

**WASHINGTON  
SEPTEMBER MIGRATION  
IN THE PACIFIC  
NORTHWEST**

**SEPTEMBER 8-16, 2010**

**LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM**

**COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM**

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

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*September concentrates migrating birds along Washington and southern British Columbia's forest edges, bays, coastal shorelines, and over the ocean itself. Our September Migration in the Pacific Northwest tour takes advantage of nature's timing to go in search of songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds during their southward migration. We enjoyed superb weather, an admirable list of birds, great food, and a memorable journey through the scenic Northwest. 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—a loop that ran all the way from Willapa Bay in southwest Washington to Boundary Bay in southeast British Columbia.*

*The first morning of the tour was devoted entirely to birding inland, beginning along Scatter Creek south of Olympia, Washington. A tiny Northern Pygmy-Owl perched for careful scope study, as did a Red-breasted Sapsucker and Evening Grosbeaks. We started our birding that day in the yard of leader Bob Sundstrom, where Band-tailed Pigeons and Purple Finches visited the feeders, Rufous Hummingbirds buzzed the flowers, and a Black-throated Gray Warbler perched atop a garden sculpture. The first of fall Golden-crowned Sparrows shared the ground with Steller's Jays, Western Scrub-Jays, and Spotted Towhees. The same afternoon found us along the coast, where several hundred Marbled Godwits roosted on a jetty while a single Wandering Tattler bobbed on another section of shoreline rocks.*

*On the second day of the tour, a private charter boat took us for a full day in the pelagic zone, 37 miles into the Pacific off Westport, Washington. Highlights were frequent on a day of good sailing weather. A dark South Polar Skua banked close over the boat, flashing its bold white wing markings. Black-footed Albatross came close to the boat, on a day of four shearwater species: Sooty, Pink-footed, Buller's, and a rare for the region Manx Shearwater. There were small flocks of lovely Sabine's Gulls, Tufted Puffins, and Cassin's Auklets bobbing on the surface, and wonderful views of Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels skimming the wave tops. The day proved terrific for marine mammals too. Several of the 14 humpback whales spotted that day came close enough to the boat to nearly spray it with their spouts. And when the boat was idling beyond the edge of the continental shelf, we had an unforgettable encounter with dolphins. A group of northern right whale dolphins, all dark with no dorsal fins, came right at the boat. From a quarter-mile off we watched them porpoising across the surface, continually arcing low over the water. They came close enough for us to hear them splashing as they passed down the side of the boat, to continue on in the same manner, arcing and arcing on into the distance. An amazing experience!*

*By the following day we were focusing on shorebirds, which included a handsome Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Black Turnstones. The shorebird search turned up a Lapland Longspur and, nearby, a rare for the area King Eider swam alongside Surf and White-winged scoters. A day later we drove*

*up the Dosewallips River valley on the east side of the Olympic Mountains. While enjoying the lush fern and moss-covered forest along the river, we came upon two American Dippers atop rocks in the rushing stream. Soon after, we stopped to check out a cloud of Vaux's Swifts, circling low over the low end of the valley. The same afternoon, as we drove slowly up a mountainside in the Olympic National Forest, we stopped abruptly for the first Sooty Grouse of the tour—we would see a dozen altogether. Back along the shoreline again, this time at Sequim Bay, a breeding plumage Pacific Loon swam close enough to shore to dazzle all onlookers.*

*The morning of Day 6 was perfect for a scenic walk along on a subalpine trail at over 5,000 feet in Olympic National Park. Late season wildflowers added color as we encountered small, curious flocks of Gray Jays, and watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk chase a Cooper's Hawk—as a Townsend's Solitaire chased after both. The same afternoon, back at sea level, we had close views of stunning male Harlequin Ducks, as well as Black Oystercatchers, Red-necked Grebes, Pigeon Guillemots, and Rhinoceros Auklets along the shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.*

*Day 7 saw us ferrying across the Strait of Juan de Fuca, from Port Angeles, Washington to scenic Victoria, British Columbia. The tour then continued north through Victoria to some rather unimpressive-looking agricultural fields—unimpressive to look at, but home to Sky Larks, at their only regular breeding area in North America. We soon found about a dozen Sky Larks, sharing the fields with American Pipits and Savannah Sparrows. Later that afternoon we left Vancouver Island for the B.C. mainland, ferrying among the evergreen-covered islands.*

