

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

SEPTEMBER 17–25, 2017

**LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM
LIST COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM**

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

WASHINGTON: SEPTEMBER MIGRATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

September 17–25, 2017

By Bob Sundstrom

The rush of migration in September concentrates birds along Washington and southern British Columbia's mountain ridges, coastal shorelines, and over the ocean itself. The September Migration in the Pacific Northwest tour takes full advantage of nature's timing to showcase shorebirds, seabirds, and songbirds in the midst of southward migration. It seemed like each species we encountered had a unique story to tell: seabirds headed south to such different destinations as Antarctica, New Zealand, and Chile. Shorebirds passing through en route to Central and South America, as well as shorebirds arriving to winter in the Northwest. Post-breeding migrants that had just come north—pelicans, gulls, cormorants—arriving from Baja and places south along the Pacific Coast to reach food-rich waters of the Northwest. And loons and scoters coming south from nesting on tundra ponds across the Arctic, as Fox and Golden-crowned sparrows also arrived from northern breeding areas.

The 2017 tour enjoyed superb weather, an admirable list of birds, a wonderfully congenial group, plus 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 to Whidbey Island and then on to British Columbia—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 to inland birding near Scatter Creek south of Olympia, Washington. Here a Northern Pygmy-Owl perched for fine scope views, as a trio of Hutton's Vireos and a family of Red-breasted Sapsuckers showed their alarm at the hooting owl. In leader Bob Sundstrom's yard, California Quail joined California Scrub-Jays and Steller's Jay at the feeders, Band-tailed Pigeons perched in tree tops, seed feeders were busy with Purple and other finches, while Spotted Towhees, "Sooty" Fox Sparrows, and Golden-crowned Sparrows picked seed off the ground. Both a Cooper's Hawk and a Sharp-shinned put in an appearance.

Shorebirds and seabirds at the coast would occupy us much of the first three days. Our own pelagic charter (delayed a couple of days by weather) took us 30 miles offshore to intercept an array of seabirds, most in southward migration. Beautifully patterned Buller's Shearwaters were a highlight, as were Black-footed Albatrosses that circled the boat on long, bowed wings and then sat just off the stern to sample the chum. Predatory seabirds showed too: hulking South Polar Skuas and two jaeger species. Fancy Sabine's Gulls floated tern-like past the boat, and hundreds of Pink-footed Shearwaters swooped low over the ocean. A stop near a seiner fishing boat revealed hundreds of seabirds, among them a beautiful Laysan Albatross—a great find.

We visited top shorebird spots in Washington and B.C. over the course of the tour. Wandering Tattlers picked their way over coastal boulders, as did Ruddy and Black turnstones. Greater and Lesser yellowlegs posed for an edifying comparison, and two juvenile Stilt Sandpipers, scarce for the region, showed nicely. A swirling flock of 500+ Marbled Godwits was a memorable sight. Freshly plumaged Pectoral Sandpipers shared the high tide line with handsome, tawny young Baird's Sandpipers.

Leaving the Pacific Coast behind, we headed inland into the Olympic Mountains. Right along the roadside in Olympic National Park we enjoyed views of the regional specialty, Sooty Grouse. A Northern Pygmy-Owl posed for us in the tree tops, soon joined by another of its diminutive species. On the same day we spent the late afternoon along the marine shoreline, where Harlequin Ducks preened atop floating logs.

The final two days of the tour took us to the southeast edge of British Columbia where we birded renowned shorebird sites and refuges, and enjoyed splendid seafood. Along the vast estuary of Boundary Bay, migration was again in full view. And a leisurely visit to Reifel Sanctuary nearby, a private bird refuge, was a tour highlight. Hundreds of yellowlegs and dowitchers crowded shallow ponds, lots of lovely ducks were very close at hand, and harriers tilted and swooped across the vast salt marsh at the bay's edge.

