

SEPTEMBER PACIFIC NORTHWEST

SEPTEMBER 5-13, 2007

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

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Leader: Bob Sundstrom

Our 2007 September Pacific Northwest tour participants enjoyed nearly impeccable weather and a truly admirable list of birds, as well as great food and a wholly gratifying journey through the scenic Northwest. Early September in the Northwest lived up to its billing as a brilliant time to see migrating birds—on land, over the mountains, along the shorelines, and on the ocean.

Rare and regionally unique shorebirds are a major focus of this tour, and our results were among the best ever. One of the most admired birds of the trip was a juvenile Pacific Golden-Plover, which we were able to scope at close range as it stood atop a shard of driftwood on the tide flats. The golden tones of its feathers glowed in the late afternoon light, and its shorter primary projection (vs. American Golden-Plover, which we also saw) was clearly evident. The very next day, after a two-hour vigil on an incoming tide, we were rewarded with great views of a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper among a few dozen Pectorals. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was a much hoped for sighting of a North American rarity seen primarily just in this region—and a new bird for all! We were also fortunate to scope a vagrant Ruff, as well as watch a small flock of crisply plumaged juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers walk within 20 feet of our group. Other shorebirds seen included Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Red Knot, and Baird's Sandpiper.

Seabirds are another central feature of the tour, which includes a full-day pelagic boat trip from Westport, Washington on the Pacific Coast. Despite a choppy outward voyage, the day's seabird sightings were exceptional, especially beyond the edge of the continental shelf. Small flocks of elegant Sabine's Gulls fluttered by, some close enough for good photo opportunities. Pale gray Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels fluttered just over the water's surface, and immense Black-footed Albatross came right to the boat, alongside Northern Fulmars. Shearwaters included Buller's, Pink-footed, and thousands of Sooties. All three jaeger species showed, as did South Polar Skua and Rhinoceros and Cassin's auklets. From land, we scoped a pair of endangered Marbled Murrelets, which shared the near shore waters with dozens of Red-necked Grebes still in breeding colors. At Westport Marina, a short stroll before dinner turned up a near breeding plumage Red-throated Loon virtually at our feet, and point-blank views of a garish male Surf Scoter. Perhaps the most astonishing seabird sighting of the tour was a Common Loon that flew over the Hurricane Ridge visitor center in Olympic National Park, at least a mile high and miles from any water!

Another anticipated bird on the tour is the Sky Lark, whose only North American population resides north of Victoria, British Columbia. We quickly located a concentration of about a dozen larks, where they shared a field with migrating American Pipits, and enjoyed excellent views of both species. A stroll alongside a fast-flowing river turned up an American Dipper on the stream and Black and Vaux's swifts overhead.

Sunny days of weather in the 70s helped make all our bird sightings pleasant, but some images still stand out more than others. Although we had good scope views of a tiny Northern Pygmy-Owl the first morning of the tour, our second sighting of the owl became one of the most indelible images of the tour: the less-than-7" owl perched at eye level, framed by the deep green of a subalpine fir,

hooting, with its large, yellow eyes turned intently toward the spotting scope, which its image more than filled. Almost at the same spot, a pair of Red Crossbills perched at eye level in the treetops, so close we could see the resin of the fir cones they had been foraging on still glistening on their bills. And a short time later, we watched a hen Sooty Grouse with chicks in a roadside meadow, plucking the fruit of low-growing huckleberries. She was tame enough to pose for a lengthy photo session.

Having seen such an array of seabirds and shorebird rarities, it felt like a bonus on the last day of the tour to watch a dark Merlin, the “Black Merlin” of the Northwest, as it flew out from its perch to harass crows. While we watched, the Merlin swooped briskly along the shrubby edge of Boundary Bay and flushed an American Bittern. The Merlin veered off after a short chase, leaving the bittern standing in the open for us to admire at close range with binoculars and scopes.

Itinerary

Day 1 Wednesday, September 5: Get-acquainted dinner in Seattle; Overnight in Seattle.

Day 2 Thursday, September 6: After breakfast in Seattle, we drove south to spend the morning birding in the Tenino/upper Scatter Creek area and at Sally and my house, where we also picnicked; drove west to Willapa Bay along the Pacific coast, birding along the bay and at Tokeland Marina; dinner at Anthony’s and the first of three nights at Chateau Westport.

Day 3 Friday, September 7: 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 break at hotel, then birding at Westport marina before dinner at Anthony’s in Westport and the second night at Chateau Westport.

