



Participants:

Jan D, Jackie D, Val B, Lawrence P, Phil S, Cathy H, Alison and Mike U, Bob and Tessa H, John van der Dol (Sandwich Bird Tours), Ken and Chris (guides)

Sept 2

Phil, Cathy and I drove to Gatwick this evening and stayed at the Best Western at Horley. Traffic on the motorway was horrendous so this took the stress out of the airport run.

Sept 3

Our flight left about half an hour late and despite it being a long flight direct to Vancouver it was fairly uneventful. Not terribly impressed with the plane being an Airbus 330 which had rather narrow seats and personally I was not that impressed by the food which Transat provided. However, we left at about 10.30am and arrived at 12.10 pm exactly on time. It was Labour Day in Canada and the world seemed to descend on Vancouver airport which just could not cope with the immense volume of traffic. 90 minutes after arriving we finally left the arrivals and met up with Alison, Mike, Bob and Tessa and our local guide who had already teamed up with the others.

We immediately set off for Reifel Bird Sanctuary where we had a walk for a couple of hours or so. We saw lots of MALLARD and CANADA GEESE, but of real interest was the pair of SANDHILL CRANES with one young. We were able to approach to just a few yards. It is a bit of a public park where ducks were being fed and hence many of the birds were very tame and virtually totally unafraid of people. Other birds included HEN HARRIER, WOOD and RUDDY DUCK, and NORTHERN FLICKER. Some BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES, a PURPLE FINCH and a few HOUSE FINCHES were noted too. It was a nice walk and great opportunity to stretch our legs after the long flight.

At a lake by the centre was a mixed flock of GREATER and LESSER YELLOWLEGS and a female HOODED MERGANSER drifted by. Most the ducks seem to be MALLARD, GREEN-WINGED TEAL and a few SHOVELER and PINTAIL.

We then continued our journey on to our accommodation for the night at Tsawwassen and the Coast Tsawwassen Inn hotel. We met up with Jackie, Jan, Val and Lawrence and soon after we went to a restaurant where we were served with an enormous meal which was going to be the norm from now on. Lovely food but ridiculous quantities.

Sept 4

We picked up our hire car at 9 o'clock and after picking up the others started on our long drive to Ucluelet on Vancouver Island. We had a great lunch break at a picnic site in the middle of the forest by a fast flowing river. No birds to be seen but then there is so much fabulous habitat that finding birds is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Eventually we arrived in this quaint little touristy town and our hotel on the waterfront, appropriately name Bay Shore Waterfront. Nice clean rooms overlooking the harbour in which at one stage we saw a CALIFORNIAN SEA LION.

The ferry crossing was rather bizarre. We were told at the ticket booth that the boat was full and we would have to wait until the next one at 12.30 which was probably full also, it being a public holiday. We thought the two vehicles might get split up and the whole thing could have become a difficult situation. In the event we both got on the first crossing and we were on our way.

Sept 5

The morning was spent doing a walk at Amphritite Point lighthouse loop where we managed to clock up just a few birds including CEDAR WAXWING, YELLOW WARBLER, FOX SPARROW. A BLACK-TAILED DEER was found sitting alone in the forest.

We drove north to Tofino in order to join our zodiac for our Black Bear tour. We were donned in our all in one orange survival suits before boarding our 12 seater rib, looking remarkably like astronauts, and set off to try and find some bears. After a while we found our first bear but he was very distant and on approach disappeared quickly back into the forest. Bears forage on the shoreline at low tide looking crabs, clams, limpets and basically anything edible. We continued and got a call from another zodiac who had found three bears in a small bay, two females and a cub. We approached but unfortunately the driver did not like to get too close so photos were a little distant. Nevertheless a great sighting. Another single, possibly a male was also found a bit further on. All in all a great afternoon finished off with a nice hot coffee at the boat house on return.



A few Bald Eagles were noted and COMMON GUILLEMOTS were as the name suggests, common. A raft of these with some associated gulls turned up an adult Herring Sized Gull with a black sub-terminal tailband clearly visible as it spread its tail on landing. This can only have been a BLACK-TAILED GULL which is an East Asian vagrant which occasionally occurs in Alaska. I can

only assume this bird may have been floating down the west coast for a while and has ended up here. In any event a very rare bird indeed.

