

Mass Audubon Pacific Northwest Birding

Trip Journal

May 25-June 5, 2012

May 25

Seattle arrival/Jack Block Park

Seattle rolled out the red carpet today in the form of a gorgeous sunny day. Early arrivers joined Woody and Wayne on an urban birding tour of Jack Block Park. This former EPA Superfund site is now a major beach restoration. It boasts stunning views of Elliot Bay and downtown Seattle. Birding here was productive too. We saw: Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Pelagic Cormorant, Pigeon Guillemot, Caspian Tern, Glaucous-winged Gull, Bushtit, and American Goldfinch. This was an auspicious start to our journey. A nice get-acquainted dinner at the hotel followed.



May 26



Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge/Lake Quinault Lodge

Under blue skies and temperatures in the mid-70s, we drove south to our first big day of birding at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. As we pulled into the refuge parking lot a Bald Eagle practically strafed our 12-passenger van. When we got out of our vehicles, we immediately heard Yellow Warbler and Black-headed Grosbeak songs. At the visitor center, Barn, Tree and Cliff Swallows swarmed over a pond, the latter periodically returning to their adobe-like nests in the building's eaves. Wood Ducks paddled by in the pond.

After this introduction, we commenced walking through the refuge. A short distance into the Black Cottonwood riparian forest, we found Northern Flickers and our first Western Tanager. A Rufous Hummingbird hovered directly over the group, perhaps drawn to Mike's red jacket.

At this point, we first heard then saw Western Wood Pewee, Willow and Pacific Slope Flycatchers. As we walked out of the riparian forest into the 700-acre restored salt marsh area, we saw three Bald Eagles perched on the Cottonwoods at the edge of the marsh, making their unique broken-flute call. Wayne found three Yellow-headed Blackbirds, well out of their range, our first rare find of the trip.

As we stepped onto the relatively new one-mile boardwalk that extends to Puget Sound, we found Caspian Terns, Ring-billed and Glaucous-winged Gulls. Thanks to an alert spot by Doug we also saw Whimbrel probing the mud flats and an American Avocet – another bird well outside of its normal range. The Avocet gradually moved closer, providing good looks for all in the scope, and then flew directly over the board walk with its up-turned needle-like bill in plain view. This was a “wow” moment.

As we hiked the loop trail back to the visitor center, the birds kept coming: Red-tailed Hawk, Virginia Rail, Sora, Northern Shoveler, Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, and several Purple Martins in flight.

This refuge was not only buzzing with birds, but also with people. On this sunny Memorial Day weekend, scores of families, and all kinds of people – young, old, and ethnically-diverse – came to enjoy

the wildlife and natural beauty of this place. Nisqually is a testimony to the notion that “if you build it (right) they will come.” Following this walk which generated 60 species of birds, we drove around the southern end of Puget Sound to the west side of the Olympic Mountains and our historic lodge at Lake Quinault. Steller’s Jays greeted us with their raspy “shook-shook” calls as we exited our vans and checked into our cozy rooms in the lodge where Franklin Delanor Roosevelt once stayed.

May 27

Lake Quinault Rain Forest, Ruby and Kalaloch beaches

On a typical cloudy, coastal morning, we had a hearty breakfast before setting out to hike into a genuine temperate rainforest near Lake Quinault. No amount of advance billing can adequately prepare you for the majesty of these forests. We slowly birded and botanized our way through the half-mile loop trail, savoring every minute of the experience. Pacific Wrens serenaded us from beginning to end with their virtuoso song – the longest, with the most notes, of any bird species in North America. Elusive Pacific-slope Flycatchers occasionally provided us with glimpses of their presence. Varied and Swainson’s Thrushes sang



their hauntingly beautiful tunes, and an American Dipper made a cameo appearance in Willaby Creek. Our group was quite taken by the artistic array of ferns, including: Sword, Deer, Wood and Maiden Hair.



