

Canada: The West

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 25th September 2025



Belted Kingfisher by Barrie Cooper



Black Bear by Andy Horner



Coyote by Barrie Cooper



Grizzly Bear cubs by Barrie Cooper

Tour report by Barrie Cooper



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Summary

A Coyote posing in the early sunshine on the first morning was the first of a series of memorable wildlife encounters on this Canada West tour. We had some excellent boat trips which featured Gray and Killer Whales, Sea Otters and many seabirds. Humpback Whales were seen from every boat we boarded, included two ferries. The most spectacular moment came when a Humpback was trap-feeding near the boat and inadvertently caught a shearwater, the fortunate bird escaping when the whale next opened its mouth. Both Grizzly and Black Bears provided very good views, and we saw several cubs. A Grizzly cub wrestling with a salmon almost as big as itself was a particularly memorable moment! Bird migration was in full swing, with skeins of Cackling and Greater White-fronted Geese heading south for the winter. As always, the spectacular scenery of Vancouver Island added an extra dimension to the trip.

Day 1

Friday 12th September

Fly London Heathrow to Vancouver – Tsawwassen

The Air Canada flight from Heathrow departed an hour late, but arrived five minutes early in a sunny Vancouver. After meeting Blair, our local guide, and collecting the vehicles, we made our way to our hotel, passing a few Red-tailed Hawks and American Crows on the way. Some of the group went for a pleasant meal in the restaurant adjacent to the hotel before retiring for a well-needed sleep.

Day 2

Saturday 13th September

Boundary Bay Regional Park – ferry to Nanaimo – Neck Point Park – Cathedral Grove

Mist at first. Sunny until mid-afternoon followed by rain. 21°C max.

Everyone was suitably refreshed when we met up for a good breakfast, before checking out and making our way to Boundary Bay. It was misty when we arrived, but visibility slowly improved. Before we left the car park, we had the fortunate sighting of three Caspian Terns flying over. As we reached the first trees along the track there was plenty of bird activity, with Orange-crowned Warbler, Song Sparrows and Black-capped Chickadees. We didn't have to wait long for our first Anna's Hummingbird, which was swiftly followed by a Belted Kingfisher perched on a wire running above the track; it was the first of many sightings throughout the trip. Great Blue Heron, Common Yellowthroat and Savanna Sparrow were seen before we reached a channel holding about twenty Greater Yellowlegs and a Killdeer. An American Pipit flew over, and American Wigeons were flying in the distance. It was exciting to see a Coyote out on the mudflats and, much to our delight, it ambled in our direction and then posed to look at us, before continuing towards some houses on the edge of the bay. A few minutes later it strolled back to give us more good views. The Coyote was a wonderful bonus sighting, and our luck continued when a Northern Harrier followed a similar route over the mudflats, providing us with great views of another predator.

Our return journey was along a track through an area of trees and bushes, where a young male Anna's Hummingbird posed at the top of a tree and flashed its red throat when the light hit it from the right angle. A

Spotted Towhee posed in the same tree, just a metre below the hummingbird, providing a real two-for-one sighting. The hummingbird moved to another tree where a Lincoln's Sparrow appeared. Our first American Robins and White-crowned Sparrows were seen, before we made our way back to the vehicles. On reaching the car park, a melanistic Eastern Gray Squirrel showed well before we set off to the ferry.

Once on the top deck, we were able to see Common Loons, Surf Scoters, Pelagic and Brandt's Cormorants before the ferry embarked on the two-hour crossing. The sea was calm, and the sun came out to make it a pleasant crossing; however, wildlife sightings were few. A couple of Red-throated Loons and a Caspian Tern gave us fly-pasts before we finally had a whale sighting. A female and calf Humpback Whale were seen, initially in the distance. By the time the group gathered to see the cetaceans, they were closer; however, they only gave us a few brief views when they came up for air. On reaching Nanaimo, we drove to a supermarket to pick up lunch, which we ate at Neck Point Park. Unfortunately, it was quite breezy here and there was no bird activity in the trees or on the sea, so after finishing lunch, we continued our journey across Vancouver Island.

