

Canada and the USA, 7th – 21st July 2026

British Columbia (Canada), Washington, Oregon & California (USA)

Team: Ian Thompson and John Wright.

Trip report by John Wright (email: johnpwright1500@gmail.com).

Photos: Ian Thompson (IT), John Wright (JW).

When Ian Thompson invited me over to his house in Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, I of course accepted the invite. The plan was to visit various locations on Vancouver Island for some mammal-watching and then travel to the USA, trying specific sites for some target mammals. In the USA we visited Washington, Oregon and northern California.

Tuesday 7th

I flew from London Heathrow to Vancouver and then got the sky train, bus and ferry to Swartz Bay Victoria on Vancouver Island, where Ian met me and we drove to his house, arriving after dark. Ian and his partner Tracey live in a beautiful cliff top house overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

During the first 5 days in the Victoria area Black-tailed Deer were seen every day as they wandered through the streets, gardens and parks nibbling on bushes and shrubs in the well-tended gardens. They were completely unconcerned by people. Also seen daily were Eastern Cottontails and Eastern Grey Squirrels, both introduced species. Whilst on Vancouver Island we made day trips using his car. For the USA section of the trip, we travelled and slept in Ian's camper van. Ian organised the itinerary to visit sites for specific species, using information from mammal-watching trip reports and from Jon Hall and Venkat Sankar – many thanks to both.

Wednesday 8th

We walked a beautiful scenic coastal trail in East Sooke Provincial Park and visited Whiffen Spit. We only saw Harbour Seals at both sites. Ian has seen River Otters at both sites but there was no sign of them today.

Thursday 9th

A pre-breakfast visit to some rocky coves close to Ian's house (another site for River Otters) only produced Harbour Seals.

After breakfast we drove 3.5 hours north to Mount Washington, arriving late in the morning. We drove there in fine sunny weather but reaching the higher altitude of Mount Washington we were met with low clouds and chillier conditions. I was a little concerned that the weather conditions might affect our chances of seeing our target species. Fortunately, all went well. We walked up the slope from the ski centre buildings and soon found two Vancouver Island Marmots. The marmots here are part of a re-introduction project where captive-bred marmots are released onto the mountain to acclimatise to life in the wild. We think a small population is left on the mountain to colonise and breed. Some are later transferred to other more remote mountains to recolonise or boost populations of this rare Vancouver Island endemic – the rarest mammal in Canada.



Vancouver Island Marmots

JW

After lunch we walked up a couple of slopes but only came across 1 of the 2 marmots we saw earlier.

Later we did a short hike on a trail through Paradise Meadows in the adjacent Strathcona Provincial Park, part of the greater Mount Washington complex.

On the way back to Victoria, we stopped off at Rathtrevor Provincial Park but only saw feral European Rabbits! Some were the colour of wild rabbits, but many were black,

white or a mixture of colours. All were obviously released domestic rabbits. Why or how this came about we don't know but the population is booming and spreading.

Moving on we diverted down Lake Cowichan Road to look for Elk and found a small herd grazing in fields alongside the road. There were also a few Black-tailed Deer nearby.



Vancouver Island Marmot

IT



Elk

JW

Friday 10th

Before travelling to Canada, I had booked an Eagle Wing Tours whale-watching trip for this morning. Ian dropped me off at Fishermen's Wharf, Victoria Harbour in time for the pre-trip briefing and embarkation at 10:00. Ian had other things to do today so didn't join me. Walking around the harbour before the boat trip, I had a brief view of a River Otter.

We sailed south and west and as expected encountered Humpback Whales – at least 6 but possibly 8 in total. A Humpback swam over to the boat to inspect us giving superb close views as it loitered by the boat. It swam under the boat, surfaced, waved a flipper, eyed us and blew a couple of times before, curiosity satisfied, it swam off.

We slowly cruised around Race Rocks seeing Harbour Seals loafing on rocks and a single Steller's Sea Lion. Most Steller's are breeding further north at this time of year but there are usually a few immature non-breeders summering further south. We then headed north and west in the hope of finding Orcas but unfortunately didn't come across any.