Returned for quick wash and brush up and went to dinner.

Sept 6

Breakfast in a rather strange little place was followed by a quick departure for Tofino. We had a stop en route at some beach place where a few nice birds were seen including three GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS, two of which were in full plumage, some SURF SCOTERS, WESTERN SANDPIPER amongst a party of SANDERLING and a SEMI-PALMATED PLOVER.

The much anticipated whale-watch started at 2.30. We set off with Jamie's whale-watch company and after a safety briefing we set off at high speed out to sea. After about an hour we encountered our first GREY WHALE. We had it very close to the boat and although they don't do a lot we had great views. We were lucky also to see a couple of SEA OTTERS floating on their backs like they do and some STELLER'S SEA LIONS and a party of HARBOUR (COMMON) SEALS.

Birds were difficult to identify due to the speed of the boat but it was great to see a couple of HEERMAN'S GULLS, and some more PIGEON and COMMON GUILLEMOTS, RED NECKED GREBES and



the ubiquitous GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULLS.
It was a great trip enjoyed by all.

Sept 7

Today was spent relocating from Ucluelet to Port McNeill on the east coast of the island. It was a long drive taking virtually all day with a few stops for lunch in an information centre who allowed us to use their facilities. It rained most of the day.

We visited Cathedral Cove where the biggest and oldest Douglas Firs are being preserved. Covered in moss these things are spectacular to say the least, the oldest and biggest being over 800 years old. Amazingly again not a bird in sight. The place really is devoid of passerines.

We eventually arrived at Black Bear Lodge, had a short stroll seeing more BALD EAGLES (first winter birds), quite a few GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS, four SURF SCOTERS and a party of BLACK TURNSTONES. Most of the gulls appear to be GLAUCOUS-WINGED and the crows NORTH WESTERN with the odd RAVEN thrown in.

Another massive meal in the local restaurant was enjoyed by all followed by another early night.



Sept 8

Whale watch out of Port McNeill. A leisurely morning before joining our whale watching boat. This was a much larger boat than the one we had used in Ucluelet, holding about 50 passengers on three decks and all of us being able to be accommodated downstairs out of the weather should it occur. In the event the 5 hour cruise remained largely dry and it was within the first ten minutes that we encountered our first Orcas. They were close to the boat but we had to temporarily leave them in order to pick up more passengers at an isolated lodge along the coast. We returned to the whales and spent most of the time with them watching the northern pod interacting with some from the transient pod. They got quite excited and clearly don't mix very well. Some distant HUMP BACKS put in an appearance too and we watched one them tail fluking just as it dived in order to feed in the depths of the ocean. About half way through our cruise, Bill the captain, gave a really interesting insight into the life of the three pods that frequent this area between Vancouver Island and the mainland. It was indeed a very informative and very humorous talk.

We eventually concluded our day with a hot coffee in a

little coffee shop on the shore but not before we had photographed some very close BLACK TURNSTONES .

After a short break the group set off for some birding in the local estuary finding a few bits and pieces such as SURF SCOTERS, more GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS and BALD EAGLES of all ages.

The day was finished off with yet another huge sumptuous meal.

Sept 9

Today's plan was to visit Zeballos where originally we were to stay for two nights. The threat from the close-by forest fires caused the lodge to temporarily close as advisory evacuation was announced. A deep depression off the Pacific hit this area causing much rain which was great for the fires but now with the much denuded hillside behind the lodge meant that a landslide was possible so a compulsory evacuation was ordered. An alternative accommodation in Port McNeill was secured and now the plan was to drive to Zeballos for

the sea otter safari. The rain really set in and an open boat was going to be very uncomfortable and so here too alternative arrangements had to be made. We heard later that a landslide had in fact closed the road and we would possibly have been stuck behind it as there is just the one road in and out.

We drove to Port Alice and a Sea Otter tour was quickly arranged with George and his little boat. It meant we had to do two tours but it all worked well and about twenty OTTERS were seen by both groups. It was a lovely three hour cruise which included many Eagles one of which was attracted with a fish enabling some close-up flight shots of this magnificent bird. The non-cruising group was entertained by Donna, George's wife, in their B&B with coffee and muffins. NORTHERN FLICKER and AMERICAN ROBINS frequented the garden as did a couple of YELLOWTHROATS.