Our next destination was Cathedral Grove, to see the magnificent collection of Douglas Fir and Western Cedar trees, providing an insight into the ancient forest that once covered the island, and was an important part of the culture for the First Nations people that lived here. As we continued our journey west across the island, we reached the predicted rain, which continued all the way to Ucluelet, and for the rest of the evening.

Day 3

Sunday 14th September

Black Rock (Big Beach) - Black Bear-watching boat trip – Tofino – Shore Pine Bog Trail – Ucluelet

Drizzle at first followed by sunshine. 20°C max.

It was a dank, drizzly start to the day as we drove to Black Rock for breakfast. The restaurant overlooked the Pacific Ocean, and it was interesting to see the visibility slowly improving while we ate. By the time we had finished, it was clear enough to see the horizon, which was an encouraging sign for the rest of the day. A group of Common Murres (Guillemots) were on the sea in the distance and, beyond them, shearwaters were flying low, too distant to identify. A Black Oystercatcher was on a rock near the restaurant, but otherwise it was quiet for wildlife. After a fine breakfast, we had a short walk on the nearby beach, where several Golden-crowned Kinglets were flitting about in the trees in their usual hyperactive way. A Northern Flicker posed on a rock for a couple of minutes, and a Peregrine flew over. Four skeins of Greater White-fronted Geese flying high on their migration were good sightings. After a pleasant few minutes on the beach, it was time to drive to Tofino for our boat trip, in search of Black Bears.

As we waited to move out of the dock, a Bald Eagle flew to a tree above the harbour and posed for photographers with long lenses. Soon after we started the boat trip, another Bald Eagle was spotted at the top of a tree. Various waterbirds were seen, with a highlight being Red-necked Grebes in breeding plumage. After forty minutes, we found our first Black Bear along the shoreline; it kept us entertained for several minutes as it moved large rocks as though they were pebbles. The bear was looking for nutritious food such as crabs, with the aim of building up fat reserves for the winter hibernation. We missed seeing two more bears due to boats getting too close and spooking them back into the forest. Fortunately, we overcame that disappointment when we came to a mother and cub

feeding along the shoreline. The cub was a yearling, and would become independent from its mother during the next few months. The cub was already showing signs of that independence when it wandered away to climb onto a fallen tree. Seeing a mother and cub was the highlight of the trip, but close views of thirty-five Harbour Seals loafing on some rocks were appreciated by everyone. On the way back to the harbour Band-tailed Pigeon, Common Merganser (=Goosander) and a surprise group of ten Mute Swans were seen.

Lunch was collected from a local supermarket, and we ate at a local park in Tofino. We planned to spend some time at the Wickaninnish Visitor Centre, but it was closed, so we continued our journey to the nearby Shore Pine Bog Trail. Apart from Northern Flicker and Steller's Jay, it was relatively quiet, so after completing the loop trail, we continued our journey to Ucluelet. Back at the hotel, we could hear California Sea Lions so we went to look for them; ten were resting on a wooden platform near a factory. The view wasn't great, but everyone saw them. We also had good views of a Least and a Spotted Sandpiper feeding close together on the shoreline. As we were about to return to the hotel, we had the good fortune to see an Osprey circling overhead, making a fine end to a good day.

Day 4

Monday 15th September

Whalewatching boat trip, Tofino – Long Beach – Pacific Rim National Park (Lighthouse Loop Trail)

Sunny all day. 20°C max.

A Belted Kingfisher and three Cedar Waxwings were seen as we gathered outside the hotel. We began a gorgeous sunny day by driving to Tofino for breakfast, at the Roar Restaurant in Hotel Zed. The boat left on time, and we soon passed our first Sea Otter. We encountered these animals on several occasions during the trip, including a couple of rafts. These endearing creatures always seem to have either an indignant or curious expression! We didn't see large numbers of birds during the trip, but we did find such species as Common Loon (Great Northern Diver), Red-necked Grebe, Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants, Pigeon Guillemots and Common Murres, and Short-billed and Heermann's Gulls. On our return leg, we came across good numbers of Surf Scoters, and a few White-winged Scoters.