Day 4 Saturday, September 8: After breakfast at the Chateau, birded at Midway Beach, Tokeland, Westhaven State Park in Westport, and Bottle Beach, then drove on to Ocean Shores where we had lunch; afternoon birding walks out Damon Pt. and the Oyhut Wildlife Area tidal flats; dinner and final night at Chateau Westport.

Day 5 Sunday, September 9: Breakfast at Chateau Westport, and brief birding there afterward; departed Westport, birding at Bottle Beach before driving north via Aberdeen and McCleary toward Hood Canal; drove north along Hood Canal to near Brinnon then inland along the Dosewallips River, then hiked in along the river. After lunch in Brinnon, we made birding stops along the road up Mt. Walker, at Diamond Pt., and at Helen’s Pond at Dungeness; dinner at Café Garden and the first of two nights at Best Western Olympic Lodge in Pt. Angeles.

Day 6 Monday, September 10: Morning birding in Olympic National Park up the road to Hurricane Ridge. Birded near visitor center at 5242’ and then walked out Hurricane Hill Trail for about a mile. After picnicking near Hurricane Ridge, we birded along Ediz Hook in Port Angeles, then returned to Dungeness waterfront; dinner at Café Garden in Pt. Angeles and the second of two nights at Best Western Olympic Lodge.

Day 7 Tuesday, September 11: Took first morning Black Ball Ferry across the Strait of Juan de Fuca from Pt. Angeles to Victoria, B.C., birding from the deck enroute. In the Victoria area we birded in the Saanich farm fields for Sky Larks. Lunch in Central Saanich, then drove north to catch 1:00 p.m. ferry from Swartz Bay to Tsawwassen. After a break at the Tsawwassen Inn, we birded at a pond along Hwy. 17 and along Boundary Bay in Delta; dinner at Alfa in Tsawwassen and the first of two nights at Tsawwassen Inn.

Day 8 Wednesday, September 12: After breakfast at the hotel, we again birded the pond along Hwy. 17, then near Boundary Bay then drove to the Iona Ponds at south edge of Vancouver to bird and picnic. From mid-afternoon to 6 p.m., we birded Reifel Sanctuary on an incoming tide; dinner at Alfa and the second night at Tsawwassen Inn.

Day 9 Thursday, September 13: Departed south from Tsawwassen after breakfast, saying goodbye to a few of the group staying on in Canada. Crossed into the U.S. and continued south through Seattle to SeaTac Airport.

BIRD LIST

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

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Canada Goose – of the non-migratory “Great Basin” form

Brant – quite a surprise was a single heavily molting immature at Ediz Hook

Mute Swan – countable in British Columbia, where we saw one at Westham Island

Wood Duck – fine views of beautifully plumaged pair at Reifel Sanctuary

Gadwall

American Wigeon – a few returning migrants among thousands of pintails

Mallard

Cinnamon Teal – Steve spotted one at the Iona Ponds in eclipse plumage

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail – flocks of thousands gathering at Willapa and Boundary bays

Green-winged Teal

Harlequin Duck – a couple dozen molting birds at Ediz Hook

Surf Scoter – some wonderful views of colorful males, especially at Westport marina

White-winged Scoter

Black Scoter

Hooded Merganser – a few immatures

Common Merganser

Ruddy Duck

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Sooty Grouse – A much anticipated bird, we had close views and photographed a hen with at least two chicks, near the top of the road up to Hurricane Ridge. Sooty was recently split as *Dendragapus fuliginosus*, from former Blue Grouse species.

California Quail – near Bob and Sally’s house

LOONS:

Red-throated Loon – at Westport marina, a near breeding plumage loon at very close range.

Pacific Loon – a few seen on the pelagic trip

Common Loon – the most surprising was the one flying over the Hurricane Ridge visitor center in Olympic National Park, at least a mile high and a long way from water

GREBES:

Pied-billed Grebe

Red-necked Grebe – along the Pt. Angeles waterfront, still in bright breeding colors

TUBENOSES

Black-footed Albatross – excellent views of the huge tubenose, some right alongside the boat

Northern Fulmar - ditto

Pink-footed Shearwater – numerous on the pelagic day
Buller's Shearwater – strikingly patterned shearwaters among the Sooties
Sooty Shearwater – the abundant shearwater all day, with one group of 2-3000 just offshore
Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel – terrific views of hovering, pattering storm-petrels close to the boat

PELICANS:

Brown Pelican – hundreds along the Pacific coast

CORMORANTS:

Double-crested Cormorant – the widespread cormorant of the tour
Brandt's Cormorant – seen along the outer coast, especially from the pelagic boat
Pelagic Cormorant – on all salt water edges during the tour

BITTERNS & HERONS:

American Bittern – One of the more remarkable sightings of the tour was the American Bittern chased along the Boundary Bay dike by a Merlin. The bittern landed in the open atop the dike and posed for minutes before flying on. An excellent view of this secretive species.

