands where a Harlequin performed in the surf and a flock of Black Oystercatchers came into roost. Returning to the dock at Tofino after a satisfying boat trip, we drove to a nearby supermarket to pick up some lunch. Long Beach was the venue for our picnic where surfers were clearly appreciating the ocean here.

Our final destination was the Lighthouse Loop Trail in the Pacific Rim National Park, which is a spectacular coastal walk. The famous Banana Slug was one of the first creatures we found, this one being a medium size for this species. A small mixed flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets and Chestnut-backed Chickadees showed well, but never stayed still long enough for observers to fully appreciate their beauty. A Douglas Squirrel seemed oblivious to people as it sat on a low branch overhanging the trail while it ate a pinecone. A female Belted Kingfisher perched in a dead tree overhanging the sea in a scenic location was the final highlight of a pleasant walk in this beautiful area. We then made our way back to the hotel where people had some free time before dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 4

Friday 15th September

Black Bear watching trip from Tofino. Pacific Rim National Park (Wickaninnish Beach)

It was a very early start this morning because we had a seven o'clock bear watching trip from Tofino. We had a brief impromptu breakfast in the car park of the hotel. The clear, dark sky presented us with the opportunity to look at Venus, Jupiter, Orion, Sirius and a couple of satellites. We also heard Great Horned Owl which was a bonus. Within a minute of starting our journey on the boat, we saw a Sea Otter less than fifty metres away from us. However, it was a misty morning and visibility was less than a hundred metres in places which made it difficult to scan for wildlife, so not ideal conditions. After an hour, the mist began to lift so more of the shoreline was visible during our voyage. Spotted Sandpiper and four Belted Kingfishers were some of the notable birds seen before we eventually found our main target. Another boat had found a Black Bear and communicated this to ours, so we motored to the area and, thankfully, the bear was still feeding on crabs along the shoreline. We watched the bear for around fifteen minutes and it wasn't bothered about being watched by two boat loads of people before eventually moving up the beach and into the forest. We received reports of two more bears but, by the time we arrived in those areas, the bears had moved on. Time was pressing, so we made our way back to Tofino where a California Sea Lion was swimming around near the harbour. We had a free hour before lunch so everyone had the chance to visit a few shops and art galleries.

A pleasant lunch was taken at Sobo restaurant before we took advantage of the wonderful weather and spent the afternoon in the Pacific Rim National Park. Wickaninnish Beach, Lismer Beach and South Beach were our destinations for a pleasant walk. The fine weather brought many people to enjoy various recreational activities which resulted in no shorebirds being seen along any of the beaches. The only identifiable shorebirds we saw were three Black Oystercatchers on a rock island. A juvenile Peregrine chased an unidentified shorebird for several minutes before the falcon eventually gave up the chase. The same bay had an adult and juvenile Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) plus a Pacific Diver and a Harbour Seal relatively close to shore. A Raven on a beach was the only other notable bird as we made our way back to the vehicles. We drove back to Ucluelet for some free time that Ray took full advantage of by photographing a North American Otter. Another fine dinner at Howler's ended the day.

Day 5

Saturday 16th September

Black Rock Resort. Ucluelet to Zeballos via Stamp Falls Provincial Park, Cathedral Grove, Qualicum Beach

It was an early start today because we had a long journey to Zeballos. Breakfast was taken at the Black Rock Resort but unfortunately the misty, drizzly weather restricted the view of the spectacular scenery and ocean. The weather had improved to warm sunshine by the time we reached Stamp Falls Provincial Park. A walk along the river brought us to the falls where salmon were leaping as they attempted to move up river to breed. There was a continuous stream of salmon displaying their valiant attempts to continue their journey while below, in a pool in the river, many more salmon were gathering before they followed the same route. It was a marvellous insight into this part of the salmon's journey. American Dipper and Bald Eagle were also seen here. 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 and nine metres in circumference. An American Robin was the only bird we saw along the trail. Prior to going on the trail, we watched a procession of over one thousand motorcyclists as they made their way to Port Alberni on the "Toy Drive". We couldn't fail to be impressed by the

