

**WASHINGTON:
SEPTEMBER MIGRATION
IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

SEPTEMBER 2 – 10, 2009

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

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In early September, migrating birds concentrate along the Pacific Northwest's stream and forest edges, marine bays and coastal shorelines, and over the ocean itself. Our September Pacific Northwest tour is timed to best take advantage of these vast movements of birds, and in a natural setting that ranks among the most beautiful on the continent. Our 2009 tour produced many highlights, as we birded from Seattle to the Pacific Coast, and then north along the Olympic Peninsula before crossing the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Vancouver Island, and then on to the British Columbia mainland. The extensive loop through varied habitats over nine days turned up an admirable list of birds, which we combined with some fine dining and scenic splendor.

We enjoyed excellent weather and seas on our privately chartered pelagic trip which took us nearly 40 miles out into the Pacific, beyond the edge of the Continental Shelf. The ocean birding off Westport offered a remarkable series of highlights: we had close views of several powerful South Polar Skuas—two coasted right over our heads—and good studies of all three jaeger species. Dozens of Black-footed Albatrosses came in close to the boat, and on the return trip the cry went out that a Laysan Albatross had been spotted. The skipper closed in on the Laysan and everyone got a good look at a bird that is seen only a few times each year off Westport. Other seabirds seen on the pelagic trip included both Red and Red-necked phalaropes, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Sabine's Gull, Tufted Puffin, Cassin's and Rhinoceros auklets, and thousands of Pink-footed and Sooty shearwaters.

Most days of the tour allowed for birding along tidal shorelines, and as a result we found 27 species of shorebirds. A tawny juvenal Pacific Golden-Plover turned up along Canada's Boundary Bay, alongside hundreds of Black-bellied Plovers—some still in fancy breeding plumage. We had exceptional views of all the seasonal "rockpipers": Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, and Black and Ruddy turnstones. At Cattle Point near Victoria, B.C., we watched Surfbirds and turnstones from a distance of thirty feet as they foraged over the bay-side rocks, and while Black Oystercatchers whistled in the background. While checking for shorebirds along the Port Angeles waterfront, we also had great views of Marbled Murrelet (endangered in the region), Red-necked Grebes in breeding plumage, and Harlequin Ducks.

Our tour took us into the Olympic Mountains too, where we searched for specialty birds. Sooty Grouse foraged near the roadside along the Dosewallips River and near Hurricane Ridge. Not far from the second group of grouse, we came upon a flock of Pine Grosbeaks—a first for the tour in its nine-year run. Red Crossbills posed for terrific views, and a family group of Varied Thrushes hopped along in front of the group during a stroll through a stand of old growth forest. At another spot, an American Dipper twosome chased one another along a mountain stream as a flock of Vaux's Swifts soared overhead.

Many migrant songbirds were still on the move. We found small flocks of warblers, including Wilson's, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, Yellow, and Orange-crowned. A few Western Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks were still preparing for the migration to Mexico, as were immature Rufous Hummingbirds. Other migrants included Willow Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, and Swainson's Thrush.

Sky Larks, a much anticipated bird for the tour, were found readily in the crop lands north of Victoria—their only foothold in North America. And all five of the region's woodpeckers turned up, including Red-breasted Sapsucker, a Pacific specialty.

Among the most memorable sights of the tour were those of spectacle: thousands upon thousands of Northern Pintails, sharing the Boundary Bay tidal mud with Green-winged Teal and American Wigeons, as Peregrine Falcons sat close by; hundreds of Western Sandpipers and a few Sanderlings sharing a high tide roost on massive rocks just off the shoreline, all fluttering as one when large waves broke below them; thousands of Barn Swallows converging on fence lines during a rain shower; hundreds of Violet-green Swallows staging to migrate; and thousands of shearwaters cruising low over the waves en route to their nesting islands near New Zealand.