A great day considering the circumstances. We drove back towards Port McNeill and just beyond to Telegraph Cove where we looked for the log dump we had been told about where Black Bears appear in the evening. Unfortunately we never found the place but had a lovely meal instead before returning to Black Bear Lodge.

Sept 10

Drove to Port Hardy.

It was horrible weather delaying the sea plane crossings to Great Bear Lodge. It took two flights to get the whole group across to the mainland. It was touch and go whether the second group was going to make it. Quite a noisy experience flying in a seaplane and landing on its belly on the water.

After arriving at the Lodge and a quick snack we were immediately taken to a hide for our first bear session. One bear was seen with another brief glimpse of one on the road. It was a great start but nothing compared with what we were going to experience over the next two days.

The floating lodge is a beautiful place to stay, cut off from the rest of the world, in the middle of the West coast temperate rainforest with no communication with the rest of the world, at least not for the guests. No phones, no emails, no Facebook.

The staff are amazing, the food tremendous and the full-on program of activities incredible. No time for down time. Bears, food and more Bears.

Sept 11

Seven o'clock wake up call, breakfast at 07.15, 08.00 first activity which is a bear watch from a different hide. We were transported in old American school buses which have seen better days, but they do the job. After lunch we did a boat-ride where GOOSANDERS, BARROW'S GOLDENEYE, COMMON SEALS were seen. The scenery is just spectacular. Water and trees everywhere and full of bears and apparently Cougars too but these tend only to be seen on camera traps.



A quick snack and back to the hides. There is no rest here but then that is what we wanted. "Hey Bear" was the cry from the guides followed by another load of bears seen. A total of seven were seen by the group and Lawrence saw another two as it was getting dark from the bus. It has been an incredible day and an experience none of us will ever forget. Fishing bears, more or less taking salmon at will, and mothers with cubs just a few feet away from the hide. This is what we had come for and we were not disappointed.

Sept 12

This morning started with the usual Bear watch but this time from an open platform. This gives a much wider perspective on the scenery. Two single females and an old male were seen this morning. An OSPREY and two AMERICAN DIPPERS put in an appearance and the gull flock appears to be mostly CALIFORNIAN GULLS and the usual BALD EAGLES were always present.

On return we saw an American Mink.

Afternoon walk along the logging road. Not surprisingly it rained. Well we were in the rainforest after all and it is the rain which makes this place so spectacular. We learnt a lot about trees and berries. The guides were very knowledgeable and it was a pleasure listening to their enthusiastic patter.

The evening watch resulted in three bears, an old Male, a young male which passed through not wishing to hang around with the dominant male present and a female who after having consumed quite a few salmon disappeared with fish in mouth possibly having smelt the male in the vicinity.

A THAYER'S GULL was a first for the trip and an AMERICAN HERRING GULL was noted constantly upending.

After dinner we were treated to some camera trap footage. It is great that education is very much part of the experience as it was on our Whale trips. It puts things so much more into perspective.

Another lovely dinner with copious amounts of wine all included in the price.

Sept 13

Another great morning again from the open platform. Initially a single bear was noted on our arrival but it did not stay that long. After a short break a female with two cubs arrived and these stayed with us most of the morning. It was fun to watch the cubs trying to

unsuccessfully catch salmon. The mother mostly took the lazy way out by digging for fish eggs amongst the gravel.

A RING-BILLED GULL joined yesterday's THAYER' GULL in the gull flock and a GREAT BLUE HERON took advantage of the discarded salmon parts. A SHARP-SHINNED HAWK put in a brief appearance.

Another fantastic morning followed by a beautiful lunch and a short afternoon boat trip before sadly leaving the lodge our return seaplane flight. This time it was much clearer and we were able to see much more of the scenery than on the way out. We were collected from the airport in Port Hardy and taken to the office from where we met up with Chris, picked up our vehicles and returned to The Black Bear Lodge at Port Mc Neill.

It has been a most wonderful experience and one I would recommend to anybody wishing to encounter Grizzly Bears on the Salmon run.