After just over an hour, we found our main target: Gray Whale. There were two feeding near each other in an inlet; this was unusual, because they are usually out along the ocean coastline, although the sea was sixty metres deep where the whales were feeding, which is actually deeper than the norm. The boat crew think that these two may have moved inshore because of a lack of food in the usual area. One of the whales was an unknown individual; it was thought that it may have recently arrived from Alaska to feed up, before continuing its migration down to Baja California. The other Gray Whale was a well-known individual, who had been given the name of "Ditto". Ditto was first seen off Tofino in 1992, and clearly has a bond to this area. The captain switched off the engines and we just floated, with spectacular forested mountains around.

We had a whale to each side of the boat, and they seemed to alternate their times on the surface, enabling us to concentrate on one whale at a time. We all hoped to see and/or photograph the tail flukes when they dived. The unknown individual certainly provided better views of the flukes, keeping the photographers happy. We eventually had to leave this very satisfying scene to head back to Tofino. Three Harbour Porpoises were another cetacean

seen as we headed back. On arrival back at Tofino, the smiles on the passengers were an indication of a very satisfying boat trip.

A short drive took us to a supermarket; we ate lunch in a local park. Our next destination was Long Beach, where there were a couple of groups of shorebirds. Unfortunately, there were plenty of people on the beach and they seemed oblivious to the shorebirds, which were unable to settle and feed. But flight views as they passed confirmed that they were Sanderling, with a few Western Sandpipers among them. The Lighthouse Trail was our final destination, and we had a very pleasant walk along this beautiful coastal footpath, the Pacific Ocean crashing against the rocky coastline. A Red Squirrel put in a brief appearance as it moved along branches overhanging the path. A feeding flock of gulls included a few juvenile Heermann's Gulls, and a calling Hudsonian Whimbrel flew past.

Scope views of Goose-necked Barnacles created some underwhelming interest, but an obliging Brown Creeper was enjoyed by all who saw it. A mixed party of Golden-crowned Kinglets and Chestnut-backed Chickadees gave us good views, before the path looped inland to take us back to the vehicles. On return to the hotel, a Bald Eagle was perched at the top of a tree nearby and became an extremely popular photographic subject for the next ten minutes. The late afternoon light was perfectly angled to show the eagle in all its glory, and it was a privilege to see it so well.

Day 5

Tuesday 16th September

Ucluelet to Zeballos, via Qualicum Viewing Platform and Oyster Bay

Sun with cloudless skies. 24°C max.

After breakfast in Ucluelet, we set off for the long drive to Zeballos. While we were stopped at a gas station for a comfort break, two lucky people saw two Merlins flying rapidly from an open area, before disappearing over the forest on the other side of the road. After another hour, we arrived at Qualicum Viewing Platform, with the spectacular mountainous scenery of the mainland across the water. There were several Horned, Western and Red-necked Grebes on the water, plus a few Pigeon Guillemots and Black Scoters. Our first Bonaparte's Gulls were on the beach and close inshore.

We picked up some lunch in Courtenay and ate it at Oyster Bay. A small intertidal area had a few shorebirds, including Least and Western Sandpipers, Grey and Semipalmated Plovers, Killdeer and Greater Yellowlegs. Wildfowl included Pintail, Greater Scaup and Green-winged Teal. The sea had a variety of birds including more grebes, Harbour Porpoise and Harbour Seal. Several Common Loons were on the water, many still in breeding plumage. A Red-throated Loon was close to the shore, and still had some breeding plumage remaining.

We had to drag ourselves away from the warm sunshine to continue our journey to Zeballos. We stopped to have a look at a site where Beavers have been seen in the past, but the water levels were very low, and there were none around. After a good dinner at our accommodation half, of the group went out for another attempt to see Beavers, but had no luck. However, we did have views of a very bright International Space Station pass.