Itinerary

- Day 1** Wednesday, September 2: Get-acquainted dinner in Seattle. Night in Seattle.
- Day 2** Thursday, September 3: After breakfast in Seattle, we drove south to spend the morning birding in the Tenino/upper Scatter Creek area and at Bob and Sally's house, where we also picnicked. Began the drive west toward the coast, with one stop in Capitol Forest near Oakville and another at Bottle Beach near Ocosta. Continued west to Westport on the Pacific coast. Dinner at Half Moon Bay; first of two nights at Chateau Westport.
- Day 3** Friday, September 4: Full day pelagic trip (6:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.) out of Westport to beyond the edge of the Continental Shelf/Grays Canyon. Late afternoon visit to Tokeland waterfront. Dinner at Bennett's in Grayland. Night at Chateau Westport.
- Day 4** Saturday, September 5: After breakfast at the Chateau, birded at Midway Beach then, as rain showers began, on to Hoquiam treatment ponds; then drove toward Ocean Shores for lunch. Birded several spots on Ocean Shores Peninsula: Pt. Brown jetty, Oyhut Wildlife Area, and Bill's Spit. Dinner at Alec's and night in Ocean Shores.
- Day 5** Sunday, September 6: After breakfast at the motel, birded the base of Pt. Brown jetty before leaving the Ocean Shores area. Returned east and then north along Hood Canal, with lunch in Brinnon. Drove out along the Dosewallips River, then north to Quilcene hatchery and Crocker Lake before continuing on to Pt. Angeles. Dinner at Fiesta Jalisco and first of two nights at Best Western Olympic Lodge in Pt. Angeles.
- Day 6** Monday, September 7: Morning birding in Olympic National Park up the road to Hurricane Ridge, where clouds still enshrouded the high elevations. Birded back down along the park road, then had lunch at Chestnut Cottage in Pt. Angeles. Birded Ediz Hook then, after a break at the hotel, continued on to Dungeness waterfront and also birded along Jamestown Road and Sequim Bay. Dinner at Sawadee Thai in Sequim. Second of two nights in Pt. Angeles.
- Day 7** Tuesday, September 8: Took first Black Ball Ferry across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Victoria, B.C., birding from the deck enroute. Birded north of Victoria birded in the Saanich farm fields for Sky Larks. Lunch in Central Saanich, then birded in Victoria at Rithet's Bog and Cattle Point before driving north to catch 4:00 p.m. ferry from Swartz Bay to Tsawwassen. Dinner at Alfa in Tsawwassen. Night at Coast Tsawwassen.
- Day 8** Wednesday, September 9: After breakfast in Tsawwassen, we birded Boundary Bay before a coffee break in Ladner during a rain shower. Drove to the Iona Ponds at south

edge of Vancouver to bird, then returned to Ladner for lunch at Sharkey's. Late afternoon at Reifel Sanctuary. Dinner at Alfa and second night at Coast Tsawwassen.

Day 9 Thursday, September 10: Departed south from Tsawwassen after breakfast, stopped along Boundary Bay, then crossed into the U.S. After a birding stop at Blaine waterfront, continued south through to Seatac Airport, arriving at 12:30 p.m.

BIRD LIST

[unexpected/unusual sightings in *italics*; rarities in ***bold italics***]

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Canada Goose - of the non-migratory "Great Basin" form (*moffitti*)
Mute Swan – enroute to Reifel Sanctuary, we saw a few along Deas Slough
Wood Duck – seen best at Reifel
Gadwall
American Wigeon – many hundreds in eclipse plumage at Dungeness and Boundary Bay
Mallard
Cinnamon Teal – a few in eclipse plumage at the Tenino mill pond
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail – by the thousands along Boundary Bay
Green-winged Teal
Greater Scaup
Harlequin Duck – along the Pt. Angeles waterfront, including some males in decent plumage
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Barrow's Goldeneye – two with scaup were a surprise for this early in the season
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser – a few at Ocean Shores, recently returned migrants

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Sooty Grouse – good views of two along the Dosewallips River road, and then three more in the mist near Hurricane Ridge; Sooty Grouse was recently split as *Dendragapus fuliginosus*, from former Blue Grouse species
California Quail – seen best around Tenino, including in Bob and Sally's yard

LOONS:

Red-throated Loon – both colorful adults and summering first year birds
Pacific Loon – flying over on the pelagic trip
Common Loon – arriving in substantial numbers, some in lovely breeding plumage

GREBES:

Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe – the final morning, there were several on the Blaine waterfront
Red-necked Grebe – in fine color, seen best as we waited for the ferry out of Pt. Angeles
Western Grebe - on the Blaine waterfront, in the distance

TUBENOSES

Black-footed Albatross – dozens seen on the pelagic trip, some right at the rail
Laysan Albatross – one during the return leg of the pelagic trip, within sight of land; this species is only seen a couple times a year on Westport trips
Northern Fulmar – from very light to very dark forms
Pink-footed Shearwater – over 1200 were counted on the pelagic; others were seen on the ferry crossing of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, definitely an unusual event and a tour first
Sooty Shearwater – thousands on the pelagic, more on the ferry to Victoria
Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel – zipping close by the boat