Until next time "Hey Bear"



Sept 14

An early breakfast and a 08.45 departure for the long drive back to Naniamo in order to catch the ferry back to Tsawwassen. We made a couple of stops on the way, one of which was near Campbell River for a picnic lunch. This was a site on the beach where a flock of Harlequin Ducks were noted included a beautiful Drake. There really are cracking birds. At last some woodland species were seen, notably a PILEATED WOODPECKER accompanied by a RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER on the same tree and a couple of BROWN CREEPERS amongst the CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEES.

A short walk along the trail produced a BLACK SQUIRREL which apparently is the melanistic

form of the Eastern Grey Squirrel. Some PIED-BILLED GREBES were found on the small lake and a lone BLUE-WINGED TEAL. Again passerines were in short supply but a MARSH WREN was heard.

We eventually arrived at the ferry terminal and after about an hour we set sail for the mainland. Nothing was really noted on the two hour crossing apart from some COMMON SEALS.

On arriving back at Tsawwassen we filled up the car with petrol and went straight to dinner. Another great meal. It was well gone 10 by the time we got to bed, which for us on this trip seemed quite late.

Sept 15

Chris, our driver/guide for two days and I returned the car after breakfast before saying goodbye to Mike and Alison who were flying back later than us. We drove towards Vancouver but made a stop again at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. This was a very successful break for as soon as we arrived we saw two bird photographers near the entrance. They were photographing a beautiful BARRED OWL right next to the road and in full view. Of course we had to join in. On the small lake at the centre the flock of LESSER and GREATER YELLOWLEGS was still there but by now joined by a party of LONG-BILLED and two SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHERS. Fantastic views as there were just a few feet away from the building. We never really strayed from the car park as rain threatened throughout but managed to see a few things, namely the ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD, PURPLE MARTIN, YELLOW WARBLER, YELLOWTHROAT, TOWNSEND WARBLER and DOWNY WOODPECKER.



It was time to move on to the airport and catch our flight home. Here we said goodbye to Chris and Bob and Tessa who were staying on for a few more days. It had been an amazing tour of a beautiful country with tremendous wildlife. Both Ken and Chris looked after us really well and dealt with the issues thrown at us in a calm and professional manner. As for the picnic lunches, these were something else.



BIRDS

Pacific Diver

Great Northern Diver

Pied Billed Grebe

Red necked Grebe

Sooty Shearwater

Double-crested Cormorant

Pelagic Cormorant

Great Blue Heron

Turkey Vulture

Canada Goose

American Wigeon

Mallard

Blue-winged Teal

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

Harlequin Duck

Surf Scoter

Barrow's Goldeneye

Hooded Merganser

Red-breasted Merganser

Goosander

Osprey

Bald Eagle

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

American Coot

Sandhill Crane

Semipalmated plover

Kildeer

Black Oystercatcher

Greater Yellowlegs

Lesser Yellowlegs

Spotted Sandpiper

Black Turnstone

Sanderling

Western Sandpiper

Least Sandpiper

Common Snipe

Red-necked Phalarope

Heerman's Gull

Mew (Common) Gull

Ring-billed Gull

California Gull

Thayer's Gull

American Herring Gull

Black-tailed Gull

Western Gull

Glaucous-winged Gull

Sabine's Gull

Common Guillemot

Pigeon Guillemot

Marbled Murrelet

Rhinoceros Auklet

Mourning Dove

Collared Dove

Black Swift

Vaux's Swift

Rufous Hummingbird

Anna's Hummingbird

Belted Kingfisher

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker

Steller's Jay

Northwestern Crow

Raven

Purple Martin

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Barn Swallow

Black-capped Chickadee

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Brown Creeper

Pacific Wren

American Dipper

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

American Robin

European Starling

Cedar Waxwing

Yellow Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Townsend's Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

Spotted Towhee

Savannah Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow

Red-winged Blackbird

Purple Finch

House Finch

House Sparrow

MAMMALS

Black Bear

Grizzly Bear

American Mink

Sea Otter

River Otter

Steller's Sea Lion

California Sea Lion

Harbour (Common) Seal

Mule (Black-tailed) Deer

Pacific White-sided Dolphin

Orca

Eastern Pacific Grey Whale

Humpback Whale

John van der Dol
www.sandwichbirdtours.co.uk

