

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

AN INTRODUCTORY BIRDING TOUR

JULY 18 – 22, 2009

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

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Puffins, grouse, oystercatchers, crossbills, dippers, sapsuckers, and murrelets. That's an eye-catching array of birds to fit into a short tour—with the added bonus of brilliant displays of wildflowers and magnificent mountain and coastal scenery. Our Pacific Northwest Introductory Tour catches a five-day glimpse of the region at one of its best seasons for nature travel.

Meeting in Seattle, we wasted little time, as the birding began an hour later just south of Puget Sound. Along the upper reaches of Scatter Creek, an area we also visited the next morning, we were quickly into some Western specialty birds. A male Western Tanager perched just overhead, its red face a tropical match to its yellow body. Black-headed Grosbeaks, boldly-patterned in black and orange, fed on native serviceberries alongside cranberry-hued Purple Finches. A MacGillivray's Warbler, typically a shy species, popped out and stared down the group for a long moment. During dinner at my home in the country, we watched Rufous Hummingbirds buzz furiously around the yard, with California Quail and Western Scrub-Jays in the background. In the same area, we turned up Black-throated Gray and Orange-crowned warblers, Bushtits, Willow Flycatcher, and Hutton's Vireo, as well as Red-breasted Sapsucker and a family group of Pileated Woodpeckers.

Then we headed to the scenic Olympic Peninsula just a couple of hours away, where we spent most of the tour. The Peninsula is home to the steep-sided Olympic Mountains, still showing snow at the top in mid-summer, as well as the immense bays that give western Washington its mild climate and ready access to marine birds. With two full days to explore up into the mountains and along the shoreline, we spent our nights in a forest edge lodge in Sequim, close to great dining.

We had great views of a bounty of seabirds. As we walked the gravel beach at the mouth of one bay, we scoped Rhinoceros Auklets with beaks full of silvery anchovies and Pigeon Guillemots flashing their bright red feet as they dove. And at a tide rip just a bit farther down the beach we found what the group had been hoping for the most—Tufted Puffins. Although only a few dozen nest nearby, we had close views of several puffins in full breeding regalia of immense orange bills and long blonde head plumes. We also rode the ferry across Admiralty Inlet from Port Townsend to Whidbey Island. It's a truly beautiful setting, with the Victorian homes of Port Townsend against the blue water, Mt. Baker in the distance, and guillemots nesting under the ferry landing. And it's one of the best inshore seabird crossings in the Northwest, as we saw several pairs of endangered Marbled Murrelets from the ferry bow. Other shoreline birding gave us nice views of Black Oystercatchers, a few Black Turnstones, and dozens of Harlequin Ducks as they walked or swam alongside a bunch of basking harbor seals. Along a fast-flowing river, we watched an American Dipper as it preened.

A morning drive into Olympic National Park would take us from sea level up to over 5,000 feet elevation, with dramatic changes in vegetation and birds en route. At mid-elevation, a hen Sooty Grouse stood at the roadside, then escorted her half-grown chicks across the road. In one tall stand

of firs, a Varied Thrush sang its eerie notes again and again, but we couldn't locate it from any angle. As we looked for the thrush, a flock of Red Crossbills perched atop a fir tree, offering amazing views of their crossed bill tips. A bit later, fortunately, a less shy Varied Thrush perched in the open atop a dead tree, and we studied it in the spotting scope for minutes. A family of Gray Jays flew in silently near the road, a species we would get to know even better when we picnicked near the summit. Dozens of species of wildflowers graced the roadside meadows: slender bog orchids, colorful monkeyflowers, orange lilies, blue larkspurs, lupines, penstemons, paintbrushes, asters, carnivorous butterworts, and an endemic harebell—an amazing concentration of form and color that reaches its peak here in mid-July.

Among lots of highlights, one moment stands out. We had pulled off on the edge of the road into the Olympic Mountains to check a flower when we realized we were parked alongside a tiny spring splashing down a nearly vertical set of rocks—the whole spot no more than five feet tall. Shrubby alders reached their branches on both sides of the spring. A rustle of feathers in the alders turned out to be a Chestnut-backed Chickadee, preening after a bath in the spring. Other chickadees came to bathe. Then a Rufous Hummingbird clung to one of the rocks, letting the spring run over its back. A Pine Siskin joined the bathing action and then, in a sudden flash of color, an Evening Grosbeak darted in for a shower—the only one we saw during the tour. And the flower we had pulled over to look at? It was Piper's bellflower, a pale blue flower, growing right out of the rocks, that is endemic to the Olympic Mountains.