After this inspirational walk, we headed for the Pacific coast. En route, two Turkey Vultures suddenly flew up from the roadside -- one narrowly averting the windshield of the 12-passenger van. We stopped for a picnic lunch beneath wind-sculpted Sitka Spruces overlooking a broad sandy beach and the Pacific Ocean. Then we headed further up coast to Ruby Beach, a picturesque cove with a sea stacks and a cobblestone and driftwood studded beach. The rocks and sea stacks provide habitat for marine birds like the Pelagic Cormorants and Pigeon Guillemots that we saw here. While watching two Bald Eagles flying along the beach, we witnessed an ambush by two Peregrine Falcons that drove the eagles out of their air space – an extraordinary aerial display by two formerly endangered species.

Meanwhile offshore, Surf and Black Scoters were passing by, interspersed with Pacific and Red-throated Loons. A Black Oystercatcher walked along a small sea stack probing the abundant shellfish along the way. As we hiked uphill from the beach a Bald Eagle perched regally atop a sea stack and an Orange-crowned Warbler sang while offering us a fleeting glimpse.

On the way back to the lodge, we investigated another set of offshore rocks near Kalaloch Lodge and were glad we did. Barrie spotted the first Common Merganser of the trip in a tidal lagoon. A flock of Cedar Waxwing, which Woody referred to as “designer birds” gathered close by. Then we were able to find several Brandt’s Cormorants interspersed with Pelagic Cormorants on the nearest rocks. At an overlook just beyond the cabins, while sorting through Western, Glaucous-winged and Glaucous-winged

Western hybrid gulls, Wayne noticed that one of the gulls had especially “snowy” tail feathers. We waited for several minutes until the other gulls dispersed revealing a rare look at a Glaucous Gull!

As we strolled back to the van after this very special sighting, we saw and heard Vaux’s Swifts flying erratically overhead in search of bugs. A Purple Finch sang while conspicuously perched atop a Sitka Spruce. This concluded an outstanding day of birding in breath-takingly scenic places.

May 28

Fourth Beach, Ediz Hook, Marymere Falls, Sequim

Here on the rainiest corner of the continental United States, we finally awoke to a drizzly day. Over breakfast at the lodge, we enjoyed close looks at Band-tailed Pigeons, Rufous Humminbirds, Black-headed Grosbeak and Steller’s Jay at the feeders near the dining room window. Somehow, almost magically, the rains dissipated as we drove northwest to the Pacific Coast. At Fourth Beach, the day became bright, dry and comfortable as we watched Bald Eagles, Red-throated Loons and our first Marbled Murrelets of the trip.

Heading north, we stopped in Forks, epicenter of the logging epicenter of the book and film sensation featuring modern day Apparenty, the author chose Forks as the location for these the rainiest city in the continental United States. Who would this town now bases its economy on a blend of vampire, tribal



world and recent vampire tales. tales because it is have thought that and logging culture!



Beyond Forks, we stopped at Lake Crescent to hike to Marymere Falls in search of better looks at American Dippers. As so often happens, right in the parking lot we found some new species, including Gray Jay and Townsend’s Warbler. Once up the trail, close to the falls, Barrie spotted an American Dipper in the stream bed. This led to several other sightings, including two adults gathering and transporting food upstream to a nest near the falls.

We travelled on to Port Angeles where we found pleasant cafes, bookstores and murals to partake in prior to heading out once again to bird at Ediz Hook. Brewer’s Blackbirds gathered in a grassy area near the industrial entrance to the Hook, which provides a protected harbor for Port Angeles. Once we entered the undeveloped portion of the 2.5-mile natural sandy spit, six Harlequin ducks swam close to shore in a parade-like procession. A yearling Bald Eagle perched on a log raft surrounded by tens of Harbor Seals and several Black Oystercatchers. Bald Eagles and Glaucous-winged Gulls scrapped over fish. Our first Rhinoceros Auklets swam by on the other side of the bay. Views of Vancouver Island and the San Juan Archipelago enhanced the scenery of this birdy place.



From here we headed to Sequim and dinner at the Three Crabs Restaurant. Tim Cullinan, Wildlife Biologist for the Point No Point Tribal Commission, gave an informative presentation about the geography of the Olympic Peninsula and the history of the Important Bird Area program in Washington followed by a driving tour to a Roosevelt Elk Herd outside of Sequim with a full rainbow overhead. This was a fitting end to another fine day on the Olympic Peninsula.