Great Blue Heron

Green Heron – one along Scatter Ck. near Tenino

Black-crowned Night-Heron – one tucked deeply in the streamside tangles at Reifel Sanctuary

AMERICAN VULTURES

Turkey Vulture – migrants seen in the U.S. and Canada

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

Osprey – perched on driftwood at Ocean Shores

Bald Eagle – nice view of an adult at Diamond Pt.

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk – of the darker toned northwestern variety

Golden Eagle – soaring distantly over Hurricane Hill

FALCONS:

American Kestrel – brief views the first day west of Tenino

Merlin – Good views of the dark Pacific Northwest form of Merlin, *F. suckleyi* (“Black Merlin”)

Peregrine Falcon – several *F. pealei* in Canada, with a nice scope study of an immature at Reifel

RAILS & COOTS:

American Coot

PLOVERS:

Black-bellied Plover – hundreds along Boundary Bay

Pacific Golden-Plover – One of the most admired birds of the trip was a juvenile plover along Boundary Bay, which we were able to scope at close range in late afternoon light. The fine golden tones of its plumage were fully realized in this light, and the shorter primary projection (vs. American Golden-Plover) was very evident.

American Golden-Plover – seen both at Ocean Shores and Boundary Bay, in comparison with Pacific G-P at the latter site.

Semipalmated Plover

Killdeer

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

Black Oystercatcher – their loud whistles directed us to the pair at Ediz Hook
Greater Yellowlegs – in close comparison with Lesser at Reifel
Lesser Yellowlegs
Willet – a dozen or so at Tokeland
Wandering Tattler – seen from the boat as it wandered along the Westport jetty
Spotted Sandpiper – one at Iona
Long-billed Curlew – at Tokeland
Marbled Godwit – perhaps 500 massed together at Tokeland
Black Turnstone – at several sites, seen very well at Westport and Tokeland
Surfbird – a fine, close scope study of one at Westport marina
Red Knot – a single, gray individual at Bottle Beach
Western Sandpiper – the most common “peep” of the trip
Least Sandpiper
Baird's Sandpiper – tawny, finely scaled juveniles
Pectoral Sandpiper – at Boundary Bay and Reifel
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper – A two hour vigil as the tide rose at Reifel Sanctuary was rewarded with great views of a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper among a few dozen Pectorals. A much hoped for sighting of a North American rarity seen primarily just in this region – and a new bird for all!
Buff-breasted Sandpiper – Quite uncommon visitors to the Pacific NW, we watched a small flock of crisply plumaged juveniles walk within twenty feet of the group. At Midway Beach on the Washington coast.
Ruff – Another much hoped for species, we scope a juvenile at a roadside pond near Tsawwassen.
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Red-necked Phalarope – seen on the pelagic trip and the ferry crossing to Victoria

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

South Polar Skua – a few seen on the boat trip, none close at hand
Pomarine Jaeger – good views of the largest jaeger on the pelagic trip
Parasitic Jaeger – seen on the pelagic trip only, as was Long-tailed
Long-tailed Jaeger
Bonaparte's Gull – a few seen during the ferry trip to Tsawwassen
Heermann's Gull – abundant along the coast and strait
Mew Gull – just two seen, one each in the U.S. and Canada; early migrants
Ring-billed Gull
California Gull – the most abundant gull of the trip
Herring Gull – one adult seen on the pelagic trip
Western Gull
Glaucous-winged Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake – one on the Westport jetty
Sabine's Gull – superb views of many of these elegant gulls on the boat trip
Caspian Tern
Arctic Tern – nice views at the outer distance of the pelagic excursion

AUKS:

Common Murre – common indeed, both on the pelagic trip and ferry crossings
Pigeon Guillemot – good views, especially at Diamond Pt.
Marbled Murrelet – seen best at Ediz Hook, now considered endangered in the state
Cassin's Auklet – for a hard to see little seabird, we had good views on the boat trip
Rhinoceros Auklet – good views, mostly of immatures

PIGEONS & DOVES:

Rock Pigeon (formerly Rock Dove)

Band-tailed Pigeon – scoped near Tenino

Mourning Dove – on both sides of the border

Eurasian Collared-Dove – the B.C. authorities are currently considering the somewhat pale doves we saw on Westham Island as Eurasian Collared-Doves and not hybrids, etc.

OWLS:

Northern Pygmy-Owl – After good scope views of this tiny owl near Tenino, we had brilliant scope views of one along the road up to Hurricane Ridge. One of the trip highlights!