ITINERARY

- Day 1** Sunday, September 17: Get-acquainted dinner at Aqua Terra at Marriott, in Seatac. Night in Seatac.
- Day 2** Monday, September 18: After breakfast at hotel, drove south to bird with a first stop at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. Next birded in the upper Scatter Creek area near Tenino, including Bob and Sally's house, before driving west along the Chehalis River Valley to Montesano for lunch. Then on to Westport on the Pacific coast, where we birded the marina area before checking in at hotel. First of three nights at Chateau Westport.
- Day 3** Tuesday, September 19: [Pelagic trip scheduled for today rescheduled to Thursday because of weather.] After breakfast at Chateau, departed to bird shorefront of Westhaven State Park, wooded area along Pirate's Way, then Bottle Beach State Park tide flats. After lunch in Montesano, birded up Wynoochee Valley Rd.
- Day 4** Wednesday, September 20: Drove north and west around Grays Harbor, stopping to bird at Hoquiam treatment ponds, then on to lunch at Galway House in Ocean Shores. After lunch, birded south end of Ocean Shores Peninsula at Point Brown Jetty, treatment ponds, and Oyhut Wildlife Area. Final night Chateau Westport.
- Day 5** Thursday, September 21: Pelagic trip aboard Monte Carlo (6:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.) out of Westport to beyond the edge of Continental Shelf. After change of clothes at hotel, began drive to Port Angeles, departing north along Grays Harbor, east toward Olympia, then north along Hood Canal. Brief stop at Potlatch State Park. Dinner at Timber House in Quilcene, then on to Port Angeles. First of two nights Olympic Lodge in Port Angeles.
- Day 6** Friday, September 22: Morning birding in Olympic National Park along road that climbs up to Hurricane Ridge. Stopped briefly at upper visitor center, and birded out Obstruction Pt. Rd. a few miles. Returned to Port Angeles for lunch at Chestnut Cottage. Afternoon birding along Pt. Angeles waterfront out Ediz Hook and at Marine Life Center. Dinner at Café Garden. Second night in Pt. Angeles.
- Day 7** Saturday, September 23: Departed Olympic Lodge, heading to Dungeness River mouth tide flats. Then to Port Townsend, where rode 11:00 a.m. ferry to Keystone on Whidbey Island, birding from bow of ferry. North on Whidbey Island, crossed Deception Pass, then connected with I-5 north across Canadian Border to Tsawwassen, where checked in at Coast Tsawwassen Hotel. After a short break, birded Boundary Bay tide flats at 104th. Dinner at White Spot. First of two nights at Coast Tsawwassen.
- Day 8** Sunday, September 24: After breakfast at hotel, birded on Westham Island and then at Reifel Sanctuary when they opened for business. Birded along trails and at shorebird ponds. Drove to Tsawwassen ferry jetty, where we scoped to rocky shorelines for

oystercatchers and the bay for diving birds. Late afternoon birding along Boundary Bay at 112th St. Dinner at Sharkey's in Ladner. Second night at Coast Tsawwassen.

Day 9 Monday, September 25: After breakfast at Coast Tsawwassen, crossed south into U.S. and continued directly on toward Seatac Airport.

BIRDS [*italics for uncommon sightings; bold italics for rarities*]

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Cackling Goose – some in both U.S. and Canada

Canada Goose

Mute Swan – several on Deas Slough in British Columbia, where species is established

Wood Duck – at Nisqually, and very close vies at Reifel Sanctuary

Gadwall

American Wigeon – huge flocks, in the thousands, at Dungeness and Boundary Bay

Mallard

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail – large flocks on tidal bays, most males in eclipse plumage

Green-winged Teal

Greater Scaup

Lesser Scaup – both scaup species seen from Tsawwassen jetty

Harlequin Duck – 15 or more at Ediz Hook

Surf Scoter – seen widely on tidal bays

White-winged Scoter – at several spots, including Tsawwassen jetty

Hooded Merganser – nice views of Hoodies on a slough near Sequim Bay and at Reifel