ITINERARY

Day 1, July 18: The group met at 2:30 p.m. at Seatac Airport then drove directly south to Tumwater and checked in at the Guesthouse Suites. Shortly after, we were in Tenino, birding at Bob and Sally's house and along the upper reaches of Scatter Creek nearby followed by a get-acquainted dinner at Bob and Sally's. Night at Guesthouse Suites.

Day 2, July 19: After breakfast at the Guesthouse, we returned to Tenino and upper Scatter Creek, adding to the previous day's sightings in the area. By mid-morning we left Tenino and drove north along Hood Canal stopping for lunch in Brinnon. We birded after lunch in the forest along Dosewallips River Rd., and later at Diamond Pt. near the mouth of Discovery Bay before we checked in at Sequim Bay Lodge. After a break, went to dinner at Dockside Grill in Sequim. First of three nights at Sequim Bay Lodge.

Day 3, July 20: After an early breakfast at Chestnut Cottage in Pt. Angeles, we made a morning trip up from Pt. Angeles to Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park stopping to bird and look at wildflowers along the 17 mile route to the 5200' summit. We picnicked atop Hurricane Ridge, with help from Gray Jays. During the drive back down, we made a series of photo stops, birded among the huge conifers at the lower campground, and stopped at the visitors' center. This afternoon, we birded at Ediz Hook in Port Angeles before returning to bird roadside ponds in Sequim followed by a visit to one of Sequim's lavender farms, and then bird at the mouth of the Dungeness River. Dinner at Sawadee Thai; second night at Sequim Bay Lodge.

Day 4, July 21: Pre-breakfast birding behind lodge. After breakfast in Sequim, we re-visited Diamond Pt. with quick success in finding puffins, then birded along the Quilcene River (near the hatchery) and up Mt. Walker, taking in the geographic panorama from two high elevation viewpoints. We had a

picnic at Falls View Campground in Olympic National Forest. Driving south past Brinnon, birded a roadside area just south of Pleasant Cove Marina, near an active Osprey nest. Took a late afternoon ferry (on foot) from Port Townsend to Whidbey Island, birding enroute, then made the same crossing back to Pt. Townsend, where we had dinner at Public House Grill. Final night at Sequim Bay Lodge.

Day 5, July 22: Pre-breakfast birding across the road from the lodge. After breakfast in Sequim, began the drive toward the ferry crossing, with one detour to bird on a forest road up above Blyn at the bottom of Sequim Bay. Drove south to cross Hood Canal, caught the Kingston-Edmonds ferry, and birded from the bow. Arrived at Seatac Airport around noon, where the tour ended.

BIRDS

(sightings in *italics* are uncommon or of special note, in ***bold italics*** are very unusual)

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Canada Goose – the non-migratory “Great Basin” (*moffitti*) subspecies

Gadwall – at the Diamond Pt. pond, both adults and ducklings

Mallard

Harlequin Duck – roughly 40 along Ediz Hook, including one male still in fairly colorful plumage

Ruddy Duck – with ducklings, on the roadside ponds outside Sequim

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Sooty Grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosa*). A few years ago, the former Blue Grouse species was split into Sooty Grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosa*), the darker Pacific form, and Dusky Grouse (*D. obscurus*) of the interior West.

California Quail – nice views of a male calling from atop a fence post at Bob and Sally’s

GREBES:

Pied-billed Grebe

CORMORANTS:

Pelagic Cormorant – showing white flank patches in flight

BITTERNS & HERONS:

Great Blue Heron

Green Heron – uncommon in the area, we saw one along Scatter Ck.

AMERICAN VULTURES

Turkey Vulture

EAGLES, HAWKS, FALCONS & ALLIES:

Osprey – several, including a pair at a nest with two downy nestlings

Bald Eagle – a few adults and immatures

Red-tailed Hawk

Merlin – quite a surprise, possibly a nesting family group in the Olympic NP campground; the adult seen was clearly of the “Black Merlin” (*Falco columbarius suckleyi*) which is resident along the northwest coast of North America.

