

My wife and I went to Canada in August 2018 to visit both Vancouver Island for 1 week and then Yukon (+ a bit of Alaska in the Haines area) for 2 weeks. If there is quite a lot of reports and documentation available about Vancouver Island, I found on the other hand the information related to mammal watching in Yukon pretty limited so I hope this report would be useful for future people wishing to visit this area.

Vancouver Island is very easy to visit with lots of convenient accommodations and there are many offers for wildlife watching, either with whale watching operators or local tour agencies for bear viewing. We can also easily observe animals during walking trips or just from your car while driving.

August is probably not the best season to visit the island for mammal watching. It was indeed very crowded with tourists everywhere (I could not find any accommodation available in Tofino during our stay in August although I was booking in May!). Such frequentation on certain spots mentioned in previous reports was clearly limiting opportunities for observations. For example, when we visited Sidney Spit Island near Victoria or Newcastle Island near Nanaimo, we quickly realized it would be impossible to see wildlife like river otters mentioned by Jon given the amount of people and dogs present in the campsites there. The weather was also surprisingly hot (at least to me) and dry with serious concerns of wildfire from the authorities. There were some important forest fires in British Columbia that month indeed.

However, even with lots of people visiting the island that month we had some good surprises: Mount Washington ski resort that we visited for the Vancouver Island marmots was totally empty and the Buttertubs Marsh Park we visited in Nanaimo for birding was also only used by a few locals.

We did 4 whale watching trips on the island: in Sydney, Tofino and in Port McNeill up north the island. I found the Port McNeill area very beautiful, still fairly pristine and full of marine wildlife. Telegraph cove is also worth the visit. We liked the place so much that we actually booked a second whale watching tour there that we didn't originally plan. Our main target during whale watching was of course orcas and although we saw many of them, very well for some, I was on the other hand a bit frustrated about the photography opportunities since we could only see them from quite a distance. Indeed, regulations have apparently changed recently and the boats are no longer permitted to approach orcas less than 200m! Of course, if the captain is smart enough and stops his boat in the right place, nothing prevents the orcas from approaching the boats closer but the animals don't always decide to come close ☺... Another disappointment was our whale watching booked in Tofino with the primary target to see the few grey whales that stay in the area during summer. This time, weather was at stake: due to the very hot weather while the Pacific Ocean remained cold, we had thick fog the entire morning we were there. Usually the fog disappears quite early but it did not the day we were there and as a consequence, we spent the whole tour under fog and saw almost nothing except for a few sea otters and harbor seals. The tour company and captain were definitely not to blame; they did their best but oh well, the weather gods were against us ☺...

Besides orcas, we had several nice observations with other small and big animals. First were the Vancouver Island marmots that we saw for long, very well and as I mentioned above all alone for the entire morning we spent there. As mentioned in several reports, we contacted the Marmot Recovery Foundation (@marmots.org) to get up to date information on where we would have most chance to observe them. We got a fast reply from them and although the location they indicated us (Invitation Run – same spot as mentioned in other reports) was empty, we heard first and then could see 2 groups frolicking on the ski slope about 200m below and next to Invitation Run. I found these cut animals not to be shy at all. Other great encounters were black bears observed at low tide looking for crabs in Tofino and grizzly bears observed in the Knight Inlet / Glendale Cove area during a tour starting from Port McNeill. During the boat ride returning to the marina, we also had the chance to have a pod of pacific white-sided dolphins playing in the boat waves and offering us a great show for about 30 minutes! Finally, we had a nice but quick sighting of Dall's porpoises in Port McNeill. Two of them swam very close and under the boat, which allowed us to see very well by transparence their black and white color but these guys are extremely fast and taking good pictures was just impossible.

Globally speaking, I found the Vancouver Island very interesting and one week is definitely not too long to visit well such a large island.

Yukon was the second part of our trip. It was a self-drive tour we did with a group of friends for 2 weeks. We flew and started from Whitehorse, capital of Yukon, where we rented 2 cars for a long loop drive that took us in Haines/Alaska, Lake Kluane and Destruction Bay, Alshihik park, Carmacks, Dawson City, Tombstone park, Eagle Plains, the Arctic circle and up to Fort McPherson in the North West Territory through the Dempster highway.

