

Unique Rodents of the PNW

Washington (USA) and Vancouver Island, British Columbia (Canada)

20-23 August 2026

By Andy Parks

For a more engaging read with photos, please view my blogpost:

<https://andrewjpark.wordpress.com/2026/10/10/marmots-chipmunks-and-mountain-beavers-oh-my/>

For my first mammal watching trip report, I'm excited to document my sightings of three of my top target species for the area: the Olympic marmot, mountain beaver, and Vancouver Island marmot!

20 August 2026

After getting off work for a long weekend, I drove up north along Highway 101 to the Olympic Peninsula town of Port Angeles. Before heading to my campsite in Olympic National Park I stopped at the Olympic Discovery Trail after dark to look for mountain beavers. According to iNaturalist observations, the species can be seen here. Upon walking up and down the trail along the water (access from the 9/11 Memorial Waterfront Park) I saw many burrows but no mountain beavers. I spent the night at the Heart O' the Hills Campground.

21 August 2026

I drove up to Hurricane Ridge shortly after sunrise. I walked the meadow trail in search of my first target species near the site of the old visitor center which burned down in 2023. I had no luck here, but did see **mule deer** and sooty grouse. I drove to the Hurricane Hill trailhead and wandered around the picnic table area and saw a **snowshoe hare**. The population here in the Olympic Mountains is known to retain its brown coat year-round. I hiked the 1.5 mile trail all the way to the top of Hurricane Hill. At the base of the final climb at the end of the trail, I got my first target species, the **Olympic marmot**. I watched it from afar sunning on a rock, and soon a second one appeared and they both scurried off. At the top of Hurricane Hill I saw a third marmot on one of the rocky cliffs below. This one had the peculiar blonde and grey patchy coloration that is common in the species. I also saw the Olympic subspecies of the **yellow pine chipmunk** (*Neotamias amoenus caurinus*) which was very active at the end of the trail.

After completing my hike, I drove back down into Port Angeles and stopped at the site of the old Elwha River Dam. As an ecologist, I wanted to see this site where one of the greatest dam removals and river restoration projects in history took place. I went back to the Olympic Discovery Trail and walked the same stretch. This time I was lucky enough to actually see a **mountain beaver** poking its head up out of the ivy right at the edge of the trail! Unfortunately it darted into its burrow to quickly for me to get anything more than an iphone video of it disappearing, a single frame capturing a glimpse of its behind as it vanished from view. Still, I was ecstatic to see this rare mammal, and without having to trap for it. I then caught the ferry across the Strait to Victoria, BC, Canada.

22 August 2026

After sightseeing in Victoria and the Butchart Gardens I drove my rental car north along Trans-Canada Highway 1 to the Mt. Washington Ski Resort, the only site where one can reliably see the **Vancouver Island marmot**. It was a misty early evening as I hiked up the slopes. I heard the marmots' whistle before I saw them. I saw two marmots on the ridge above me, but as I was getting in range for photographs, some mountain bikers tore down the path very near the marmots and they broke for their burrows. After waiting for about twenty minutes I decided to try for a better view in the morning.

23 August 2026

This morning I only found one marmot but I got a much better view and was able to get better photos. The Vancouver Island marmot is in my opinion the prettiest of the marmot species in North America and definitely a mammal highlight for Canada. I drove back south to Victoria and took the ferry back to Washington where I tried one more time with no luck for a better look at the mountain beaver. Overall, it was a very successful trip!

Mammal Species List

Mule deer	(<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)
Snowshoe hare	(<i>Lepus americanus</i>)
Olympic marmot	(<i>Marmota olympus</i>)
Yellow-pine chipmunk	(<i>Neotamias amoenus</i>)
Mountain beaver	(<i>Aplodontia rufa</i>)
Vancouver Island marmot	(<i>Marmota vancouverensis</i>)