RAILS & COOTS:

Virginia Rail – heard along upper Scatter Ck.

American Coot

PLOVERS, SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

Killdeer – daily on the flats near Sequim Bay
Black Oystercatcher – scoped on Ediz Hook, where a pair was hanging out on a raft of logs
Ruddy Turnstone – uncommon in the area, we saw a bright, breeding plumage bird
Black Turnstone – a couple playing hide-and-seek along the Ediz Hook log raft
Sanderling
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Long-billed Dowitcher – still in bright rufous breeding plumage

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

Bonaparte's Gull – a few early returning migrants
Heermann's Gull – distinctive gulls with bright red bills and very dark bodies
Ring-billed Gull – a few
California Gull – abundant mid-summer visitors to the area
Western Gull – a few along the Strait of Juan de Fuca
Glaucous-winged Gull – the common resident large gull of the area, some hybridizing with Western Gulls
Caspian Tern – with bright red bills and raucous squawks

AUKS:

Common Murre – two seen on the Whidbey Is. ferry crossing
Pigeon Guillemot – quite a few of these red-footed alcids, most close to shore
Marbled Murrelet – a few pairs were seen flying by the bow on the ferry to Whidbey Is.
Rhinoceros Auklet – locally abundant, we had many good views
Tufted Puffin – at most 20 pairs nest on Protection Is.; we were lucky to see four of them in their most striking plumage, with huge orange bills and long blonde head plumes

PIGEONS & DOVES:

Rock Pigeon
Band-tailed Pigeon – mostly seen in flight, near Tenino and along in the Olympic Peninsula forest
Eurasian Collared-Dove – a recently established species in the area, ever more widely seen
Mourning Dove – a few seen locally near Tenino and Sequim

SWIFTS:

Vaux's Swift – brief views along the road up to Hurricane Ridge

HUMMINGBIRDS:

Rufous Hummingbird – Bob and Sally's yard was busy with immatures, and we saw others here and there during the tour, including one bathing in a roadside spring

KINGFISHERS:

Belted Kingfisher – noisy and conspicuous, especially along Sequim Bay

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:

Red-breasted Sapsucker – great views of one perched alertly on a dead branch
Downy Woodpecker – near Tenino, one of the darker bellied Northwest forms
Hairy Woodpecker – at over 4000' along Hurricane Ridge Rd.
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker – a family group called repeatedly, flew back and forth, and perched for good views along the road along upper Scatter Ck.

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES

Olive-sided Flycatcher – singing from the tall tree tops behind the Sequim Bay Lodge

Willow Flycatcher – seen well at several locations

Hammond's Flycatcher – mostly heard, both near Tenino and at Falls View Campground

Pacific-slope Flycatcher – seen especially well in the tall, shady forest at Heart O' the Hills Campground in Olympic National Park

VIREOS

Cassin's Vireo – singing the first afternoon in the tall Douglas-firs

Hutton's Vireo – many good views along upper Scatter Ck.

Warbling Vireo – heard, and glimpsed near Tenino

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Gray Jay – first a family group in the Subalpine Firs along the Hurricane Ridge Rd., then quite a flurry of them at our picnic tables at the top of the road

Steller's Jay – surprisingly secretive, heard a few times and glimpsed the final day in Seattle

Western Scrub-Jay – bold sentinels around Sally and Bob's yard

American Crow

Northwestern Crow – the smaller, hoarser-voiced crows along the marine edge

Common Raven – seen daily, often in good voice

SWALLOWS & MARTINS:

Purple Martin – a few at nest sites on the old pilings near the mouth of the Dungeness River; only a few hundred breed around Puget Sound and nearby

Tree Swallow

Violet-green Swallow – the most abundant swallow locally

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Cliff Swallow

Barn Swallow

TITMICE through CREEPERS:

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – great views along the road up to Hurricane Ridge

Bushtit – a flock the first afternoon

Red-breasted Nuthatch – most with heavily worn breast feathers showing little color

Brown Creeper – heard several places

WRENS & DIPPERS:

Bewick's Wren – good views along upper Scatter Ck.