Common Merganser

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

California Quail – best views were in Sally and Bob's yard near Tenino

Ring-necked Pheasant

Sooty Grouse – great view of a hen right along the road up to Hurricane Ridge

GREBES:

Pied-billed Grebe

Horned Grebe – a few, species just arriving from the north

Red-necked Grebe – seen well along the Port Angeles waterfront

Western Grebe – from Tsawwassen jetty

PIGEONS & DOVES:

Rock Pigeon

Band-tailed Pigeon – seen from Bob and Sally's yard

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Mourning Dove – uncommon in the area of the tour

SWIFTS:

Vaux's Swift

HUMMINGBIRDS:

Anna's Hummingbird – at Bob and Sally's feeders and at Reifel feeder

RAILS & COOTS:

Virginia Rail – great views of two on the slough at Bottle Beach marsh

American Coot

CRANES:

Sandhill Crane – four flew in at Nisqually refuge, a surprise for the location

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

Whimbrel – a handsome juvenile at Westhaven State Park

Marbled Godwit – wonderful views of a flock of roughly 500 at Westport harbor, both in the air and on the shoreline

Ruddy Turnstone – seen in the area only in very small numbers

Black Turnstone – seen well at several spots, including Westport marina and Pt. Brown jetty

Surfbird – a couple with Black Turnstones at Pt. Brown

Stilt Sandpiper – at Reifel Sanctuary shorebird ponds, two with many dowitchers and yellowlegs

Sanderling

Dunlin

Baird's Sandpiper – pretty juveniles along Boundary Bay

Least Sandpiper

Pectoral Sandpiper – seen a few places, with roughly 45 at Reifel

Western Sandpiper

Short-billed Dowitcher – at Bottle Beach State Park, where the typical dowitcher in migration

Long-billed Dowitcher – hundreds at Reifel

Wilson's Snipe

Spotted Sandpiper

Wandering Tattler – one each at Westport marina and Pt. Brown

Greater Yellowlegs – easily 200 at Reifel Sanctuary

Lesser Yellowlegs – a handful among Greaters at Reifel

Red-necked Phalarope – two on the pelagic trip

Red Phalarope – 4 on the pelagic

SKUAS & JAEGERS:

South Polar Skua – three of these amazing predators on the pelagic trip

Pomarine Jaeger – just a single bird was seen on the pelagic trip

Parasitic Jaeger – two the pelagic trip

AUKS:

Common Murre

Pigeon Guillemot

Marbled Murrelet – 3 seen from Keystone Ferry

Rhinoceros Auklet

Tufted Puffin – one in duller non-breeding plumage, seen well from the boat

GULLS & TERNS:

Sabine's Gull – wonderful views of these strikingly marked gulls

Heermann's Gull – abundant at Grays Harbor

Mew Gull – a few returning migrants

Ring-billed Gull

Western Gull

California Gull – abundant Northwest visitors in summer to early fall

Herring Gull – 6 were counted during the pelagic trip, well offshore

Glaucous-winged Gull

Black-legged Kittiwake – a boldly marked immature at Hoquiam

Caspian Tern

LOONS:

Common Loon – seen on all the marine bays

TUBENOSES

Black-footed Albatross – 50 on the pelagic trip, with many views in the chum by the boat and flying close by

Northern Fulmar – seen best at the chum

Pink-footed Shearwater – hundreds seen on the pelagic

Sooty Shearwater – seen throughout much of the pelagic journey

Short-tailed Shearwater – one showed nicely, on the water right next to the boat

Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel – a few

CORMORANTS:

Brandt's Cormorant – all three cormorant species side-by-side at Westport

Double-crested Cormorant

Pelagic Cormorant

PELICANS:

Brown Pelican – hundreds on Grays Harbor

White Pelican – a flock of about 50 on Crockett Lake on Whidbey Is.