Day 6

Wednesday 17th September

Zeballos

Rain until mid-morning, sunny later.

We were staying at a different place in Zeballos this year, and the arrangements for the boat trip were also new. The size of the boat meant that we had to do the trip with two groups. The first group went off at 8.00am in rain, while the remainder of the group relaxed at the lodge or went for a walk. The rain eventually stopped, and visibility improved during the first boat trip, which ended in pleasant sunshine. The morning boat trip saw two Humpback Whales, while the afternoon trip saw three. There were plenty of Sea Otters, including a raft. The highlight of the afternoon boat trip was three Black Bears; excellent views of a big male and a female with a cub filled up the memory cards of the photographers. Birds seen on the boat trips included Common Loon, Marbled Murrelet, Surfbird, Black Turnstone, Grey Plover, and all three cormorants.

On land, Cedar Waxwing, Red Crossbill, Fox, Song and Savanna Sparrows were some of the birds seen, and there seemed to be constant action from Belted Kingfishers.

Day 7

Thursday 18th September

Zeballos to Port MacNeil (whalewatching trip)

Sunny. 16°C max.

It was a bright and sunny morning when we left Zeballos. Our first stop was near a lake, and our first bird was a female Goldeneye. Two American Dippers were on the shoreline; they took off to do some formation flying over the water. A Song Sparrow was in some bushes and a Varied Thrush called on the other side of the lake. A Northern Pygmy Owl was also calling; we located it at the top of a tree on the other side of the lake, and it showed quite well in the scope. We only had time for a short stop, so we continued our journey to Port MacNeil, where we picked up lunch at a supermarket.

We set off on the MacKay whalewatching boat with a sense of anticipation, and we weren't disappointed. We were soon seeing plenty of Red-necked Grebes and Pigeon Guillemots, and as we progressed Common Murres became more numerous. There were good numbers of Rhinoceros Auklets during the four-hour boat trip, but at least a thousand Red-necked Phalaropes was a remarkable count. The calm conditions meant that many birds were sitting on the sea, and the shearwaters added to the spectacle as they moved from one shoal of fish to another. There were at least three thousand Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwaters, and that might be a conservative estimate, as we encountered several large rafts of them. A few Fork-tailed Storm Petrels were picked out, and a single Common Tern was possibly wondering where the rest of its species had gone. Bonaparte's Gull, Kittiwake and Surf Scoter were other notable birds.

The first mammals we saw were Sea Otters, with a few lone males scattered across the sea. Some large rocks had Steller Sea Lions on them, including a few hefty bulls. It took around forty-five minutes before we found our first Humpback Whale. All Humpbacks seen around Vancouver Island are recorded and identified, and this individual

was known as Trinity, having first been noted in 2017. We progressed to an area where there was plenty of fish. The sea was covered in shearwaters and auks, but it was the Humpbacks that were grabbing most of the attention. The Humpbacks were actively feeding and, at times, up to three could be seen in the same binocular view. The large number of fish were being harvested by the eager Humpbacks, two of which were Squidgy, a whale first recorded in 1999, and Ridge, first recorded in 2004. However, the star of the show was Conger, as featured in the BBC's "Planet Earth 3" series. He was first seen here in 2009, and in 2011 was seen doing a new form of feeding called "trap-feeding", which involves waiting for birds to "chase" fish into his mouth. Some other Humpbacks have now learned this technique, and the BBC came over to film them here. Today, the sharp photographers and videographers managed to capture Conger trap-feeding relatively close to the boat, but with a twist. A shearwater was caught when he closed his mouth, but then flew out when Conger opened up again! It was all very exciting stuff, and a real privilege to experience. We saw at least eleven Humpbacks during the boat trip, but Conger definitely took the prize for star of the day.