Humpback Whale

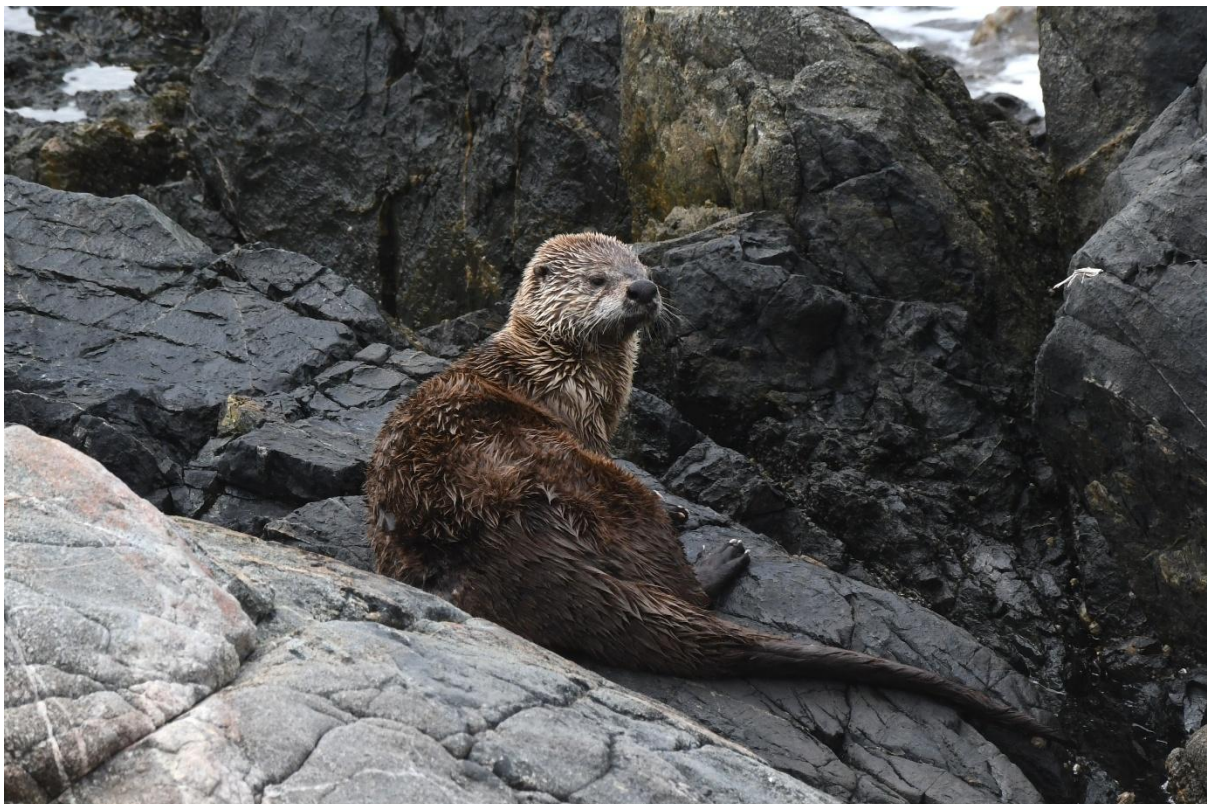
JW



Steller's Sea Lion

JW

We arrived back in the harbour around 13:30 and again I got a brief view of a River Otter. After disembarking I hung around the harbour for some time looking for the otter but had no luck. I then walked along Dallas Road which followed the coast, east away from the harbour. A breezy but warm and sunny afternoon was made all the better by watching a River Otter emerge from the sea onto rocks with a fair-sized flat fish in its mouth. It hid under a pile of washed up timber to eat its meal before emerging after 5 minutes or so, had a brief grooming session before it entered the sea and disappeared.



River Otter

JW

Ian picked me up around 16:30 and we went back to his house. Whilst I was out he and Tracey watched a female Raccoon with 4 youngsters in the garden. They weren't on show when I got back, but I managed to see one of the youngsters briefly in the early evening. Ian happened to look out of the window and saw the unmistakable tall fin of a male Orca. We rushed out into the garden and watched the Orca steadily moving south as it surfaced now and again to take a breath. Before it was lost to view behind a headland it was joined by 2 smaller individuals with smaller dorsal fins – presumably females. I was really pleased to see them and just thought how amazing it is to have Orcas on your garden list. Ian and Tracey see them quite frequently!

Saturday 11th

The morning was spent sea-watching from the garden and searching local rocky coves for otters. But no luck seeing any cetaceans or otters. In the afternoon we drove in Ian's camper van to Victoria's Harbour and caught the 15:00 ferry to Port Angeles, Washington, USA. We saw 2 Humpback Whales on the crossing and a few Harbour Seals as we entered Port Angeles.