May 29



Dungeness Spit and Hurricane Ridge

Cloudy but not rainy weather greeted us today. Undaunted, we bundled up and set out for a hike to Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge. Fortunately, the weather improved significantly as we hiked through the upland forest to the Spit. Red-breasted Nuthatch, Spotted Towhee, Western Tanager and Mourning Dove were among the species we noted on this one-mile stretch. We paused at one of Washington's iconic views overlooking the six-mile Spit extending into the Straits of Juan de Fuca with the San Juan Islands and Cascade Volcanoes behind.



Rufous Hummingbird and Chestnut-backed Chickadee moved through the Ocean Spray shrubs as we took in the splendid view. As we walked down to the Spit, a flock of 20 Pigeon Guillemot appeared in the surf, illuminated by the now-sunny weather. We scoped Pacific Loons in breeding plumage along with Rhinoceros Auklets. Two Bald Eagles perched together on top of a



Douglas Fir tree on a headland. A Belted Kingfisher chattered as it flew by.

Although it would have been we pressed on to 5,300-foot Olympic Mountains. The mostly clear and dry. We degree views of the Olympic banks and first leafy shoots of Jacobs Ladder and Lupine were



nice to relax here all day, Hurricane Ridge in the weather there was calm, experienced great 360-Mountains amid the snow spring. Mountain Aster, just beginning to leaf out.

While walking the road to emerging from under a snow and waited as a Mountain from us -- a "life" animal for



Hurricane Hill, Betsy spotted a small mammal bank. Wayne, Woody and Betsy stood quietly Beaver came out to forage only 10 feet away all three of us!



Upon returning to the parking lot, a tame Common Raven posed against the backdrop of the Olympic Mountains. As we drove back to Port Angeles through the cloudbank, five Sooty Grouse appeared along and on the road. Some were displaying and even booming. We were very fortunate to witness this behavior from such a reclusive species.



We spent the balance of the afternoon watching Alcids from the Port Angeles harbor before heading to dinner a C'est Si Bon. Here we were treated to a delicious French dinner accompanied by charming couple that founded the restaurant. Everyone was in high spirits as we headed to the hotel on our last and very eventful day on the Olympic Peninsula.

May 30

Whidbey Island: Crockett Lake and Ebey's Landing

Today we departed from the Olympic Peninsula, pausing briefly in historic Port Townsend to see the ornate Victorian architecture of its downtown. A ferry took us across the Straits of Juan de Fuca, also known as "Alcid Alley." True to form, we saw numerous Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet and Marbled Murrelet from the ferry. Once ashore on Whidbey Island, we birded around Crockett Lake, another Audubon Important Bird Area. Pigeon Guillemots perched close by on rocks with their scarlet feet clearly visible. Our first Northern Harrier soared by. Purple Martin perched outside of their bird houses while keeping up a constant soft chatter. Several lingering species of wintering ducks, including Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup and Northern Shoveler were on the lake. Multiple Great Blue Heron, a Bald Eagle and Northern Harrier took turns perching on a long line of pilings extending across the lake.



As we drove toward our lunch and lodging destination of Coupeville, a Pileated Woodpecker flew overhead. After a sumptuous lunch at Mosquito Fleet Café overlooking Saratoga Passage, we met with Peter Dunwiddie, Stewardship Ecologist, for a walk to Ebey's Bluff. In addition to identifying plants and discussing land management issues, Peter shared Native American and European history of the area. This gorgeous three-mile bluff and beach walk burned a few of our excess calories from all of the great meals we had been eating. Peter pointed out a rare form of Prickly Pear cactus and locations where the Endangered Golden Paintbrush has been growing. Dinner in Coupeville's many fine restaurants followed.