After watching all the Humpback excitement, Captain Bill announced that he had received a report of Killer Whales (Orcas), so we set off at a fair rate of knots to get there. Nine Orcas were actively feeding when we arrived and it was a pod that included A34, a female born in 1975. Because they were feeding within the boundary of an ecological reserve, we had to watch from a distance. Nevertheless, we watched them for around twenty minutes and, during this time, around 150 Pacific White-sided Dolphins joined them. Unfortunately, we had to drag ourselves away to return to Port MacNeil, where we ended a very memorable whalewatching trip.

Day 8

Friday 19th September

Port MacNeil – Quatse River Estuary – Port Hardy riverfront – Great Bear Lodge

Sunny, occasional cloudy. 17°C max.

After breakfast at Bon Appetit, people had some free time to walk around Port MacNeil to do some birding or their own thing. Bald Eagles showed well, as did Black Turnstones, and some saw American Mink and North American River Otter near the harbour. The channel off Port MacNeil had Red-necked Grebe, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Horned Grebe and a female Hooded Merganser. As always, Belted Kingfishers were a constant presence, continually drawing attention to themselves. We moved on to Port Hardy, and our first stop was a pleasant walk along a section of the Quatse River Estuary. Song and Red Fox Sparrows showed well near the car park, and a couple of Greater Yellowlegs were on the river, while an Orange-crowned Warbler gave brief views at the top of a tree next to the path. Some fleeting glimpses of a Townsend's Warbler were followed by some Dark-eyed Juncos and Purple Finch. Scope views of a group of Cedar Waxwings were a bonus as we walked back to the vehicles. A short drive around to view another part of the estuary produced a group of ten male and female Hooded Mergansers, as well as an adult and juvenile Greater White-fronted Goose, and a solitary Cackling Goose.

We visited a supermarket to pick up lunch, and then ate it another viewpoint over the river. The high tide had forced a range of shorebirds to roost close to the shore. Western Sandpiper, Surfbird, Black Turnstone, Sanderling and Short-billed Dowitcher were all seen very well, while a Bald Eagle perched in a tree close to its nest. It was then a short drive to the seaplane base, where we sorted out our luggage for our trip to the Great Bear Lodge. While waiting for the plane, some of the group saw Thayer's and Bonaparte's Gulls.

The weather was excellent for the flight to Great Bear Lodge, so everyone had wonderful views during the journey. After the introductory talk and some snacks, we were soon boarding the old school bus to drive up the track, with a sense of anticipation. We assembled on the open platform and waited for the action. For the first fifty minutes it was Short-billed, Californian and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Belted Kingfisher, Common Merganser and Bald Eagle providing the entertainment. Eventually, a Grizzly Bear appeared and it soon became evident that she had a cub with her, but junior remained under the bushes on the edge of the river until mum gave it the all clear. We watched mum digging up salmon eggs initially, until she eventually moved to the river to catch a salmon or two. Mum and cub remained with us for the remainder of the session, and it was interesting to observe their behaviour when another bear appeared upriver. Before we left, the seven- or eight-month-old cub was clearly getting tired and lay down on the gravel for a rest, but didn't quite manage to fall asleep.

Other bear action included a subadult three-year-old male, which was clearly worried about the mother and cub and moved away down river when they started to move towards him. The next bear to appear was an old friend of Naturetrek groups: Clara. This young lady was first seen as a six-month old cub, and was seen by us last year when she became independent of her mother. Clara is now three and a half years old. Clara kindly came across and waded into the river to catch salmon. The fifth bear was to our right and down river, and wasn't individually identified. At one stage, there were four bears on view at the same time: a fantastic start to our time at this marvellous place. On return to the lodge, we finished the day in the usual way with an excellent meal.

Day 9

Saturday 20th September

Great Bear Lodge

Rain all day. 14°C max.