We walked the Olympic Discovery Trail that runs along the coast east of Port Angeles in search of Mountain Beaver (Sewellel) holes. There was a lot of vegetation growing on the banks which didn't help but we found 3 or 4 holes that were viewable and had what looked like fresh spoil outside. The plan was to go and get something to eat and come back before dusk and sit and wait for a Mountain Beaver to emerge. On first arrival at the trail, we parked at the north end of North Ennis Street where it meets the trail. As we parked, a Douglas's Squirrel and a Black-tailed Deer showed well. However, due to a couple of unsavory looking characters loitering around we decided to join the trail later that evening from the 9/11 Memorial Waterfront Park, which is a little further west, rather than leave the camper van unattended in North Ennis Street.

We were duly seated comfortably in a couple of camping chairs at dusk. When it was dark we picked out plenty of mice through our thermals and at least one shrew. But disappointingly no Mountain Beavers made an appearance. We left late and drove to a campground to spend the night.

Sunday 12th

We spent most of the day driving south through Washington and into Oregon. The only mammals seen on route were a couple of Harbour Seals when we stopped briefly at a rest stop in Potlatch State Park (Washington).

We next stopped at Emerald Estates Park in Bethany (Oregon). This is a site for Camas Pocket Gopher and is a park/open area in a suburb of Portland. We soon found plenty of gopher holes, some with fresh looking spoil, very close to the trail that runs through the area. However, it was 16:00 on a very hot afternoon and there was a constant stream of people using the trail – runners, bikers, walkers, dog walkers. It was still hot and busy at 19:00 and with no gophers poking their heads above ground we decided to give it up as a bad job and move on. Given the amount of evidence of gopher activity, on a different day, there shouldn't be a problem seeing the gophers (as Jon Hall did!).

We drove for a few hours and reached Marys Peak campground. It was dark by the time we arrived; we spent the night here.

Monday 13th

Marys Peak Campground, Siuslaw National Forest. We spent the first few hours of the morning around the campground and walking a couple of trails. We saw Black-tailed Deer, Douglas's Squirrels and Townsend's Chipmunks.



Townsend's Chipmunk

JW

We left Marys Peak late morning and headed west to the coast and then south along the scenic 101 coast road. We arrived late afternoon at our destination, the Francis Schrader Old Growth Trail, Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest.

We walked the short 1.4k circular trail but didn't see any mammals. One of the reasons for walking the trail was to get a feel for it before walking it again that evening for our target species – Humboldt's Flying Squirrel.

When it was dark we walked the trail but didn't find any flying squirrels on the first circuit. We walked the trail again and this time between marker posts 8 and 9 I picked up a gliding squirrel in my thermal. It landed at the base of a big tree, but I couldn't see it at first because of the vegetation. Fortunately, Ian got onto it and when we were both in position Ian put the spotlight on it. We had good but brief views before it scuttled round the back of the tree and out of sight. I picked it up again in the thermal climbing up the tree before it glided off and away behind the trees. We didn't pick it up again after that. We did a third, and final, circuit of the trail and found a Western Deer Mouse. It kept

darting out of sight behind a log but eventually stayed in the open long enough for some good views and photos.



Western Deer Mouse

IT

Tuesday 14th

First thing in the morning we did a couple of circuits of the trail but didn't see any mammals. We then left and headed west to Gold Beach and from there south, again driving down the scenic 101 highway heading for California. In Elk Valley, still in Oregon but on the border with California, we, appropriately enough, saw a herd of Elk. We drove to Alfred Loeb State Park in Southern Oregon to look for Western Grey Squirrels. We didn't see any but did see a couple of Siskiyou Chipmunks. Moving on we arrived at Prairie Creek (California) in the late afternoon, parked by the visitor centre and walked to the Prairie Creek campground. We soon found a couple of very obliging Shadow (formerly Allen's) Chipmunks, plus a Douglas's Squirrel and a Brush Rabbit.



Shadow Chipmunk

IT

A little later we drove to a local store to get some provisions, seeing a small herd of Elk on route. We then parked in a beachside car park for a while before driving to an off-road parking area for the night.

Wednesday 15th

We set off early and headed northeast, driving towards Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in southeastern Oregon. The refuge is a high elevation desert with grasses and sagebrush the dominate vegetation type. It's a rocky scenic landscape. It was established in 1936 to provide range for remnant Pronghorn herds. It's been a great success and Pronghorn are thriving along with many other forms of wildlife.

We arrived mid-afternoon and soon after entering the refuge we encountered Pronghorn; at least 35 of them in small, scattered groups. I was particularly pleased as the last Pronghorns I had seen were at least 26 years ago in Arizona. We decided not to stay at the first campground – Camp Hart Mountain. Instead, we carried on along the road which proved fortuitous as on the side of the road was a Yellow-bellied Marmot. Despite checking that spot and other areas we didn't see it again, or any others.