Yukon is a very scenic area, empty of people with a nice network of roads in good conditions (even the Dempster dirt road shape was ok). In August, the landscape colors started to change from green to yellow/red/brown leading to superb visual effects. Tombstone park along the Dempster highway is just magnificent with many trails opportunities and the fact we were there on the sunniest day of our trip was a big bonus. Talking about weather, if Vancouver Island was unusually hot, Yukon was on the other hand fairly chilly with temperatures ranging from -1°C to 18°C during the entire trip. We were lucky to get almost no rain but we had 3cm of snow on August 21 in Eagle plains near the Arctic circle!

During our tour, we either slept in small hotels or in tents on the very nice campgrounds you can find along the roads. Among the best, we had Engineer Creek along the Dempster, Tatchun and Moose Creeks along the Klondike and

Dezadeash Lake near Haines Junction. Sleeping in campgrounds was great for birdwatching or to get access early or late in the day to beaver dams for observation.

Wildlife is pretty rich in Yukon and it was fairly easy to see animals either during the few walks we did on trails in Tombstone, Ogilvie area or Alshihik park or simply along the roads from our cars during the long drives to reach one place from another. Red squirrels and arctic ground squirrels were everywhere. We had nice sightings from the car of black bears, grizzly bears, red foxes and coyotes. We also had very good observations of beavers in hides. We were not so lucky with Dall's sheep that we could only observe high in the mountains near Lake Kluane/Destruction bay and we could only see one lonely and shy hoary marmot in Tombstone along the Goldensides trail. On the other hand, we had a couple of "cheery on the cake" observations:

- * mountain goats in the mountains of Destruction bay Lake (scope views only though) as I actually didn't know such species was present in Yukon
- * harbor seals fishing salmon in the river in Haines/Alaska as I was not aware this could be possible
- * superb view of an American mink near a dam in Alshihik park
- * a memorable sighting of a lonely but tame wolf just outside of Tombstone park close to the Dempster Highway.

On the disappointment side, we were not able to see any Barren ground caribou migrating south from the arctic although we drove quite up north beyond the arctic circle but the weather was not good that day with rain, wind and fog, which significantly limited the areas we could scan and it was also probably still too early in the season... We only had some poor scope views of a few individuals, probably woodland caribous, high in the mountains in the Alshihik park. Worse and very unexpectedly, we could also not see a single moose although we drove thousands of km and scanned tenths of swamps/lakes during that trip. Very strange...

Bottom line, we liked Yukon a lot and since our primary target was to see black bears and grizzly bears fishing salmon we were not disappointed. If I had to come back there, I would probably go later in the year to ensure better chance of seeing the reindeer migration.

Below is the list of mammals observed during such Canada trip (lifers in red):