In contrast to yesterday's pleasant weather, rain arrived during the night and continued for the rest of the day. After breakfast we boarded the bus for the drive to a covered hide, where we could sit in the dry to watch any action. A mother with two cubs was already on the island in front of the hide when we arrived, and they remained in view for around ninety minutes. The cubs were yearlings, meaning they were around one and a half years old. They spent over half an hour digging up salmon eggs before moving to the river, where they ate dead salmon, taking the easy way to feed rather than trying to catch live fish. Eventually they walked up river and out of view. The usual gulls and Common Mergansers were around, while a Spotted Sandpiper put in a brief appearance along the shoreline of the island. During two and a half hours we were in the hide it was noticeable how the island began to shrink as the relentless rain raised the level of the river. The area of gravel and rocks where the bears had been digging for salmon eggs at the start of the session was completely covered when we left the hide to go for lunch.

After a fine lunch, we had a walk up the track to learn about some of the plants and ecology of the rainforest. We saw the area where there had been a landslide in January, and learned that Red Alder was the pioneer species of tree, growing rapidly before the cedar and spruces move in. We also learned about the other main tree species, including Western Hemlock, Sitka Spruce and Western Red Cedar, which is known as the Tree of Life by the First Nation people. We also learned about a few berry-bearing plants important for bears, and how the salmon is a keystone species which brings huge benefits for the forest and the creatures that live in it. Lodge guide Maeve held a Banana Slug while telling us about how the slime can cause numbness, and how the local First Nation people

traditionally put a small one in their mouths when they had toothache! After a three kilometre walk, the bus came to collect us to take us back to the lodge, damper and wiser.

When we arrived at the hide for the evening session, it came as no surprise that the island was almost completely covered. The river was significantly deeper than the previous evening, and after ninety minutes without seeing a bear, we left and boarded the bus. A couple of stops at places where salmon were moving upstream near the track were also unsuccessful, so we returned to the lodge for dinner, and Tom gave a presentation about the history of the Lodge.

Day 10

Sunday 21st September

Great Bear Lodge

Rain, occasionally dry. 14°C max.

The rain continued overnight and was still falling as we had breakfast. The weather resulted in us going on boats into the estuary in the hope of seeing bears. One boat did manage to find a Grizzly on the estuary, and it was seen at a distance by one or two other boats before it disappeared into the forest. However, there were many adult and juvenile Bald Eagles to enjoy, and some posed on trees or fallen stumps, providing good photographic opportunities. Belted Kingfishers, Steller's Jays and a Northern Flicker were some of the birds seen, and seven Greater White-fronted Geese were a notable sighting. A few flocks of Canada Geese were also interesting, because the subspecies we saw were darker and more attractive than the ones back in the UK. As usual, there were plenty of Common Mergansers, and some boats had good views of American Wigeon. The rain stopped thirty minutes into the boat trip, making it a pleasant and relaxing way to spend the morning.

After lunch we were shown a collection of skulls, including Brown and Black Bear, plus Cougar. We then watched a few videos of Grizzly Bear activity filmed at the Lodge over the years, some of it on camera traps. During some downtime in the afternoon, an American Dipper gave some of the group excellent views while it posed on the platform.

Following afternoon snacks, we boarded the bus and headed for the open platform. It wasn't raining when we arrived, but the river was clearly much higher than during our previous visit. We didn't have to wait long for our first bear sighting. Down river, we picked up a female Grizzly on the shoreline. Further observation revealed that there were two cubs on the riverbank, partly sheltered by bushes. The cubs eventually entered the river and followed mum, walking slowly and carefully in the water. Fortunately, they eventually arrived on the far side of the river, opposite to where we were sitting. Mother caught a salmon and shared it with the cubs, which were known to be male and female. The male cub was confident enough to walk ten metres away upriver and grabbed a large salmon almost as big as itself but, after a struggle, was unable to keep hold of it and had to rely on mother for supper. Mum caught another salmon and took it onto the bank to make it easier for the cubs to feed. The mother bear was known as Diablita, and was approximately ten years old. She is the mother of Clara, who became independent from her last year. Eventually the family disappeared into the forest and we didn't see them again. However, a fourth bear was spotted down river and it also walked up towards us. This bear didn't show quite as well, making photography difficult. The rain became heavier, so we retreated to a covered hide, but failed to see

another bear; however, we did have a Harbour Seal showing well. With the light fading, we boarded the bus and made our way back to the Lodge after another good session.