*With a full day to bird near Boundary Bay south of Vancouver, B.C., we covered some of the best shorebirding spots in the Pacific Northwest. No rarities were lurking in the flocks of shorebirds we found, but we had good comparisons of both dowitchers and both yellowlegs, nice views of a rare for the area Stilt Sandpiper, and superb views of Peregrine Falcons perched and stooping on the shorebird flocks. Too soon we were crossing back south into the States, for a farewell dinner together and a chance to reflect on the birds and wildlife of September in the Pacific Northwest—one of the most distinctive and beautiful regions of North America, at an ideal season.*

## **ITINERARY**

**Day 1** Wednesday, September 8: Get-acquainted dinner in Seattle. Night in Seattle.

**Day 2** Thursday, September 9: 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. Late morning drove west to Montesano for lunch, then drove south via Raymond and along the Raymond airport fields then north to Tokeland waterfront. After a break at the hotel, birded Westport marina before dinner at Half Moon Bay. First of two nights at Chateau Westport.

**Day 3** Friday, September 10: Full day pelagic trip (6:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.) out of Westport to beyond the edge of the Continental Shelf/Grays Canyon. Late afternoon visit to Tokeland waterfront. Dinner at Half Moon Bay and second night at Chateau Westport.

**Day 4** Saturday, September 11: After breakfast at the Chateau, birded at Bottle Beach then continued on to Ocean Shores peninsula. Birded the base of Pt. Brown Jetty, then picnicked at the interpretive center. Afternoon birding at the Oyhut Wildlife Area. Dinner at Waves and night in Ocean Shores.

**Day 5** Sunday, September 12: After breakfast at the motel, lefty rainy Ocean Shores area to bird at Hoquiam treatment ponds. Returned east and then north along Hood Canal, then drove out along the Dosewallips

River before lunch in Brinnon. Continued north through Quilcene to bird along the road up Mt. Walker, then a final birding stop at Sequim Bay before continuing on to Pt. Angeles. Dinner at Kokopelli Grill in Port Angeles and first of two nights at Olympic Lodge in Pt. Angeles.

**Day 6** Monday, September 13: Morning birding in Olympic National Park up the road to Hurricane Ridge, where clouds still enshrouded the lower elevations. Primary birding areas were Heart O' the Hills Campground, Hurricane Hill Trail, and Obstruction Pt. Rd. Lunch at Chestnut Cottage in Pt. Angeles. Birded Ediz Hook then, after a break at the hotel, continued on to Dungeness waterfront. Dinner at El Cazador in Sequim. Second of two nights in Pt. Angeles.

**Day 7** Tuesday, September 14: Took first Black Ball Ferry across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Victoria, B.C., birding from the deck as possible, although much of the crossing was fogged in. Birded north of Victoria birded in the Saanich farm fields for Sky Larks. Lunch in Central Saanich, then birded in Victoria at Cattle Point and Rithet's Bog before driving north to catch ferry from Swartz Bay to Tsawwassen. Dinner at Alfa in Tsawwassen. Night at Coast Tsawwassen.

**Day 8** Wednesday, September 15: After breakfast in Tsawwassen, we birded the wooded roadside near McDonald Beach Park, then the nearby Iona Ponds at south edge of Vancouver. Picnicked at Reifel Sanctuary before birding the sanctuary trails and wetlands, then mid-afternoon to Boundary Bay. Crossed south over the U.S. border late afternoon. Dinner and night at Marriott Seattle Airport.

**Day 9** Thursday, September 16: Departures from Seatac Airport.

## **BIRD LIST**

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

### **GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:**

Greater White-fronted Goose – migrant flocks seen at Ocean Shores and Reifel Sanctuary

Canada Goose - of the non-migratory "Great Basin" form (*moffitti*)

Wood Duck – close views of gorgeous Wood Ducks at Reifel

Gadwall

American Wigeon – already flocks of thousands of fall migrants

Mallard - thousands

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail – the most abundant migrant duck on the tide flats

Green-winged Teal – often foraging with Northern Pintails

Ring-necked Duck

Greater Scaup – side by side comparison of scaup species at Hoquiam ponds

Lesser Scaup

**King Eider** – a female on Grays Harbor seen from Ocean Shores, quite rare here

Harlequin Duck – dazzling breeding plumage males at Pt. Angeles

Surf Scoter

White-winged Scoter

Hooded Merganser

Red-breasted Merganser

### **GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:**

Sooty Grouse – Good luck with grouse! We saw the first hen on Mt. Walker, then a hen with three large chicks at Hurricane Ridge visitor center, and then a hen with five chicks along Obstruction Pt. Rd. [Sooty Grouse was recently split as *Dendragapus fuliginosus*, when the former Blue Grouse species was reclassified into Sooty and Dusky grouse.]