number of motorcycles in all shapes and sizes, including several Harley Davidsons. Lunch was picked up at a supermarket in Qualicum Beach and eaten at a viewpoint ten kilometres up the coast. Great Northern Diver and Red-necked Grebe were the most numerous birds on the sea and two Steller's Sea Lions put in a brief appearance. A few Bonaparte's Gulls and Killdeer provided added interest. We continued our long journey with several Turkey Vultures seen and a Merlin flying low over the vehicles. Unfortunately, a pond near Zeballos that had given close views of American Beavers twelve months ago, was now almost dried out with the water level over a metre lower and far too shallow for beavers. It was only a brief stop here and we finally arrived at Zeballos over eleven hours after leaving the hotel in Ucluelet.

Day 6

Sunday 17th September

Zeballos and Sea Otter boat trip including Nokutke Sound, Short drive towards Fair Harbour

It was a cool, damp morning for our boat trip from Zeballos. Several American Robins, Steller's Jays and a juvenile Bald Eagle were seen as we walked down from the hotel to the marina in Zeballos. Unfortunately, the almost continuous rain made the use of optics and observing wildlife a challenge for most of the boat trip. Nevertheless, we did manage to see a reasonable amount. The main target was Sea Otter and we had close encounters with several individuals and a couple of rafts, making it approximately seventy seen in total. Around ten adult Bald Eagles were seen from the boat. A Belted Kingfisher posed on some rocks off a small island, providing the photographers with a good opportunity. Scanning the shoreline in the incessant rain wasn't easy and we didn't find any bears. Boatman Scott had received a radio call of a whale sighting so we hoped to get lucky on the way back. Just before arriving back at Zeballos, Scott did a speedy U-turn and we were delighted to see the blows of two Humpback Whales. We headed in their direction and, fortunately, one hung around close to the shoreline. We watched it dive a couple of times and, on both occasions, the Humpback showed the unique pattern of its tale flukes. Happy with our final sighting, we made our way back to Zeballos. Walking up the road back to the hotel, we were damp, chilled but happy after a successful boat trip, despite the weather. Drying our and warming up back at the hotel, we had a fine lunch of toasted sandwiches and halibut soup.

As last year's Beaver site had been abandoned, we needed another. Fortunately, the Beavers had built a new dam and lodge on a stream just a few minutes from the hotel. Owner Christina took Barrie there while the group had some downtime, with the aim of returning there in the early evening. At three thirty, we drove along the coastal road in the hope of finding some wildlife. After driving around five kilometres, some animals cavorting at the side of the road proved to be a female American Mink with two large young. When first seen they were wrapped around each other like some furry ball. When they noticed us, they scampered along the small gully next to the road, passing both vehicles within less than ten metres. It was good to see the Mink in a country where they are supposed to be rather than the feral population that causes problems in the UK. Our next stop was at a bridge over a river and it proved to be quite fruitful. A few Goosanders flew off as soon as we appeared on the bridge and were missed by some of our group. Two North American Otters were swimming along the far side of the river and were in view for most of the time we were there. A couple of Greater Yellowlegs and a Belted Kingfisher were also along the river. A smaller river further along the road had an American Dipper posing for a few minutes. The rain was easing so we turned back and made a brief comfort stop at the hotel before venturing out again in pursuit of a Beaver. The group made their way through vegetation and along a narrow path to the pool that had only recently been created by Beavers. As soon as we got into position, we were delighted to see a male American Beaver swimming along just fifty metres from the lodge that was still under construction. The Beaver continually swam across the width of the pool it had created by damming the stream that was here just two weeks ago. It

didn't seem too pleased by our presence with the occasional loud tail slap breaking the calm of the early evening. Everyone had reasonable views and we were pleased we had made the effort to see this marvellous engineer of the natural world. Satisfied, we made our way back to the hotel for a very welcome dinner.