Day 11

Monday 22nd September

Great Bear Lodge

Rain for most of the day. 14°C max.

Rain had started during the night and continued throughout the morning. After breakfast we visited the same hide as the previous evening. Unfortunately, we didn't see a bear during the session. The main entertainment was provided by a Sharp-shinned Hawk perched on trees on the other side of the river, continually harassed by American Crows. Sometimes a crow chased the hawk, and then the roles would be reversed. It was interesting to watch. An adult Bald Eagle and Belted Kingfisher were among other birds seen from the hide.

After lunch, most of the group ignored the rain and went out in the boats to explore. Most of the time was spent in Walkum Bay, a beautiful area surrounded by mist-covered mountains. A few waterfalls were in full flow, making them more spectacular than usual. Some of the mosses and other plants covering the rock faces was quite special: a botanist's dream. Despite the weather, most people enjoyed the experience, even though we were soaked when we returned to the Lodge for a hot drink and freshly-baked cookies.

We were due to return to Port Hardy this afternoon; however, the poor weather prevented the planes from flying, so we had to stay an extra night. We had a relaxing evening at the Lodge, following an early dinner.

Day 12

Tuesday 23rd September

Great Bear Lodge – flight to Port Hardy

Rain throughout the morning, sunny later.

A Little Brown Bat was hunting for moths around the Lodge before breakfast, but it was the only thing flying. The weather in Port Hardy had delayed the planes from coming over, but we didn't have to wait too long for the good news that they were on their way. The first plane left the Lodge at 9.40am, and we all eventually arrived back and met up with Blair to start our long drive to Nanaimo for the ferry. Unfortunately, the delay meant that we couldn't stop in some of the usual places en route. Lunch was picked up at Campbell River and we ate it at Tyee Spit. Several Brewer's Blackbirds were around the picnic area, and Bonaparte's Gulls were on the sea. Soon after, we recommenced our journey, and a stop at traffic lights enabled some of the occupants of the second vehicle watch a Merlin being harassed by some American Crows. The weather was now fair and sunny, providing perfect conditions for Turkey Vultures and Ravens.

The ferry back to Vancouver was done in beautiful evening sunshine on a calm sea. Six Humpback Whales were seen, including a mother and calf, while Red-throated Loon and Black Oystercatcher were the notable birds.

Day 13

Wednesday 24th September

Boundary Bay Regional Park – George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary – Iona Beach – Vancouver International Airport

Sunny all day. 18°C max.

After breakfast at the hotel, we checked out and were soon walking around Boundary Bay. Several Anna's Hummingbirds were active, as were a few skeins of Cackling Geese. A Bewick's Wren put in a brief appearance, but a Northern Harrier was much more obliging and gave us a close fly past. House and Purple Finches, Red-winged Blackbird, and Lincoln's and Song Sparrows were among other birds seen during the first part of our walk. A Merlin posed at the top of a few trees as it moved along in search of breakfast, but a distant Cooper's Hawk was missed by some group members. We found Audubon's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Cedar Waxwing and Northern Flicker before we returned to the vehicles and made a thirty-minute drive to Reifel.

Anna's Hummingbirds always provide good views here, particularly when they visit the feeders near the visitor centre. Long-billed Dowitcher and Greater Yellowlegs were in the pool behind the centre, and were probably on full alert when a Peregrine flew over. The strong wind seemed to suppress bird activity, but Black-capped Chickadees were always on the lookout for free seed from people; however, Bushtits were only noted on one occasion. Five Greater White-fronted Geese and a solitary Snow Goose provided contrast to the Cackling and Canada Geese. Other waterbirds included Wood Duck, American Wigeon, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe and American Coot. A fly past by a male Northern Harrier was appreciated by all who saw it. After a pleasant few hours, we left to have lunch, before saying our goodbyes to four of the group who were staying on in Vancouver for a few days. We then made our way to Iona Beach for a brief visit, where a Caspian Tern was the highlight. It was then a short drive to the airport, where we said our goodbyes and gave our thanks to Blair.

