

Washington State PCT Section L 2023 ~ Rainy Pass to Canada Border

RED-BACKED VOLE (2): Saw an unidentifiable blur disappear into a hole for a second or two before sticking its head (and some of its back) out for diagnostic views. Three days later I got good, though brief views, of one diving into a hole at Hart's Pass.

BLACK BEAR (1): Spotted a super distant black-bear feeding outside a burn 2 miles south of the border.

GRIZZLY BEAR (1) The obvious highlight of the trip!!! While we were descending down to Holman Pass (Whatcom Co.) I spotted a distant speck in a meadow adjacent to the ridge we were on (~6,400'). Upon getting on it in binoculars, it became apparent that not only was it brown and huge, but it had a large hump between its shoulders. We watched it for about a half an hour and though distant, every now and then it would turn at the right angle and we could see the large facial disc typical of Grizzlies.

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL (1): While having dinner the evening before we saw the Grizzly from the same location, we spotted a Short-tailed Weasel run by with a large vole in its mouth. Throughout dinner, it made 2 more appearances right next to our tent site. This was a lifer mammal for both us and the highlight of the trip up until the next morning.

LONG-TAILED WEASEL (1): After hearing that we might've missed a potential Wolverine at Hart's Pass on Day 4 (by 10 minutes) we decided that it would be a good idea to wake up early the next morning and walk along the area it was seen in the previous evening. Though we obviously had no luck with the Wolverine, we did have sporadic views of a Long-tailed Weasel running along the blowdowns at the rim of the burn.

Throughout the hike it was hard to escape the calls of Columbian Ground-Squirrels and Red Squirrels. Columbian Ground-Squirrels were especially prevalent along the first 20 or so miles of trail north of Hart's Pass.

During a day-long stretch of trail between Okanogan and Skagit counties, I noticed a handful of squirrels that appeared intermediate between Red and Douglas' Squirrel. These squirrels either had the uniform rusty upperparts of Red and yellowish-tan underparts of Douglas', or pale white underparts (Red) and drabber brown-gray upperparts (Douglas'). I suspect that these few individuals could be hybrids between Red and Douglas' Squirrel. This is supported by the fact that this stretch of trail is where the PCT crossed over from the drier east slope of the Cascades to the wetter forest west of the Cascade crest.

While most resources show that Yellow-pine is the expected chipmunk species along the east slope of the Cascades, there were a handful of times where I was convinced I was seeing Least Chipmunks on the trail. Last year, I had a similar experience seeing chipmunks that I and a couple others identified as Least Chipmunks at Chinook Pass in the central cascades. While the range maps I've seen for this species only show them to be in lowland eastern WA, it appears

that they could be easily overlooked in parts of the Cascades. In my experience at Yellowstone NP, Least also inhabit higher elevation dry habitats which reflect the habitats that the individuals in question were seen in WA. Very curious about this!

Crappy phone/digibin pics of Short-tailed Weasel and Grizzly Bear here:

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?nelat=48.97406316640613&nelng=-120.59909132938942&place_id=any&swlat=48.91205139416953&swlng=-120.87014464359841&user_id=alexowers6&verifiable=any

Poor bird photos and audio can be seen on my eBird profile:

<https://ebird.org/profile/NjQyMzIz/US-WA>

Alex Sowers