May 31

Deception Pass State Park

This trip seemed to have good weather karma. We awoke to steady rain but by the time we started birding at Cranberry Lake in Deception Pass State Park, the rain once again stopped. Due in part to the low clouds, we found the normally high-flying Black Swift relatively close to the surface of Cranberry Lake. We had terrific looks at these larger (than Vaux's) and slower flying, longer gliding swifts. At the same lake, we heard the "Pip-pip-pip" and "Quick Three Beers" song of the Olive-sided Flycatcher coming from several directions. Eventually, Woody found one in the scope for everyone to enjoy. Several Hooded Merganser broods sailed by and three species of swallows flew over the lake.

Next stop in Washington's most-visited park was West Beach, where a narrow spit of land separates Cranberry Lake from Puget Sound. Here we had great looks at Tree and Violet-green Swallow and found our first Double-crested Cormorant. We could contrast it against Pelagic Cormorant on the same rock.

We then drove across Deception channel between Whidbey and reverse the flow of water daily white-water strong. At least four both sides of the Pass. From here Beach where we enjoyed a picnic setting. A Rufous Hummingbird



Pass on a bridge spanning the Fidalgo Islands where the tides and the resulting currents are adult Bald Eagle were perched on we continued northwest to Rosario lunch in a spectacular beach perched with the light illuminating

its radiant orange gorget. A Belted Kingfisher, Black Oystercatcher and Pelagic Cormorant were all clearly visible through the spotting scope. A Song Sparrow sang comically from atop a huge wooden sculpture of a woman holding the fish “the spirit woman of Dungeness Spit.”

In the mid-afternoon, we took a siesta at Coupeville followed by an evening of eating at the restaurants of our choice in this quaint waterfront town.

June 1

North Cascade Highway

Today we followed the Skagit River almost from its delta to its source, which led us over the North Cascade highway. This stretch is much too beautiful and interesting to drive straight through, so we made several stops. The first was a Rockport State Park. Here we hiked in a pristine low-elevation temperate old-growth forest. Since the State Park campground has been closed for several years, this trail has an even more remote feeling. We strolled in light rain, appropriate for a rain forest, through a canopy of giant trees, openings, fern grottos and nurse logs that resembled huge trellis’ or planters. Along the trail we had the best looks yet at Brown Creepers and a singing MacGillivray’s Warbler.

From here, we continued up the Skagit River valley to Cascadian Farms stand near Marblemount. If there is better ice cream than the fresh Raspberry Chocolate Chip flavor they serve, I have not yet tasted it. In addition to growing and providing wonderful natural food products, Cascadian Farms and its founder, Gene Kahn, are major conservationists. The land above the fruit stand property has been put into conservation easement designation and the property along the river was donated to The Nature Conservancy’s Skagit Bald Eagle Natural Area. At the Conservancy property Doug found a female Western Tanager, along with Yellow-rumped and Wilson’s Warblers.



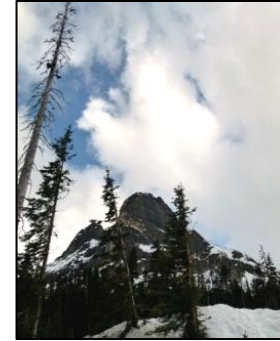
Further up the North Cascades highway we stopped at the visitor center to walk the short distance to the Pickett Range overlook, where Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Golden-crowned Kinglets were active. Inside, we watched a movie about the North Cascades that portrayed this wild and rugged 800,000-acre park in an artsy, spiritual manner.



We departed feeling relaxed and inspired. After a one hour drive through alpine meadows and Subalpine Fir forest, we arrived at snowy Washington Pass. The road to the overlook was snowed in, so we parked behind a giant snow plow and explored the roadside snow banks. This proved to be very productive, as we found two of the birds we hoped to see in this high alpine environment: Clark’s Nutcracker and Pine Grosbeak.



On the way down the pass on its eastern side, we had clear views of Liberty Bell and Shining Star Peaks. A brief rest stop at Lone Pine Campground yielded our first Chipping Sparrows along with beautiful looks at Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers illuminated by the late afternoon filtered sunshine. We cruised into the Freestone Inn, set in open Ponderosa Pine woodlands on the site of the former Wilson Ranch. We enjoyed another wonderful dinner here at a dining room overlooking a small pond and the Methow Valley.