Day 7

Monday 18th September

Zeballos and Whale-watching trip off Port McNeil (Broughton Archipelago)

It was a cool, cloudless start to the day. American Dipper and Belted Kingfisher were on the river, seen from the bridge before we set off to Port McNeil. We arrived with a couple of hours to spare before the boat trip so we checked out the intertidal areas in Port McNeil. A lone Hudsonian Whimbrel with a group of Black Turnstones were on the narrow strip of mud near the ferry terminal, with Pigeon and Common Guillemots, Grebes and Divers on the sea. Moving to the part of the harbour where our whale boat was due to set off brought a variety of shorebirds busily feeding on the mud. Pectoral, Least and Western Sandpipers, Short-billed and Long-billed Sandpipers provided close views, with a group of ten Hooded Mergansers on the water in the far corner. Walking up to our boat, a Mink was spotted sneaking onto the boat alongside.

Within thirty minutes of leaving the harbour we had already spotted three Humpback Whales and we seemed to be seeing them everywhere throughout our voyage. At one stage we had four Humpbacks around the boat, a mother and calf also passed close. One Humpback was identified as "Hunter", a male who had returned every year since 2011. It was estimated that we saw a minimum of twenty Humpbacks in total, which was a good number. There were many birds seen including plenty of Rhinoceros Auklets, smaller numbers of Ancient Murrelets, Harlequins and a Cassin's Auklet. Hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters were on the sea in the calm conditions with many close to the boat. We passed close to rocky islands where Steller's Sea Lions were hauled out and providing quite a soundtrack. Seven Dall's Porpoises and ten Pacific White-sided Dolphins came very close to the boat, displaying their impressive manoeuvres. A few adult and juvenile Black-legged Kittiwakes roosting on a small rocky island were good to see. We were excited when the captain announced that he'd received news of an Orca sighting so we took off at speed to try to find them. Thankfully, two male Orcas were spotted and the captain switched off the engine and we drifted to see what would happen. The Orcas were believed to be brothers and, to our delight, they came our way and surfaced several times as they passed us. These two were transients and, no doubt, were looking for seals. We left them after enjoying their company as we needed to return. During our speedy journey back to Port McNeil, the eagle-eyed would have spotted a Black Bear along a passing shoreline.

Day 8

Tuesday 19th September

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

Unfortunately, the rain had returned overnight and we were dodging the showers during the morning. Fortunately, we hit a relatively dry patch by the time we arrived at Englewood Bay. Two Bald Eagles were sitting in a tree and four were soaring with two Peregrines and two Ravens. There was bird activity in some nearby trees where we had brief views of Townsend's Warbler, Hutton's Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler and Pacific Wren. A few Hooded Mergansers were on the water, including a male in fine plumage. We couldn't find any bears here or at another nearby bay. The rain was getting heavier so we moved onto Port Hardy where we got lucky again with the weather. The Quatse River Estuary was our destination and the Bald Eagle number was in double figures close to the parking area, with half of them being juveniles. Wildfowl included Goosander, American Wigeon, Green-winged

Teal and Shoveler. Shorebirds were in fewer numbers than on some occasions, although there was a good mix including Marbled Godwit, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Black Turnstone, Western Sandpiper and Black-bellied (Grey) Plover. A Merlin also put in an appearance for some of the group. We went in search of a grocery store for lunch and the rain forced us to eat at tables in a communal area within the shopping mall. It was then a short drive to the seaplane base where we checked in and prepared for our adventure to the Great Bear Lodge.