We stopped at the visitor centre where we met a very friendly and informative lady who had worked there for many years. She suggested we camp at the Hot Springs camping ground which was a mile or two further along the road. As we pulled into a parking space in the campground we noticed some ground squirrels. On closer inspection they

turned out to be Belding's Ground Squirrels. We took a short walk to the hot springs which looked so inviting (it had been a very hot and dusty day) Ian had a soak in one of the springs that had been modified for people to use easily.

Before it was dark we came across a couple of Mountain Cottontails hopping about on the road. We then went for a night drive, from 21:00 to midnight. We saw a few Black-tailed Deer, many Black-tailed Jackrabbits, a single Coyote and 2 Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rats.



Pronghorn

JW



Belding's Ground Squirrel

JW

Thursday 17th

The Belding's Ground Squirrels showed well around the campground early morning. We drove along the roads of the refuge for most of the morning, seeing Pronghorns and a single Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel. We looked for Bighorn Sheep but had no luck. It was another very hot day and so when we went back to the campground for lunch we both took full advantage of the hot spring 'pool' which despite being warm water was very refreshing and most welcoming. We then just hung around the campground area until it was a little cooler.

In the late afternoon we set off again around the refuge roads seeing more Pronghorns and checked more areas for Bighorn Sheep but again drew a blank. At dusk we saw quite a few Mountain Cottontails on the road. After dark we found Black-tailed Deer, many Black-tailed Jackrabbits and, no doubt due to staying out later, more Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rats than the previous night - we saw at least 15, as well as at least one Ord's Kangaroo Rat. Ian got a brief view of a Dark Kangaroo Mouse. We got back to the campground around 01:30.

Friday 18th

We departed the Hart Mountain Refuge after breakfast, seeing the Belding's Ground Squirrels in the campground and Pronghorns out on the range. We made a few brief

stops for Bighorn Sheep but didn't have any luck. We headed to Hyatt Lake recreational area, part of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in southwest Oregon. We arrived late in the afternoon.

Around the campground were Black-tailed Deer, Douglas's Squirrels, Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels, a single Californian Ground Squirrel and Siskiyou Chipmunks - which were common. After dark a brief walk around the campground produced a few unidentified mice, picked out in the thermal imager.

Saturday 19th

During the day, the same mammal species were seen again around the campground – Black-tailed Deer, Siskiyou Chipmunks, Douglas's Squirrels, Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels and again just a single Californian Ground Squirrel.

The reason we were at Hyatt Lake was for a bat-catching session being held this evening, something both Ian and I were looking forward to. Bat researcher Emma Busk organised it after Ian contacted her to see if she was carrying out any bat-catching sessions whilst we were in Oregon. Ian met Emma on a trip to Guatemala earlier in the year. I'm very grateful to Emma as the original session was to be the following week when I would have been back in England. Emma reorganised it for today for our benefit.



Siskiyou Chipmunk



Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

JW

In the late afternoon we drove a few miles to a Bureau of Land Management Forest. Here we met Emma, two other licensed bat researchers and eight bat catching trainees. We drove in a convoy along tracks to an open area inside the forest. A California Ground Squirrel was in the open area as we arrived.

Field tables were set up, bat recording paraphernalia set out, gloves, masks and sterilising sprays were all on hand and, of course, the all-important biscuits and cakes. At dusk I briefly used my Echo Meter Touch 2 bat detector before the session got started and picked up Little Brown Myotis that was feeding just over the surface of the pond. I also saw/detected Silver-haired Bat.

The mist nets had been erected on three sides of a small pond and were opened just after 21:00 as it got dark. The process of extracting bats from the nets, processing and release went like a well-oiled machine – all very professional. The catching session lasted three hours, with all the equipment being packed away just after midnight. It was a fantastic night with the bats and the bat people.

In three hours, 31 bats of the following seven species were trapped, processed and released: California Myotis; Yuma Myotis; Big Brown Bat; Pallid Bat; Silver-haired Bat; Hoary Bat; Long-eared Myotis.



Douglas's Squirrel

JW



Black-tailed Deer

JW

Sunday 19th

We left Hyatt Lake campground at 07:00 and headed back to Ian's home on Vancouver Island. We saw Siskiyou Chipmunks, Douglas's Squirrels, California Ground Squirrels and Black-tailed Deer all in the first hour of setting off.

Ian was determined to get back to Vancouver Island today and did an amazing job as we drove out of Oregon, through Washington, crossed the USA/Canada border into British Columbia and reached the Swartz Bay ferry terminal for the ferry to Victoria before 20:00. However, we couldn't get on the first 2 ferries we had to wait and board the 22:00 ferry. We arrived back at Ian's around 00:30.