June 2

Beaver Pond, Sun Mountain, Winthrop



The day started with a lesson. Wayne had collected a Vaux's Swift the night before that crashed to its death against the lodge window. He showed the group the features of this unfortunate swift close up: the tiny beak, the extended primaries and the tiny overall size of this agile flying bug-catcher and trans-continental migratory bird. This lesson kicked off a pre-breakfast bird walk around the Freestone Inn pond. Here we encountered a family of Spotted Sandpiper, and our first Evening Grosbeak and Say's Phoebe of the trip.

After breakfast, we drove down valley through the western-theme town of Winthrop and then back up slope to Patterson Lake and the Beaver Pond trail. As is often the case in birding, some of the best action occurs in the parking lot where you have "edge" conditions with the surrounding habitat. We were first serenaded and then had a fine look at a Hammond's Flycatcher thanks to Wayne's persistent searching. Once we hit the shore of the pond a large Osprey nest appeared in the center of the pond on top of a submerged Ponderosa Pine snag. A young Osprey was visible in the nest and its two parents were perched nearby high in tall snags overlooking the pond.

Birds were not the only highlight at this lush pond oasis. A Muskrat plied the pond waters near the shore and wildflowers in full bloom lined the trail: Arrow-leaved Balsamroot, Larkspur, Lupine and Indian Paintbrush among them. Down in the moist riparian woods along the south edge of the pond, we found the uncommon and uncommonly beautiful Mountain Lady slipper orchid.



Flycatchers and woodpeckers moved to center stage along the east bank of the pond. Here we saw and heard Western Wood Pewee, Dusky and Hammond's Flycatchers, Downy, Northern Flicker and a Red-naped Sapsucker alertly spotted by Betsy. An Eastern Kingbird perched on a trail sign and a Bullock's Oriole posed overhead in its fluorescent orange plumage. One of the show stoppers was a family of Pygmy Nuthatches going in and out of their nesting hole on a snag.

Following this popular and memorable hike around Beaver Pond, we ascended Sun Mountain by vans and enjoyed lunch at the lodge overlooking the surrounding countryside. During the rest of the day, some opted to explore Winthrop and its shops and galleries, while others chose the Freestone Inn and its attractive grounds. Then we all reconvened at dinner for another fabulous meal and a chance to catch up on our bird and mammal species lists.

June 3

Freestone Inn grounds, Confluence State Park, Sleeping Lady Resort

The Freestone Inn is a hard place to leave. We lingered and birded our way out. On the short access road to the main highway, we saw a perched Calliope Hummingbird, the smallest hummingbird in North America. Two Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels stood sentry on opposite sides of the road before scampering into the Snowbrush. Nearby we stopped to take in a high bird activity zone. Once out of the vans, eagle-eyes Judy spotted Cassin's Finch, Cassin's Vireo and Western Tanager.

Our next stop was Twisp, which means Wasp in Native American Dialect. Here we stopped at the famous Cinnamon Twisp Bakery to pick up sack lunches and to savor the pastry that goes by the same name. It alone is worth a stop in Twisp. We then drove to down the Methow River valley to the confluence with the Columbia River and turned south to follow it. Here the landscape shifts dramatically to a basalt-covered river gorge. Apple trees and fruit cultivation line both river banks.

On the basalt cliffs, Wayne spotted two American Kestrels that we all watched cavorting in buoyant loops. A Red-tailed Hawk flew lazier loops nearby.

We followed the Columbia River south to another major confluence with the Wenatchee River at appropriately named Confluence State Park. Here we had a picnic lunch then took the pedestrian bridge across the Wenatchee River and walked through the natural habitat area. On the bridge we saw a Yellow-bellied Marmot, California Quail, Osprey and several species of swallows. In the natural area, we had our best looks yet at Western Tanager and Bullock's Oriole, along with our first good look at a Nashville Warbler, spotted well by Dexter. In addition, we found Catbirds and Bank Swallows – the only swallow species in Washington State we had not yet seen.