Unfortunately, flights had been delayed throughout the day due to fog at the airport in the morning, consequently we had a wait for our flights. It was therefore unusually late by the time we arrived at the Great Bear Lodge. We still had time for a shortened session down at one of the hides. A female Mule Deer with two young delayed us getting down to the hide as they insisted in staying on the track. Eventually they did the honourable thing and moved into the forest so that we could continue our journey. When we arrived at the hide, we immediately saw three Grizzly (Brown) Bears. One was wading in the river to our left, while a female with a cub of the year was on the island in front of the hide. The bear to our left eventually made its way up river while the mother and cub continued to forage in full view of us. The female seemed to be mainly feeding on dead or dying salmon with the cub aimlessly looking lost until mum finished a salmon and he/she grabbed it and enjoyed a hearty meal. Two more Grizzlies were seen by a few of the group but they were out of sight for most of us. The continuous rain made the gloom appear earlier than usual so we made our way back down the track for a fine evening meal. A Barred Owl was seen by a few in the headlights of the bus as we made our way back to the lodge.

Day 9

Wednesday 20th September

Great Bear Lodge

A Harbour Seal was laid out on a log next to the lodge, a Belted Kingfisher and several Goosanders were viewed while we waited to view the school bus. The forty-minute drive along the track to the hide was interrupted while we stopped to watch a female Varied Thrush. Swainson's Thrushes and Dark-eyed Juncos were identified from the moving bus. A young female Grizzly Bear was at the hide when we arrived and she stayed around for twenty minutes, catching salmon and feeding in full view. She moved on and we didn't see any more for the remainder of the session. There was bird activity most of the time with Short-billed, Ring-billed, California and Glaucous-winged Gulls scavenging on salmon. A few Dark-eyed Juncos and Yellow-rumped Warblers were active in the bushes on the island. There was plenty of Bald Eagle activity and a Belted Kingfisher posed in full view. We made our way back to the lodge for lunch where an Osprey put in a brief appearance.

After a fine lunch we had a walk up the track to learn about some of the plants and ecology of the rainforest. A Western Wood Pewee was the first notable bird seen by those at the back of the group. A small flock of the Pacific subspecies of Canada Goose, with American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal were on the estuary. We had a discussion about a landslide that had once blocked the track and learned about the main tree species including Western Hemlock, Sitka Spruce and Western Red Cedar which is known as the Tree Of Life by the indigenous people. 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 also learned about a few berry plants that were important for bears. A particularly important point we learned is how the salmon is a keystone species that brings huge benefits for the forest and the creatures that live in it.

The evening session was on an open platform and we had to wait awhile before our first bears appeared. It was a mother with a female cub in its second summer, so bigger than the one we saw the night before. The mother

seemed adept at catching salmon and after partially eating one, left the remainder for junior to scoff. While the cub was eating, mother went back to the river and caught a huge Chum salmon that put up quite a fight before being overpowered. Before the bears appeared, some notable birds included Yellow Warbler, Western and Spotted Sandpipers. It was also interesting to watch the behaviour of the many salmon in the river with mating noted a few times. Saturn, Jupiter, and the Andromeda Galaxy were in the clear dark sky for those who ventured outside.

Day 10

Thursday 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 open platform. Things were relatively quiet initially before birds such as Steller's Jay and Dark-eyed Junco appeared, plus brief views of a Spotted Sandpiper. A couple of juvenile Bald Eagles were the initial stars of the show with one spending quite a few minutes scavenging on salmon on the island in front of us. The absence of a bear was broken bigtime by a couple of minutes that were probably the highlight of the trip so far. A female Grizzly walked along the river just five metres from us. She passed us all, pausing to give us an enquiring look before continuing down the river and scrambling up the bank just downstream of us. It was a wildlife experience that will live long in the memory of everyone and a privilege to experience. Everything was going to be an anti-climax after that, but an American Dipper tried its best by flying to our side of the river and briefly posing on logs and rocks. An American Herring Gull provided a contrast to the usual cast of gulls. We had to depart the platform to head back for lunch and, on arrival, were told that Humpback Whales had been seen from the lodge. We didn't have long to wait because a female and calf came up into the inlet and were just a few hundred metres away from us. We watched them for several minutes before having a break for lunch and the whales kindly hung around so that we could watch them again for desserts. It had been an excellent morning!