California Quail

**LOONS:**

*Pacific Loon* – the breeding plumage loon on Sequim Bay was a sensational looking bird  
Common Loon

**GREBES:**

Pied-billed Grebe  
Red-necked Grebe

**TUBENOSES**

Black-footed Albatross – nearly 40 of the huge dark seabirds graced the pelagic trip  
Northern Fulmar – small numbers, but a wide range of light to dark forms  
Pink-footed Shearwater – a very large number, roughly 1800, were seen!  
Buller's Shearwater – 5 of this handsome seabird species  
Sooty Shearwater – a couple thousand, all headed ultimately for near New Zealand  
**Manx Shearwater** – very rare, although regular, off Grays Harbor; we saw one with Sooties  
Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel – excellent, repeated views of this gray “sea swallow”

**PELICANS:**

Brown Pelican – hundreds on Grays Harbor

**CORMORANTS:**

Double-crested Cormorant – good views of all three cormorant species, including one of each on a Westport buoy  
Brandt's Cormorant – the large, dark-billed cormorant  
Pelagic Cormorant – the slender, dark-billed, iridescent cormorant

**BITTERN & HERONS:**

Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret – one at Tokeland, an unusual addition to this tour's list  
Green Heron – at the Tenino marsh

**AMERICAN VULTURES**

Turkey Vulture

**EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:**

Osprey  
Bald Eagle – the best views were of adults and immatures near Dungeness, where we scoped an adult sitting in a tree top just above us, and a younger bird on a piling in the water  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk – immatures of both accipiters chased one another near Hurricane Ridge  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-tailed Hawk

**FALCONS:**

American Kestrel  
Peregrine Falcon – seen in Washington and B.C., with fine scope views at Reifel Sanctuary

**RAILS & COOTS:**

Virginia Rail – heard at close range at several locations, but unwilling to step into the open  
American Coot

**CRANES:**

Sandhill Crane – great views of one at Reifel, where a pair was raising young; ten others in a field on Westham Island

**PLOVERS:**

Black-bellied Plover  
Semipalmated Plover  
Killdeer

**SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:**

Black Oystercatcher – good scope views at Ediz Hook and Sequim Bay  
Greater Yellowlegs – side by side at Reifel, showing the clear size contrast  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Willet – a handful at Tokeland; scarce in the state  
Wandering Tattler – repeated good views, at Tokeland, Westport, and Ocean Shores  
Whimbrel – one with godwits at Tokeland  
Marbled Godwit – roughly 300 at Tokeland  
Ruddy Turnstone – one juvenile with the first tattler at Tokeland  
Black Turnstone – great views at Ocean Shores jetty and Ediz Hook  
Red Knot  
Sanderling  
Western Sandpiper  
Least Sandpiper  
Pectoral Sandpiper – handsome juveniles, mostly on the B.C. side of the border  
*Stilt Sandpiper* – an unusual visitor to this part of the Northwest (a juvenile at Reifel)  
*Buff-breasted Sandpiper* – one beautiful juvenile at Ocean Shores' Oyhut wildlife area  
Short-billed Dowitcher  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Red-necked Phalarope – small flocks on the pelagic day

**GULLS, & TERNS:**

Bonaparte's Gull  
Heermann's Gull – thousands of small dark gulls, summer visitors from farther south  
Mew Gull – incoming wintering birds, smallest of the typical gray and white gulls  
Ring-billed Gull  
California Gull – by the many thousands, soon to head south  
Western Gull  
Glaucous-winged Gull  
*Glaucous Gull* – very unusual for the season, one pale immature at Westport marina  
*Black-legged Kittiwake* – one or two near the Westport jetty, where annual but scarce  
Sabine's Gull – beauties of the gull world, lots on the pelagic trip  
Caspian Tern

**SKUAS & JAEGERES**

South Polar Skua – 11 counted on the pelagic trip, including one that banked right over the boat  
Pomarine Jaeger – both jaegers in small numbers on the pelagic trip  
Parasitic Jaeger

**AUKS:**

Common Murre – common closer to shore on the pelagic, many on the ferry crossings  
Pigeon Guillemot  
Cassin's Auklet – good views of tiny alcids on the pelagic  
Rhinoceros Auklet