Day 14

Thursday 25th September

Those group members who took the Air Canada flight to Heathrow had the benefit of arriving forty-five minutes ahead of schedule. It was the end of a very good trip to a beautiful part of the world, with some excellent wildlife sightings. Thanks to everyone in the group for always being enthusiastic and cooperative, and to Blair and all the staff at the Great Bear Lodge.



Humpback and shearwaters by Blair Dudek



Surfbird by Barrie Cooper

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		September 2025											
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>							1					✓
Snow Goose	<i>Anser caerulescens</i>												1
Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		120					2		7			5
Mute Swan - I	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		10										
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</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>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>				✓								
Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					
White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>			✓				✓					
Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta americana</i>				✓								
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>						1						
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>							11					✓
Common Merganser (Goosander)	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>	3											✓
Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>		✓										
Eurasian Collared Dove - I	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓		✓							✓
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>					✓							
Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>												H
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>												3
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>												✓

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Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>				✓			✓					
Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>				✓								
Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>		1			3						✓	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓	1							
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	✓			✓			✓				✓	✓
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>				1								
Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>			1									
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>												✓
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>							✓					
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>						1000+						
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		✓						1				
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>												✓
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	✓			✓			✓					✓
Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>					✓		✓					
Surfbird	<i>Calidris virgata</i>					✓		✓					
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓				✓					
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>		1		1								
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓					
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	4											
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>						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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
(Thayer's) Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides thayeri</i>							1					
Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>			✓			✓						
Marbled Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>					✓							

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Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cepphus columba</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓					
Common Murre (Guillemot)	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓			✓						
Red-throated Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	2			1							1	
Pacific Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>				1								
Common Loon (Great Northern Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>	6		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Fork-tailed Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates furcatus</i>						✓						
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>						600+						
Short-tailed Shearwater	<i>Ardenna tenuirostris</i>						2500+						
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>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1										
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>										1		1
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Astur cooperii</i>	1											1
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	1											✓
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>		5	1		3	2	✓	✓	✓	✓		1
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	✓										✓	
Northern Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium californicum</i>						1						
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red-breasted Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus ruber</i>												1
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>				1								1
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>				H								
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	2	✓	✓	✓					1			✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				2							1	1
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1		1								1
Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	1	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

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Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>			3	✓	✓		✓					
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>			✓									
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	✓											✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1											3
American Bushtit	<i>Psaltirparus minimus</i>												✓
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>		✓	✓		✓							
Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>												1
Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>												✓
Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>					✓		1					
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>			1									✓
Common Starling - I	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>						H						
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>						2			1			
House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓
American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	1			✓			✓					
Purple Finch	<i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>							2					✓
House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>						✓						✓
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>					✓							
Red Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>					✓	✓	✓					
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>							✓					
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓					
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	✓				✓							✓
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓					✓
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</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>	2						1					
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	1											2
Audubon's Warbler	<i>Setophaga auduboni</i>												3

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Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>							1					

Mammals

I=Introduced		September 2025											
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓											✓
Eastern Gray Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓											✓
North American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>		✓	1		✓							
Little Brown Myotis	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>											1	
Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>				✓		✓						
North American River Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>					6		1					
American Mink	<i>Neogale vison</i>							1					
Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>						✓						
California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		10	✓									
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		35		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
American Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>		3			3							
Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i>							5	3	5			
Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>	1											
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	✓		✓									
Gray Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>			2									
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	2				3	11					6	
Common Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>						9						
Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Sagmatias obliquidens</i>						150						
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			3	3								

Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name
Red-eared Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>

Fishes

Common name	Scientific name
Chum Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus keta</i>
Pink (Humpback) Salmon	<i>Oncorhynchus gorbuscha</i>

Butterflies & moths

Common name	Scientific name
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Isabella Tiger Moth (larva)	<i>Pyrrharctia isabella</i>

Molluscs

Common name	Scientific name
Pacific Banana Slug	<i>Ariolimax columbianus</i>