SWIFTS:

Black Swift – flying over the Dosewallips River, among larger numbers of Vaux's Swifts

Vaux's Swift – at several spots, swiftly flying by

HUMMINGBIRDS:

Rufous Hummingbird – seen only in Sally and Bob's front yard the first day of the trip

KINGFISHERS:

Belted Kingfisher

WOODPECKERS & ALLIES:

Red-breasted Sapsucker – two on a utility pole near Bob and Sally's house

Downy Woodpecker – heard only, on the first morning

Hairy Woodpecker – at several spots in Washington

Northern Flicker – of the "Red-shafted" variety

Pileated Woodpecker – the first morning, near Tenino

FLYCATCHERS & ALLIES

Willow Flycatcher – above the birdbaths at Bob and Sally's house

Hammond's Flycatcher – along the road up to Hurricane Ridge

VIREOS

Hutton's Vireo – good views of both vireos

Warbling Vireo – of the western N. American form

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Gray Jay – first seen near Tenino, later landing on our hands for nuts at Mt. Walker

Steller's Jay

Western Scrub-Jay – only on the first morning

American Crow

Northwestern Crow

Common Raven – the best view was one sitting right at the roadside at Hurricane Ridge

LARKS:

Sky Lark – very good views, including scope studies, north of Victoria, B.C.

Horned Lark – at Ocean Shores, the "Streaked Horned Lark" subspecies, locally threatened

SWALLOWS & MARTINS:

Violet-green Swallow

Bank Swallow – unusual in the area, we saw a flock of at least 100 near Tsawwassen

Barn Swallow

TITMICE through CREEPERS:

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Red-breasted Nuthatch – responding well to owl tooting

WRENS & DIPPERS:

Bewick's Wren

Winter Wren – an amazingly close view of one near the Chateau Westport

Marsh Wren – close looks at Midway Beach

American Dipper – dipping and diving along the Dosewallips River

KINGLETS:

Golden-crowned Kinglet

THRUSHES & ALLIES:

Hermit Thrush – heard, seen fleetingly along the Hurricane Hill trail

American Robin

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling

WAGTAILS & PIPITS:

American Pipit – many good views, especially in the Sky Lark field

WAXWINGS:

Cedar Waxwing – lots of migrants on the move

WOOD WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler – seen in the U.S. and Canada

Yellow-rumped Warbler – of “Audubon’s” variety

Black-throated Gray Warbler – the first morning near Tenino

Common Yellowthroat

Wilson's Warbler

TANAGERS:

Western Tanager – one perched for scope views the first morning

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Spotted Towhee

Savannah Sparrow – especially numerous fall migrants

Fox Sparrow – heard calling along the Hurricane Hill trail

Song Sparrow – dark northwestern variety *morphna*

Lincoln's Sparrow – wonderful looks at this pretty sparrow at Iona

White-crowned Sparrow – mostly immatures

Golden-crowned Sparrow – seen very well along Hurricane Hill trail, an immature

Dark-eyed Junco

Lapland Longspur – a small flock in the Ocean Shores dunes, as we were closing in on a golden- plover

BLACKBIRDS & ALLIES:

Red-winged Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird

FINCHES:

Purple Finch – seen best at Sally and Bob's feeders
House Finch
Red Crossbill – A tour highlight was the pair of crossbills that perched at eye level in the tree tops near Hurricane Ridge, so close we could see the fir cone resin glistening on their bills.
Pine Siskin – seen very close at hand on the Hurricane Hill walk
American Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak – the first morning, scoped in the treetops along upper Scatter Creek

OLD WORLD SPARROWS:

House Sparrow

MAMMALS, HERPS & OTHER CRITTERS:

Harbor Porpoise – seen repeatedly on the ferry crossings
Dall's Porpoise – riding the bow on the pelagic trip
Harbor Seal - ubiquitous on the marine edges
California Sea Lion – sleeping on a buoy on one of the ferry crossings
Steller's Sea Lion – swimming ahead of the ferry near Victoria
Northern Fur Seal – sleeping on the surface on the pelagic trip
Raccoon – lumbering across the road the first day
Black-tailed Deer - the regional form of Mule Deer
Olympic Marmot – endemic to the Olympic Mts. of Washington; scarce
Townsend's Vole
Douglas's Squirrel
Townsend's Chipmunk
Snowshoe Hare – near Willapa Bay, scampering near the highway
Eastern Cottontail
Eastern Gray Squirrel – black form at Reifel
Red-eared Slider – the turtles at Iona
Pine White (butterfly)