Mammals with photos or well seen				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
<i>Vancouver Island</i>				
Harbor porpoise	Marsouin commun	Phocoena phocoena	A couple seen from the ferry between Vancouver and the island + few others observed during whale watching tours in Port McNeill	
Dall's porpoise	Marsouin de Dall	Phocoenoides dalli	Two seen very well during one whale watching tour in Port McNeill	X
Orca	Orque	Orcinus orca	A group observed close to Victoria + many observed in the Port McNeill area	X
Harbor seal	Veau marin	Phoca vitulina	Common a bit everywhere	X
Humpback whale	Baleine à bosse	Megaptera novaeangliae	1 lonely individual seen in Tofino + 8-10 observed well in Port McNeill	X
Minke whale	Baleine de Minke	Balaenoptera acutorostrata	1 seen in Port McNeill	X
Pacific white-sided dolphin	Dauphin à flancs blancs du Pacifique	Lagenorhynchus obliquidens	Very nice interaction with a pod in Port McNeill	X
Sea Otter	Loutre de mer	Enhydra lutris	5-6 observed in Tofino	X
Steller's sea lion	Lion de mer de Steller	Eumetopias jubatus	A group seen hauling on rocks near Port McNeill	X
Eastern cottontail	Lapin à queue blanche	Sylvilagus floridanus	2 observed in Courtenay	X
Common Muskrat	Rat musqué	Ondatra zibethicus	1 seen briefly in Buttertubs Marsh Park in Nanaimo	
Mule Deer	Cerf mulet	Odocoileus hemionus	Several seen all around the island	X
Northern Raccoon	Raton laveur	Procyon lotor	A few adults + 1 mum with 3 cubs observed in Newcastle Island near Nanaimo	X
Eastern gray squirrel	Écureuil gris	Sciurus carolinensis	A couple of black form squirrels observed in Buttertubs Marsh Park	X
Black bear	Ours noir	Ursus americanus	4 observed in Tofino	X
Grizzly bear	Ours brun	Ursus arctos	2 observed in Knight Inlet from Port McNeill	X
Vancouver Island marmot	Marmotte de l'île de Vancouver	Marmota vancouverensis	~10 observed well in Mt Washington ski resort	X
Red squirrel	Écureuil roux américain	Tamiasciurus hudsonicus	Several in Mt Washington ski resort	X
<i>Yukon</i>				
Red squirrel	Écureuil roux américain	Tamiasciurus hudsonicus	Common everywhere in the forests	X
Arctic ground squirrel	Spermophile arctique	Spermophilus parryii	Common everywhere along the road sides	X
Least chipmunk	Tamia mineur	Tamias minimus	A few observed in campgrounds	X
Coyote	Coyote	Canis latrans	1 seen along the road near Haines Junction	X

Dall's sheep	Mouflon de Dall	Ovis dalli	A large group seen in the mountains near Destruction Bay + a few in Tombstone park	X
Mountain goat	Chèvre des montagnes Rocheuses	Oreamnos americanus	4 seen high in the mountain near Destruction Bay (scope view)	X
Red Fox	Renard roux	Vulpes vulpes	3 tame animals seen very well along the road between Haines and Haines Junction	X
Black bear	Ours noir	Ursus americanus	4 individuals observed along the road + 1 seen crossing a river near Dawson	X
Grizzly bear	Ours brun	Ursus arctos	10 individuals (including 1 female with 3 cute cubs) fishing salmon in Haines + 1 lonely male along the Dempster Highway	X
Snowshoe Hare	Lièvre d'Amérique	Lepus americanus	1 briefly seen at a parking lot near Carmacks	
Harbor seal	Veau marin	Phoca vitulina	2 seen in the same river fishing salmon with grizzly bears in Haines	X
American Beaver	Castor du Canada	Castor canadensis	Several seen very well in WhiteHorse and along the Yukon and Klondike rivers	X
American mink	Vison d'Amérique	Mustela vison	Superb view of 1 individual in Alshihik park	X
Woodland Caribou	Caribou	Rangifer tarandus	Scope view of few individuals high in a mountain in Alshihik park	
North American Porcupine	Porc-épic d'Amérique	Erethizon dorsatum	Brief view on the side of the road near Dawson	
Hoary marmot	Marmotte des Rocheuses	Marmota caligata	1 seen in quite a distance in Tombstone park	X
Gray Wolf	Loup	Canis lupus	1 great observation of a lonely individual near the road just south of Tombstone park	X
Total Species Recorded = 31				

Below are a few other mammals that I don't really count as observed since it was either a glimpse or in conditions such that it was not possible for me to be certain which species it was:

Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen
Northern river Otter	Loutre du Canada	Lontra canadensis	Heard noise + glimpse of something jumping a couple of times out of the water in the Yukon river in Whitehorse but this was too quick to be 100% sure it was an otter
Lemming	Lemming		A small rodent with no tail running quickly across the Dempster Highway in front of our car, near the arctic circle, which made me think it could be a lemming

I'm adding to this report some pictures of the most iconic species we observed during that trip and/or those new to me:



Orca



Harbor Seal



Humpback whale



Pacific white-sided dolphin



Sea Otter



Steller's sea lion



Mule Deer



Northern Raccoon



Black bear



Grizzly bears



Vancouver Island marmot



Dall's sheep



Eastern gray squirrel



Red squirrel



Arctic ground squirrel



Least chipmunk



Coyote



Red fox



American Beaver



American mink



Hoary marmot



Gray Wolf