We then followed the Wenatchee River upstream 30 miles to Leavenworth. Once there, we drove through the downtown to give people a sense of the Bavarian-themed village. An art fair was taking place with live Bavarian music. We followed a horse-drawn carriage through town and then drove the remaining three miles to Sleeping Lady Resort.



Sleeping Lady is an environmentally conscious resort with native landscaping interspersed with artwork by the likes of Dale Chihuly and Tony Angell. The Central Cascades loom behind and Icicle Creek roars through the grounds with a white-water frenzy. As if the setting were not sufficient, Sleeping Lady provides amazing gourmet buffet meals with fresh local foods and unusual delicacies.

June 4

Waterfront Park, Leavenworth Fish Hatchery, Icicle Gorge

We awoke to a drizzly day but our spirits were buoyed by the wonderful breakfast served at Sleeping Lady. Fortified and inspired, we headed out in our rain gear to Waterfront Park, a Black-Cottonwood-dominated riparian forest and Important Bird Area at the confluence of the Wenatchee River and Icicle Creek. Two Catbirds immediately hopped out on the trail as if to greet us. Once inside the park, we walked over a bridge to Blackbird Island where we found a large mixed group of Violet-green and Tree

Swallows perched together in a shrub, comprising an attractive swallow bouquet. We heard then briefly saw a Veery perched in the thick underbrush.

A Mule Deer strolled toward us on the trail as we were approaching a bridge crossing. It looked expectantly at us, and pranced in place. When we moved to one side of the bridge, the deer trotted across it, only a few feet from us. None of us had ever seen anything like this before! We were also entertained by a River Otter playing in the strong current of the Wenatchee River.

To warm up and dry out, we stopped at the bustling Redbird Coffee Shop in Leavenworth. Then we took another birding/wildlife-watching hike into the natural area behind the Leavenworth Fish Hatchery.



Here we had excellent looks at Western Tanager, Rufous Hummingbird, Common Merganser, and our first encounter with a Pileated Woodpecker.

Following a delicious lunch with homemade ginger carrot soup and Panini sandwiches at O'Grady's Pantry, we followed a tip by a pantry employee that a White-headed Woodpecker might be on the grounds of Sleeping Lady. We proceeded to the place she directed us and waited patiently for 20 minutes until Woody heard then Martha saw a White-headed Woodpecker. It perched high on a nearby Ponderosa Pine, then perched in front of us on a suet feeder. We all had great looks at this woodpecker found in four western states.



After this triumphant sighting, some opted to search for Canyon Wrens, while others chose to bask in the wonderful surroundings at Sleeping Lady. Although those of us who sought the Canyon Wren did not find it, due in part to the roar of a raging Icicle Creek we did enjoy the sheer beauty of this river gorge. We also had an encore performance by Western Tanagers at very close range.

A final bird listing session took place at Sleeping Lady's incredible Grotto Bar. Situated next to waterfalls and complete with a rock grotto seating area, the Grotto far surpasses its name. Then we had our final gourmet buffet dinner, accompanied by a guest speaker, Jeff Parsons – director of the Barn Beach Refuge at Waterfront Park. Jeff spoke to us about the history of Leavenworth, Sleeping Lady, the refuge and local conservation issues. He kindly took a group photo of us in front of Tony Angell's magnificent bronze-sculpted ravens.



June 5

Back to Seattle and flights home

Today we departed extra early to ensure that everyone arrived in time to catch their respective flights. The road up Stevens Pass provided more beautiful mountain scenery accented by large wet snowflakes at the Pass summit. Snow changed back to rain as we headed down the west side, and the remarkable transition from dry pine forests to extremely wet Hemlock/fir/cedar forests occurred, something that Wayne noted was an interesting geographical aspect of travelling in the West. We arrived at the airport in plenty of time for everyone to make their flights and to say farewell to one-another. We departed appropriately in what Northwest author Tim Egan refers to as “The Good Rain” along with good memories of the varied, beautiful and naturally diverse landscapes of the Pacific Northwest.



- Journal and most photos by Woody Wheeler. Other photos taken by: Jeff Parsons, Jeff Larsen and a map image prepared by Michael Alexander.