Tufted Puffin – a few on the pelagic trip

**PIGEONS & DOVES:**

Rock Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon – seen best around Bob and Sally’s feeders

Eurasian Collared-Dove – now widespread in the region

Mourning Dove

**OWLS:**

*Northern Pygmy-Owl* – always a lucky-to-see bird, we had marvelous scope views near Tenino

**SWIFTS:**

Vaux's Swift – a flock of hundreds along the lower Dosewallips Valley

**HUMMINGBIRDS:**

Anna's Hummingbird – at a feeder north of Victoria

Rufous Hummingbird – a few immatures and one adult at Bob and Sally’s

**KINGFISHERS:**

Belted Kingfisher

**WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:**

Red-breasted Sapsucker – good views of this Pacific coastal species near Tenino

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker – of the “red-shafted” form

Pileated Woodpecker – one flashed into view along the Dosewallips road

**VIREOS**

Hutton's Vireo – singing and singing in the woods near Tenino

**JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:**

Gray Jay – wonderful views and in-the-hand photos

Steller's Jay – deep blue crested jays, seen best in Bob’s yard the first morning

Western Scrub-Jay – also mostly around Tenino

American Crow

Northwestern Crow

Common Raven

**LARKS:**

*Sky Lark* – in the agricultural fields north of Victoria, at their only location in North America

**SWALLOWS & MARTINS:**

Purple Martin – over the Hoquiam ponds; scarce and local in the Pacific NW

Violet-green Swallow

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Barn Swallow

**TITMICE through CREEPERS:**

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee – good views of the small chickadee with rich brown sides and back

Bushtit

Red-breasted Nuthatch – close looks as they came in to mob the whistled owl

**WRENS & DIPPERS:**

Bewick's Wren

Pacific Wren – A superb view, of one bouncing atop a low post. [Note: The former Winter Wren species has been subdivided into three species: Winter Wren of eastern North American, Pacific Wren of western North America, and Eurasian Wren of temperate Eurasia.]

Marsh Wren

American Dipper – two on the Dosewallips River, scoped as they bobbed and swam

**KINGLETS:**

Golden-crowned Kinglet – flashing yellow and orange in the crown

**THRUSHES & ALLIES:**

Townsend's Solitaire – one chased after a Sharp-shinned Hawk that was itself chasing a Cooper's

Swainson's Thrush

Hermit Thrush

American Robin

**STARLINGS & ALLIES:**

European Starling

**WAGTAILS & PIPITS:**

American Pipit

**WAXWINGS:**

Cedar Waxwing

**WOOD WARBLERS**

Orange-crowned Warbler – one finally popped up in the shrubbery near McDonald Beach

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Black-throated Gray Warbler – great looks at this nifty warbler, including one perched on a metal sculpture in Sally and Bob's garden

Common Yellowthroat

Wilson's Warbler

**TANAGERS:**

Western Tanager – one seen near Tenino, one near McDonald Beach; most had migrated south

**SPARROWS & ALLIES:**

Spotted Towhee

Savannah Sparrow

Fox Sparrow – one of the "Sooty" Fox Sparrow forms, should this species ever be subdivided

Song Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow – just arrived migrants, one the first morning in Bob and Sally's yard

Dark-eyed Junco

*Lapland Longspur* – seen by those who walked out in the dunes edge at Oyhut wildlife area

**BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:**

Red-winged Blackbird

Brewer's Blackbird

**FINCHES:**

Purple Finch

House Finch

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

Evening Grosbeak – scoped atop a conifer, near Tenino

**OLD WORLD SPARROWS:**

House Sparrow

**MAMMALS & OTHER VERTEBRATES**

Humpback Whale – wonderful and close views on the pelagic trip, where 14 were tallied

Northern Right Whale Dolphin – a group of 100+ arced its way across the water, toward and past the pelagic boat, in an amazing show that was one of the trip highlights

Harbor Porpoise – seen on the pelagic trip and ferry crossings

Harbor Seal - ubiquitous on the marine edges

California Sea Lion – near Westport Harbor, on the same buoy with the following

Steller's Sea Lion

Northern Raccoon – two snuck along the waterfront as we got in line for the Pt. Angeles ferry

Black-tailed Deer - the regional form of Mule Deer

Olympic Marmot – endemic to the Olympic Mts.

Douglas's Squirrel

Townsend's Chipmunk

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

Eastern Cottontail – introduced

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

Blue Shark –one on the pelagic, roughly 4 ft. long

Banana Slug – the famous slug of Northwest lore