PELICANS:

Brown Pelican – while dining on the Westport waterfront, we watched a thousand or more fly in at sunset to a night roost along the harbor

CORMORANTS:

Double-crested Cormorant

Brandt's Cormorant

Pelagic Cormorant

BITTERNS & HERONS:

American Bittern – Tina saw one in flight at Reifel Sanctuary

Great Blue Heron

Green Heron – Mary Ellen spotted one on an Ocean Shores canal edge

AMERICAN VULTURES

Turkey Vulture

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

Osprey

Bald Eagle – best view was of one perched overhead along Hood Canal

Northern Harrier

Cooper's Hawk – an immature perched half hidden in a tree near Tsawwassen

Red-tailed Hawk – seen mostly in the final days of the tour

FALCONS:

Merlin – one over the Sky Lark fields, another along Boundary Bay

Peregrine Falcon – at least six for the trip; the two perched side-by-side on a Boundary Bay log offered a wonderful view

RAILS & COOTS:

Virginia Rail – heard near Iona

American Coot

CRANES:

Sandhill Crane – heard at Reifel

PLOVERS:

Black-bellied Plover – hundreds along Boundary Bay, some still showing lots of black

Pacific Golden-Plover – one juvenal, nicely scoped along Boundary Bay

Semipalmated Plover

Killdeer

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

Black Oystercatcher – a few at close at Cattle Pt.

Greater Yellowlegs – side by side with Lessers

Lesser Yellowlegs

Solitary Sandpiper – two at the Tenino mill pond were a nice surprise

Willet

Wandering Tattler – good scope views at Pt. Brown jetty

Whimbrel

Marbled Godwit – hundreds at Tokeland

Ruddy Turnstone – one mixed in with Black Turnstones at Ediz Hook

Black Turnstone – chattering flocks along the rocky beaches and jetties

Surfbird – five at Cattle Pt. near Victoria were a welcome sight

Red Knot – one among Black-bellied Plovers along Boundary Bay

Sanderling – roosting with Western Sandpipers at Ocean Shores

Western Sandpiper – widespread; wonderful view of hundreds at high tide on the rocks near shore at Ocean Shores

Least Sandpiper

Baird's Sandpiper – along Boundary Bay and the nearby turf farm

Pectoral Sandpiper – several small flocks of juvenals
Buff-breasted Sandpiper – one flew by at close range at Oyhut Wildlife Area at Ocean Shores
Short-billed Dowitcher – colorful juvenals
Long-billed Dowitcher – a hundred plus at Reifel
Wilson's Snipe – flushed from the dunes at Iona
Red-necked Phalarope – some very good views at Ocean Shores; there were thousands on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, more at Cattle Pt.

Red Phalarope – one pale gray bird seen well on the pelagic trip

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

South Polar Skua - several on the pelagic, including two that swooped in low right over the boat
Pomarine Jaeger – good views on the pelagic, plus one adult on the ferry crossing to Victoria
Parasitic Jaeger – on the pelagic, and several – including one dark morph – on the Victoria ferry
Long-tailed Jaeger – good views of juvenals and a fully tailed adult on the pelagic
Bonaparte's Gull – David spotted one roosting with other gulls and a Red-throated Loon at Ocean Shores

Heermann's Gull – abundant on the coast and Straits at this point in the late summer

Mew Gull – a small group at the marina on Sequim Bay

Ring-billed Gull

California Gull – abundant at this season

Thayer's Gull – a nice surprise were a 15-20 in Active Passage on the ferry trip to Tsawwassen

Western Gull

Glaucous-winged Gull

Sabine's Gull – on the pelagic trip

Caspian Tern

Common Tern – a single riding a bit of flotsam on the pelagic trip

AUKS:

Common Murre – thousands altogether, between the pelagic and the ferry crossings

Pigeon Guillemot – lots on the Strait of Juan de Fuca

Marbled Murrelet – good scope views from near the base of Ediz Hook; endangered in this region

Cassin's Auklet – on the pelagic trip and one on the crossing to Victoria

Rhinoceros Auklet – scattered numbers on the pelagic trip and ferry crossings

Tufted Puffin – mostly without tufts at this season, we saw three on the pelagic

PIGEONS & DOVES:

Rock Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon – seen best at Bob's house