After a lunch that included whale watching, we took off for a boat trip up the estuary of the Smith Inlet in perfect weather with a cloudless sky. A male American Wigeon showed well for some boats, as did some Canada Geese. Other birds seen included Golden-crowned Kinglet, Steller's Jay and Bald Eagle. A few Harbour Seals were making the most of the plentiful supply of salmon with Pink Salmon showing in the clear water. After a couple of relaxing hours, we made our way back to the lodge but were delayed by the sight of three Humpback Whales in the Inlet in front of the lodge. The boats just drifted with the engines off, allowing good views of the whales. In addition to seeing flukes when they dived, they sometimes just lay on the surface, adding to the relaxed atmosphere. After a marvellous morning, we had enjoyed a wonderful afternoon before heading back up the track to the open platform.

It was fairly quiet for the first hour or so but some of the group managed close views of a Douglas' Squirrel feeding just a few metres away. But then the show really started. A Grizzly appeared on the track just forty minutes away, and started grazing on the grass next to the track. It then moved out of sight towards the river. Sure enough, it then went into the river, paddled around before heading towards us. We were then treated to the bear eating a dead salmon just fifteen metres away. After a couple of minutes, the bear did the honourable thing and walked along the river, straight in front of us, giving a double-take glance just to check us out. It was yet another incredible moment on an amazing day that will live long in the memory.

Day 11

Friday 22nd September

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

The day couldn't get off to a better start with a Humpback Whale breaching, flipper slapping and fluking. It was an adult male and different from the three we saw yesterday. The Humpback put on quite a display and all of this was before breakfast. He was still around as we set off to the observation platform, but unfortunately had moved on when we returned to the lodge in late morning. The drive up to the platform was interrupted for brief views of an American Beaver on a pond next to the track, it disappeared immediately after a tail slap. The skies were clear again as we sat on the open platform, but unfortunately it was relatively quiet. A few birds put in appearances including Steller's Jay, American Dipper, Belted Kingfisher and Spotted Sandpiper put in brief appearances while a Bufflehead was a surprise visitor on the river. Unfortunately, we failed to see any bears from the platform, however Steve spotted one from the bus which just a couple of hundred metres down from where we had been sitting. This was our final session on the platform and, despite the absence of bears today, we had been fortunate to have some memorable experiences during our stay at the lodge.

After another excellent lunch we went on a boat trip, this time around a deeper part of the Smith Inlet. A couple of distant Humpbacks were seen from the boats. The passengers of one boat had good views of a family of North American Otters. Unfortunately, one of the boats had an engine problem which resulted in another boat towing them back to the lodge, meaning a shortened trip for some of the group. We then had some time to relax in the sunshine before two 'Flying Goose' seaplanes (capable of take-off and landing on both land and water) transferred us from Great Bear Lodge to Port Hardy, for the end of this particular adventure.

Day 12

Saturday 23rd September

Port McNeill, Buttertubs Marsh, Tsawwassen via Vancouver ferry

A noticeable change in the weather again, with a cool, wet morning curtailing some of our plans for our journey from Port McNeill to Nanaimo. Due to the heavy rain it was decided to visit Courtenay where some members of the group took the opportunity to do some retail therapy with gifts for themselves or loved ones. A supermarket in Nanaimo was our next destination where we selected our lunch and were able to sit down in the café area. Fortunately, the rain had finished by the time we left and it remained dry while we walked around Buttertubs Marsh nature reserve. The cool weather meant it was quiet at first, but a roosting Barred Owl in full view next to the path provided us with an exceptional view. The confiding bird wasn't even partially hidden by vegetation allowing photos with cameras and phones. A pair of Wood Ducks showed well enough to show the contrast between the two. Plenty of Chestnut-backed Chickadees, a few Spotted Towhees and a couple of Anna's Hummingbirds played hide and seek making good views difficult. Brown Creepers, Orange-crowned Warblers, Yellow Warblers, McGilvray's Warblers also tantalised, but a flock of Bushtits showed quite well. A Virginia Rail was even less obliging, immediately shooting back into the reedbed after a few seconds in the open. The water levels were low, so wildfowl numbers were lower than expected, but there was sufficient mud to attract a few shorebirds including Western Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher and Killdeer. Unfortunately, we only had enough time to walk around a part of the reserve before making our way back to the vehicles for the twenty-minute journey to the ferry terminal in Nanaimo. The ferry crossing was quiet and, after a slight delay, we embarked to make the short drive to our hotel. It was a quick turnaround as we immediately went to the restaurant next door for our final evening meal and to wish Mike a happy birthday.