Winter Wren – amazing views of a singing male at Heart O' the Hills Campground

American Dipper – one posed on rock in the Quilcene River for extended scope study

KINGLETS:

Golden-crowned Kinglet

THRUSHES & ALLIES:

Swainson's Thrush – singing and calling many places, seen peering out from the leaves

Hermit Thrush – heard along the road up to Hurricane Ridge

American Robin

Varied Thrush – heard at length singing its amazing notes, then seen extremely well when a fresh plumaged immature posed for scope views

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling

WAXWINGS:

Cedar Waxwing – seen widely throughout the tour

WOOD WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler – good views the first afternoon

Yellow-rumped Warbler – a handsome male “Audubon’s” near Hurricane Ridge

Black-throated Gray Warbler – seen near Tenino

Townsend's Warbler – a couple at one of the Mt. Walker overlooks

MacGillivray's Warbler – an amazing view of a very secretive warbler, along upper Scatter Ck.

Common Yellowthroat – a very confiding male near the top of the road up the hill outside Tenino

Wilson's Warbler – especially great views at Heart O' the Hills Campground

TANAGERS:

Western Tanager – seem very well several times, including colorful red-faced males

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Spotted Towhee

Savannah Sparrow – singing from a fence post at a lavender farm

Song Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow – singing around the Sequim Bay Lodge

Dark-eyed Junco

GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS:

Black-headed Grosbeak – seen very well at Bob and Sally’s feeders

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:

Red-winged Blackbird

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

FINCHES:

Purple Finch – seen around Tenino, at the feeders and elsewhere, including bright cranberry colored males

House Finch

Red Crossbill – surprisingly prevalent; we even saw one sitting atop a piling along Hood Canal

Pine Siskin – seen best in a roadside flurry of birds just below Hurricane Ridge summit

American Goldfinch

Evening Grosbeak – one came in to bathe briefly at a roadside spring where we also saw a Rufous

Hummingbird and Chestnut-backed Chickadees bathing

OLD WORLD SPARROWS:

House Sparrow

MAMMALS & OTHER VERTEBRATES

Eastern Cottontail – non-native

Townsend’s Chipmunk

“Black-tailed” Deer (form of Mule Deer)

Harbor Seal – ubiquitous along the marine edge

WILDFLOWERS and OTHER PLANTS, SHRUBS AND TREES

(seen along Hurricane Ridge road, Mt. Walker Rd., and lowland sites)

ARUM FAMILY

Skunk Cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*) – yellow

BELLFLOWER FAMILY

Scouler's Bluebell (*Campanula scouleri*) – pale blue

American Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) – pale blue

BLADDERWORT FAMILY

Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) – purple/blue

BLUEBELL FAMILY

Piper's Bellflower (*Campanula piperi*) – pale blue

American Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) – pale blue

BUCKWHEAT FAMILY

American Bistort (*Polygonum bistortoides*) - white

BUTTERCUP FAMILY

Sitka Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*) - red

Pale Larkspur (*Delphinium glaucum*) – purple/blue

Rockslide Larkspur (*Delphinium glareosum*) – purple/blue

EVENING PRIMROSE FAMILY

Fireweed (*Epilobium/Chamerion angustifolium*) - pink

Smooth Willow-herb (*Epilobium glaberrimum*) – pink/red

FIGWORT FAMILY

Elephant's Head (*Pedicularis groenlandica*) – pink

Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) – white/pink/purple

Scarlet/Common Red Paintbrush (*Castilleja miniata*) – red (variable)

Large Mountain Monkeyflower (*Mimulus tilingi*) - yellow

Sicketop Lousewort/Parrot's Beak (*Pedicularis racemosa*) – white/pink

Magenta Paintbrush (*Castilleja parviflora olympica*) – pinkish purple (Olympic Mts.)