Eurasian Collared-Dove – increasing; seen at Ocean Shores, Sequim and Ladner

Mourning Dove – surprisingly scarce and local in this part of North America

OWLS:

Great Horned Owl – Barbara spotted a perched one the first morning, near Tenino

SWIFTS:

Vaux's Swift – good views over the Quilcene hatchery on the Olympic Peninsula

HUMMINGBIRDS:

Anna's Hummingbird – at Rithet's Bog in Victoria

Rufous Hummingbird – immatures in Sally and Bob's yard

KINGFISHERS:

Belted Kingfisher

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:

Red-breasted Sapsucker – scoped one a side road near Tenino

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker – several at the Olympic NP campground we walked through

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker – seen well the first morning near Tenino

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES

Willow Flycatcher – on Westham Is. near the entrance to Reifel Sanctuary

Pacific-slope Flycatcher – David saw one near Tenino the first morning

VIREOS

Hutton's Vireo – near Tenino the first morning, small and plump vireos

Warbling Vireo

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Gray Jay – along the Hurricane Ridge Rd., and some of the lowland population near Tenino

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub-Jay – locally, seen near Tenino only

American Crow

Northwestern Crow

Common Raven

LARKS:

Sky Lark – some close views of birds coming up off the ground north of Victoria; this is the only area this species resides in North America

SWALLOWS & MARTINS:

Purple Martin – two young birds at Dungeness, near nest boxes; scarce and local in the region

Violet-green Swallow – still hundreds staging to migrate

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – just one at Ocean Shores, as most have migrated south

Bank Swallow – a few along Boundary Bay and at Reifel

Cliff Swallow – David spotted one or more at Reifel

Barn Swallow – in large flocks, including 1000 or more at the Hoquiam ponds on a damp day

TITMICE through CREEPERS:

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – good views of this Pacific region specialty

Bushtit – after an exciting hunt, we had point blank views of a flock near Dungeness

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

WRENS & DIPPERS:

Bewick's Wren

Winter Wren – we saw this tiny bird near Oakville and in Olympic National Park

Marsh Wren – good look at this skulker in the Reifel salt marsh cattails

American Dipper – a twosome at the Quilcene hatchery

KINGLETS:

Golden-crowned Kinglet – one male flashed the red-orange center of its crown

THRUSHES & ALLIES:

Swainson's Thrush

American Robin

Varied Thrush – some very nice views (Dosewallips R., Olympic NP campground) of what can be a very shy bird

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling

WAGTAILS & PIPITS:

American Pipit – in the Sky Lark fields and along Boundary Bay

WAXWINGS:

Cedar Waxwing – in small to larger flocks

WOOD WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler – seen best along the Westham Island roadside shrub lines

Yellow Warbler – ditto

Yellow-rumped Warbler – fine views of fresh plumaged young “Audubon’s” at Reifel

Black-throated Gray Warbler – seen especially well around Tenino

Townsend's Warbler – David spotted one the first morning near Tenino

Common Yellowthroat

Wilson's Warbler – nice views of males near Tenino

TANAGERS:

Western Tanager – first seen near Crocker Lk., later near Reifel - immatures

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Spotted Towhee

Savannah Sparrow – especially common in the Canadian portion of the tour

Song Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow – a few migrants near Boundary Bay and Reifel

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

GROSBEAKS & BUNTINGS:

Black-headed Grosbeak – a first for the tour, as this species doesn't normally linger into Sept.

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:

Red-winged Blackbird

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

FINCHES:

Pine Grosbeak – a tour first, David picked out a small flock in the mist below Hurricane Ridge

Purple Finch

House Finch

Red Crossbill – superb views of what can be a difficult bird to get to sit still

American Goldfinch

Evening Grosbeak – a flyover at Tenino

OLD WORLD SPARROWS:

House Sparrow

MAMMALS & OTHER VERTEBRATES:

Harbor Porpoise – seen on the pelagic trip and on the ferry crossings

Harbor Seal - ubiquitous on the marine edges

California Sea Lion – in Westport Harbor

Black-tailed Deer - the regional form of Mule Deer

Douglas's Squirrel

Townsend's Chipmunk

Eastern Gray Squirrel – introduced; we saw both the gray and black forms

Eastern Cottontail – introduced

Snowshoe Hare – one in the denser habitats of Ocean Shores

Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*) –the odd, large fish floating on the surface during the pelagic

Blue Shark – several on the pelagic, one about 5 ft. long

Western Toad