Day 13

Sunday 24th September

Boundary Bay regional Park, George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Vancouver Airport

After breakfast, we revisited Boundary Bay which is a short drive from the hotel. It was a very low tide, so most of the wetland birds were way off in the distance with a few Killdeers and Yellowlegs the only shorebirds in proximity to the trail. A Cooper's Hawk put in a brief appearance at the top of a tree but was away before most of the group saw it. Northern Flickers were vocal and prominent at the tops of trees and a Northern Harrier flew over. The most obliging bird and, certainly the most appreciated, was a male Anna's Hummingbird that perched near the top of a tree with few leaves. It even moved into a better position to show its colourful throat when the light hit it at the right angle. After an hour here, we visited a supermarket for lunch supplies before driving to the excellent Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary. A few Greater White-fronted Geese were with Canadas in a field on the way to the sanctuary. Red-winged Blackbirds and Dowitchers were the most numerous birds near the entrance, while some calling Sandhill Cranes were spotted flying over. Some new species were seen along the trail including Red-breasted Nuthatch, Roby-crowned Kinglet and Marsh Wren. Peregrines and Northern Harriers were prominent, particularly over the saltmarsh and reedbeds. Four American Avocets were good to see, although they were mainly sleeping when we saw them. The lack of rainfall during the last few months was evident and the reserve was looking drier than normal which may have been a reason why we saw several dead fish. After a pleasant walk around the reserve, we had our lunch at the picnic tables. It was then a thirty-minute drive to the airport where we said goodbye to Carlo and four of the group who were staying on in Vancouver.

Day 14

Monday 25th September

Arrival at London Heathrow Airport after overnight flight from Vancouver

The flight arrived a few minutes late at Heathrow, bringing an end to another great trip to British Columbia. Maggie and Howard's few days in Vancouver included a brilliant sighting of a Pileated Woodpecker hacking at a tree in Stanley Park – they sent this writer video evidence!

Thanks to everyone in the group for always being enthusiastic and cooperative. Thanks also to Carlo and all the staff at the Great Bear Lodge.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

| I=Introduced | | September 2023 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| Canada Goose | <i>Branta canadensis</i> | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Greater White-fronted Goose | <i>Anser albifrons</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Wood Duck | <i>Aix sponsa</i> | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Blue-winged Teal | <i>Spatula discors</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| 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> | | 1 | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Surf Scoter | <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| White-winged Scoter | <i>Melanitta deglandi</i> | 1 | | | | | LO | | | | | | |
| Black Scoter | <i>Melanitta americana</i> | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Bufflehead | <i>Bucephala albeola</i> | 10 | | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Hooded Merganser | <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i> | | | | | | 10 | 20 | | | | | |
| Goosander | <i>Mergus merganser</i> | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Anna's Hummingbird | <i>Calypte anna</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Band-tailed Pigeon | <i>Patagioenas fasciata</i> | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Eurasian Collared Dove - I | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| Virginia Rail | <i>Rallus limicola</i> | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | H |
| American Coot | <i>Fulica americana</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Sandhill Crane | <i>Antigone canadensis</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |

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|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| Pied-billed Grebe | <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i> | | | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | |
| Red-necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps grisegena</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| Horned (Slavonian) Grebe | <i>Podiceps auritus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| Black Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus bachmani</i> | | 45 | 3 | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Grey Plover | <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> | | | | | | | 5 | | | | | |
| Killdeer | <i>Charadrius vociferus</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | 1 | | | | | ✓ |
| Hudsonian Whimbrel | <i>Numenius hudsonicus</i> | | | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Marbled Godwit | <i>Limosa fedoa</i> | | | | | | | 4 | | | | | |
| Black Turnstone | <i>Arenaria melanocephala</i> | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Least Sandpiper | <i>Calidris minutilla</i> | 1 | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Pectoral Sandpiper | <i>Calidris melanotos</i> | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | |
| Semipalmated Sandpiper | <i>Calidris pusilla</i> | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Western Sandpiper | <i>Calidris mauri</i> | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | 4 | | | ✓ | |
| Long-billed Dowitcher | <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i> | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ |
| Short-billed Dowitcher | <i>Limnodromus griseus</i> | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Wilson's Snipe | <i>Gallinago delicata</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Spotted Sandpiper | <i>Actitis macularius</i> | | | 1 | | | | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Lesser Yellowlegs | <i>Tringa flavipes</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Greater Yellowlegs | <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i> | ✓ | | | | 2 | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Bonaparte's Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i> | ✓ | | | 5 | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Black-legged Kittiwake | <i>Rissa trydactyla</i> | | | | - | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Short-billed Gull | <i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Ring-billed Gull | <i>Larus delawarensis</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| California Gull | <i>Larus californicus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Glaucous-winged Gull | <i>Larus glaucescens</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| American Herring Gull | <i>Larus smithsonianus</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | 1 | | | |

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| Caspian Tern | <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Common Guillemot | <i>Uria aalge</i> | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Pigeon Guillemot | <i>Cephus columba</i> | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| Marbled Murrelet | <i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i> | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ancient Murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i> | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Cassin's Auklet | <i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i> | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Rhinoceros Auklet | <i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i> | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| Red-throated Diver | <i>Gavia stellata</i> | 1 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Pacific Diver | <i>Gavia pacifica</i> | 1 | ✓ | 1 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Great Northern Diver | <i>Gavia immer</i> | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Sooty Shearwater | <i>Ardenna grisea</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 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Turkey Vulture | <i>Cathartes aura</i> | ✓ | | 2 | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | <i>Accipiter striatus</i> | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Cooper's Hawk | <i>Accipiter cooperii</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Northern Harrier | <i>Circus hudsonius</i> | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | 5 |
| Bald Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 12 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Red-tailed Hawk | <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Great Horned Owl | <i>Bubo virginianus</i> | | | H | | | | | | | | | |
| Barred Owl | <i>Strix varia</i> | | | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| Belted Kingfisher | <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i> | H | 1 | 4 | | 6 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Red-breasted Sapsucker | <i>Sphyrapicus ruber</i> | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |

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|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
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| Downy Woodpecker | <i>Dryobates pubescens</i> | 1 | | | | | H | H | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Northern Flicker | <i>Colaptes auratus</i> | 2 | | | | H | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Peregrine Falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | | | 1 | | | | 2 | | | | | 3 |
| Western Wood Pewee | <i>Contopus sordidulus</i> | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| Hutton's Vireo | <i>Vireo huttoni</i> | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Steller's Jay | <i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| American Crow | <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | ✓ | | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cedar Waxwing | <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i> | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chestnut-backed Chickadee | <i>Poecile rufescens</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Black-capped Chickadee | <i>Poecile atricapillus</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Violet-green Swallow | <i>Tachycineta thalassina</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| American Bushtit | <i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet | <i>Corthylio calendula</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | <i>Regulus satrapa</i> | | 3 | | | H | | | | 2 | | | |
| Marsh Wren | <i>Cistothorus palustris</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Bewick's Wren | <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i> | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Pacific Wren | <i>Troglodytes pacificus</i> | | | ✓ | | | | 2 | | ✓ | | | |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | <i>Sitta canadensis</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Brown Creeper | <i>Certhia americana</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Common Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Varied Thrush | <i>Ixoreus naevius</i> | | | | | | | | 5+ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Swainson's Thrush | <i>Catharus ustulatus</i> | | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| American Robin | <i>Turdus migratorius</i> | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| American Dipper | <i>Cinclus mexicanus</i> | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | |

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| Common name | Scientific name | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| House Sparrow - I | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Purple Finch | <i>Haemorhous purpureus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| House Finch | <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ |
| American Goldfinch | <i>Spinus tristis</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Red Fox Sparrow | <i>Passerella iliaca</i> | | | H | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Dark-eyed Junco | <i>Junco hyemalis</i> | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| White-crowned Sparrow | <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Golden-crowned Sparrow | <i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i> | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Savannah Sparrow | <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Song Sparrow | <i>Melospiza melodia</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spotted Towhee | <i>Pipilo maculatus</i> | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Red-winged Blackbird | <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Brewer's Blackbird | <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| Orange-crowned Warbler | <i>Leiothlypis celata</i> | 1 | | | | | | 1 | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| American Yellow Warbler | <i>Setophaga aestiva</i> | | | | | | | | 1 | | | ✓ | |
| Audubon's Warbler | <i>Setophaga auduboni</i> | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| McGilvray's Warbler | <i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i> | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Townsend's Warbler | <i>Setophaga townsendi</i> | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | |

Mammals

| | | September 2023 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Common name | Scientific name | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| American Black Bear | <i>Ursus americanus</i> | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | |
| Brown Bear (Grizzly) | <i>Ursus arctos</i> | | | | | | | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | |
| Steller Sea Lion | <i>Eumetopias jubatus</i> | | 3 | | 2 | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Californian Sea Lion | <i>Zalophus californianus</i> | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Common Seal | <i>Phoca vitulina</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Sea Otter | <i>Enhydra lutris</i> | | 5 | 1 | | 70 | ✓ | | | | | | |
| North American Otter | <i>Lontra canadensis</i> | | 1 | 1 | | 2 | | | | | 4 | | |
| American Mink | <i>Mustela vison</i> | | | | | 3 | 1 | | 1 | | | | |
| Mule Deer | <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i> | | | | ✓ | | | 5 | | | | 2 | |
| Common Minke Whale | <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Humpback Whale | <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i> | | | | | 2 | 20+ | | | 3 | 2 | | |
| Killer Whale | <i>Orcinus orca</i> | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | |
| Pacific White-sided Dolphin | <i>Sagmatias obliquidens</i> | | | | | | 10 | | | | | | |
| Harbour Porpoise | <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Dall's Porpoise | <i>Phocoenoides dalli</i> | | | | | | 7 | | | | | | |
| Eastern Cottontail | <i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Eastern Grey Squirrel | <i>Sciurus carolinensis</i> | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Douglas' Squirrel | <i>Tamiasciurus douglasii</i> | | 1 | H | ✓ | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| American Beaver | <i>Castor canadensis</i> | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | |

Additional species noted

Ochre Sea Star
Fried Egg Jelly Fish
Moon Jelly Fish
Lion's Mane Jelly Fish
Red Rock Crab
Pile Perch
Sockeye Salmon
Chinook Salmon
Pink Salmon
Chum Salmon
Pacific Staghorn Sculpin
Sea Star
Leather Star
Bat Star
Spiny Pink Sea Star
Cushion Star
Cookie Star
California Sea Cucumber
Banana Slug
Woolly Bear Caterpillar
Red Alder
Sitka Spruce
Western Hemlock
Western Red Cedar
Orange Peel Fungus
Canada Darner dragonfly
Cabbage White butterfly