Woodland Beard-Tongue (*Nothochelone nemorosa*) – purple

HEATH FAMILY

Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) – white/pink

Red Mountain Heather (*Phyllodoce empetrifomis*) - red

HONEYSUCKLE FAMILY

Twinflower (*Linna borealis*) - pink

LILY FAMILY

Columbia Lily (*Lilium columbianum*) - orange

Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*) - pink

Green False Hellebore (*Veratrum viride*) - greenish

Sticky False Asphodel (*Tofieldia glutinosa*) - white

MINT FAMILY

Cooley's/Great Hedge-Nettle (*Stachys chamisonis cooleyae*) – red/purple

MUSTARD FAMILY

Western Wallflower (*Erysimum capitatum*) – yellow

American Searocket (*Cakile edentula*) - pink

ORCHID FAMILY

White Bog Orchid (*Platanthera dilatata*) - white

Slender Bog/Rein Orchid (*Platanthera stricta*) – greenish white

PARSLEY FAMILY

Cow-parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) – white

Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) – white

Martindale's Lomatium (*Lomatium martindalei*) - yellow

PEA FAMILY

Large-leaved Lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus burkei*) - blue

Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) – yellow

Western Hedysarum (*Hedysarum occidentale*) – red/purple

PHLOX FAMILY

Spreading Phlox (*Phlox diffusa*) - white

Showy Jacob's-ladder (*Polemonium pulcherrimum*) – blue

PURSLANE FAMILY

Siberian Springbeauty (*Claytonia sibirica*) – pink/white

ROSE FAMILY (including some shrub-like forms)

Large-leaved Avens (*Geum macrophyllum*)

Baldhip Rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) - pink

Nootka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*) - pink

Western Thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflora*) - white

Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*) – pink; salmon berries

Ocean-spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) – creamy white

Douglas' Spirea (*Spirea douglasii*) – pink

Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus discolor*) – white to pink

Evergreen Blackberry (*Rubus laciniatus*) – white to pink

Trailing Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) – white

Blackcap Raspberry (*Rubus leucodermis*) – white

STONECROP FAMILY

Broad-leaved Sedum (*Sedum spathulifolium*) - yellow

ST. JOHN'S WORT FAMILY

St.-John's-Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

SUNFLOWER FAMILY

Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) - white

Pearly-everlasting (*Alaphalis margaritacea*) - white

Woolly Sunflower (*Eriophyllum lanatum*) - yellow

Olympic Mountain Aster (*Aster paucicapitatus*) – white

Alpine Aster (*Aster alpigenus*) - purple

Northern Wormwood (*Artemisia campestris*) – white/green

Ox-eye-daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) - white

Cat's Ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) - yellow

Indian (or Edible) Thistle (*Cirsium edule*) - red
Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) – pink/purple
Puget Sound or Pacific Gumplant (*Grindelia integrifolia*) – yellow
Rayless/Nodding Arnica (*Arnica parryi*) - yellow
Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) – yellow
Tansy Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) - yellow
Chickory (*Cichorium intybus*) – blue

VALERIAN FAMILY

Sitka Valerian (*Valeriana sitchensis*) – white/pink

WATERLEAF FAMILY

Narrow-sepaled Phacelia (*Phacelia leptosepala*) - white

WINTERGREEN FAMILY

Pipsissewa/Prince's Pine (*Chimaphila umbellata*) – pink
Common Pink Pyrola (*Pyrola asarifolia*) – pink/purple

SHRUBS

Sitka Mountain Ash (*Sorbus sitchensis*) – white/cream
Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) - pink
White-flowered Rhododendron (*Rhododendron albiflorum*) - white
Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa pubens*) – white flower/red berry
Blue Elderberry – (*Sambucus caerulea*) – white flower/blue berry
Red Huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*) – pink flower/red berry
Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) – white flower
Hairy Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos columbiana*) – pinkish flower/blackish berry
Scot's Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) - yellow
Cascade Oregon Grape (*Mahonia/Berberis nervosa*) – yellow
Tall Oregon Grape (*Mahonia/Berberis aquifolium*) – yellow
Black Hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)
Western Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) – pink flower/red berry
Devil's Club (*Oplopanax horridus*) – greenish white/red berry

TREES

Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
Mountain Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*)
Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*)
Subalpine Fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*)
Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*)
Western White Pine (*Pinus monticola*)
Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
Garry/Oregon White Oak (*Quercus garryana*)
Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)
Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*)
Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*)
Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*)
Oregon Ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*)
Black Cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera*)
Bitter Cherry (*Prunus emarginata*)