BITTERN & HERONS:

Great Blue Heron

Great Egret – scarce wintering species in southwestern Washington

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Turkey Vulture – southbound migrants

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

Osprey – only one, as most had already migrated south

Bald Eagle – just a couple, as most of the locals were elsewhere at salmon runs

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk – at Sally and Bob's house

Cooper's Hawk – at Tenino, and at Reifel and Boundary Bay

Red-tailed Hawk

OWLS:

Barred Owl – perched near the roadside in Wynoochee Valley

Northern Pygmy-Owl – two came in to whistling in Olympic National Park, offering nice scope views

KINGFISHERS:

Belted Kingfisher

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:

Red-breasted Sapsucker – one near Tenino the first morning, and another high up in Olympic NP

Downy Woodpecker – showing smoky gray where most Downys are feathered in white

Northern Flicker – seen throughout the tour; the “red-shafted” form

FALCONS:

American Kestrel – two seen, uncommon in the area of the tour

Merlin – three different sightings

Peregrine Falcon – surprisingly, just one during the tour

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Gray Jay – in Olympic National Park

Steller's Jay – dark blue, crested jays of the West

California (formerly Western) Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) – Seen near Tenino, this species was recently split from the former Western Scrub-Jay. California Scrub-Jay is the Pacific region species, while the interior West species is called Woodhouse's Jay.

American Crow

Northwestern Crow – the smaller, gruff-voiced crows of the Port Angeles and Sequim waterfront

Common Raven

SWALLOWS & MARTINS:

Purple Martin – heard flying over Hoquiam ponds

Tree Swallow – just the first morning

Violet-green Swallow – small flocks throughout the only

Barn Swallow – latest lingering swallows in the region

LARKS:

Horned Lark – at Hoquiam, one of the “Streaked” Horned Lark subspecies

TITMICE through CREEPERS:

Black-capped Chickadee
Chestnut-backed Chickadee – seen well, showing brown back and flanks
Bushtit – Tenino and Reifel
Red-breasted Nuthatch – calling from snags in Olympic National Park
Brown Creeper – the first morning

WRENS:

Pacific Wren – this tiny, cedar colored wren was seen best near Grays Harbor
Marsh Wren – heard at Reifel
Bewick's Wren

KINGLETS:

Golden-crowned Kinglet – male flashing its bright central crown feathers
Ruby-crowned Kinglet

THRUSHES & ALLIES:

American Robin
Varied Thrush – very brief view and heard

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling

WAXWINGS:

Cedar Waxwing

OLD WORLD SPARROWS:

House Sparrow

WAGTAILS & PIPITS:

American Pipit

FINCHES:

House Finch

Purple Finch – best views at the feeders the first morning

Red Crossbill – a flock of eight scoped in the fir trees in Olympic National Park

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

NEW WORLD WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler – Audubon's form

Black-throated Gray Warbler – one at Reifel Sanctuary

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Spotted Towhee – fine views at Bob and Sally's bird feeding area

Savannah Sparrow – a remarkably numerous migrant during the tour

Fox Sparrow – of the "Sooty" group, dark and heavily marked

Song Sparrow – the Northwest *morphna* subspecies, darker and more heavily streaked than most

Lincoln's Sparrow – migrants from the mountains and the north

Golden-crowned Sparrow – migrants from breeding areas in B.C. and Alaska

Dark-eyed Junco – some of the "Oregon" form

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:

Red-winged Blackbird

Western Meadowlark – Leslie saw one

Brewer's Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

MAMMALS & OTHER VERTEBRATES

Eastern Gray Squirrel
Douglas's Squirrel
Townsend's Chipmunk
Eastern Cottontail – introduced
California Sea Lion – barking in Westport harbor
Steller's Sea Lion – outside Grays Harbor on buoys
Northern Fur Seal – 3 on the pelagic trip
Harbor Seal – common along marine edges
Northern River Otter
“Black-tailed” Deer - the regional form of Mule Deer
Humpback Whale – good views of two on the pelagic trip
Harbor Porpoise
Dall's Porpoise
Bullfrog