On the drive back we only stopped 3 times, once to get petrol and twice at rest stops to use the facilities. One of these rest stops was the Oak Grove Rest Area, northbound on Interstate 5, in Oregon. We stopped here because it is a site where Jon Hall saw Grey-tailed Vole. It wasn't the best time of day to look for rodents, and it was very hot. The rest stop was busy with people and added to that all the grass had been cut short right up to the perimeter fence. However, in the northeast corner of the plot a small area still had some longer vegetation and here we found a Grey-tailed Vole – unfortunately it was dead!

Monday 20th

We both took it easy today, Ian caught up with things that needed to be done, and I looked for cetaceans from the garden and explored the nearby rocky coves. The usual Eastern Cottontails, Eastern Grey Squirrels and Black-tailed Deer were all seen and three Harbour Porpoises loitered offshore for most of the day.

From dusk until after dark I used my bat detector in Ian's garden and recorded mainly Hoary Bats but also Big Brown Bat and Silver-haired Myotis.

Tuesday 21st

Departure day for me after a thoroughly enjoyable and successful 2-week wildlife watching trip. Many thanks to Ian and Tracey.

I got the midday ferry to Vancouver for my flight back to England. On the ferry crossing I saw 12 Harbour Seals and 4 Harbour Porpoises.



Black-tailed Deer fawn

IT



Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel above, Siskiyou Chipmunk below

IT





Juvenile Racoons

IT



Pallid Bat

JW



Hoary Bat

JW



Silver-haired Myotis

JW

Systematic List (37 species)

Yellow-bellied Marmot	<i>(Marmota flaviventris)</i>
Vancouver Island Marmot	<i>(Marmota vancouverensis)</i>
California Ground Squirrel	<i>(Otospermophilus beecheyi)</i>
Belding's Ground Squirrel	<i>(Urocitellus beldingi)</i>
Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel	<i>(Callospermophilus lateralis)</i>
Townsend's Chipmunk	<i>(Neotamias townsendii)</i>
Siskiyou Chipmunk	<i>(Neotamias siskiyou)</i>
Shadow Chipmunk	<i>(Neotamias senex)</i>
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>(Sciurus carolinensis)</i>
Humboldt's Flying Squirrel	<i>(Glaucomys oregonensis)</i>
Douglas's Squirrel	<i>(Tamiasciurus douglasii)</i>
Dark Kangaroo Mouse	<i>(Microdipodops megacephalus)</i>
Ord's Kangaroo Rat	<i>(Dipodomys ordii)</i>
Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat	<i>(Dipodomys microps)</i>
Western Deer Mouse	<i>(Peromyscus sonoriensis)</i>
Brush Rabbit	<i>(Sylvilagus bachmani)</i>
Mountain Cottontail	<i>(Sylvilagus nuttallii)</i>
Eastern Cottontail	<i>(Sylvilagus floridanus)</i>
Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>(Lepus californicus)</i>
Western Little Brown Myotis	<i>(Myotis carissima)</i>
Big Brown Bat	<i>(Eptesicus fuscus)</i>
Yuma Myotis	<i>(Myotis yumanensis)</i>
California Myotis	<i>(Myotis californicus)</i>
Long-eared Myotis	<i>(Myotis evotis)</i>
Silver-haired Bat	<i>(Lasionycteris noctivagans)</i>
Hoary Bat	<i>(Lasiurus cinereus)</i>

Black-tailed Deer	<i>(Odocoileus hemionus)</i>
Elk	<i>(Cervus canadensis)</i>
Pronghorn	<i>(Antilocapra americana)</i>
Coyote	<i>(Canis latrans)</i>
Raccoon	<i>(Procyon lotor)</i>
River Otter	<i>(Lontra canadensis)</i>
Steller's Sea Lion	<i>(Eumetopias jubatus)</i>
Harbour Seal	<i>(Phoca vitulina)</i>
Harbour Porpoise	<i>(Phocoena phocoena)</i>
Orca	<i>(Orcinus orca)</i>
Humpback Whale	<i>(Megaptera novaeangliae)</i>

Selected Bird Species: Surf Scoter, Wild Turkey, Sooty Grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, Band-tailed Pigeon, Common Nighthawk, Anna's Hummingbird, Sandhill Crane, Black Oystercatcher, Killdeer, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Pigeon Guillemot, Cassin's Auklet, Glaucous-winged Gull, Forster's Tern, Common Loon, American White Pelican, White-faced Ibis, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Acorn woodpecker, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Sage Thrasher, Western Tanager.

END

