PACIFIC NORTHWEST ROAD TRIP

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I've wanted to see a Vancouver Island Marmot for years, so when a friend of Nicole's invited us to her wedding in Vancouver this August, it took us about 5 seconds of deliberation to confirm our attendance. I quickly realized that the trip would be a perfect opportunity to see a bunch of other places I'd long wanted to visit in the Pacific Northwest, and inspired by Ian Thompson's recent travels in the region, a plan for a road trip was hatched. There was one catch though… Between a busy summer at work and needing to move apartments in the prior days, we only had about a week to get there and back from San Francisco!

We left the Bay Area by 10:30AM and past SF, the roads were pleasantly traffic free and we reached Redding before 3PM. After a stop for late lunch, we were on the road again (with a **Douglas's Ground Squirrel** at the I-5 Manzanita Rest Area as the trip's first mammal) and reached our first site, the I-5 Northbound Oak Grove Rest Area near Corvallis, OR, by nightfall after ~10 hours of driving. Right as we began preparing dinner, I noticed the first **Gray-tailed Vole** on the lawn by our picnic table, and we must have seen over 20 in an hour there. We also added a **Western Deer Mouse** and 2 **Coypus** (invasive in the area).



Gray-tailed Vole (*Microtus canicaudus*)

We continued to McFadden Marsh in William Finley NWR, a site for Townsend's Vole; although we had no luck with this species, we added **Striped Skunk**, **Western Harvest Mouse**, **Eastern Cottontail** (also invasive), and **Virginia Opossum** (introduced) in and near the NWR. We reached the start of Mary's Peak Rd, the night's last site, around midnight. This is a neat spot, with iNaturalist records of lots of good mammals (e.g., Aplodontia, Snowshoe Hare, Western Spotted Skunk, and Central Pacific Jumping Mouse). We spent 2 hours slowly driving the paved road up to the USFS campground; I

thermal scoped out the passenger side window and also checked roadside ditches and creeks on foot. The night's sightings included 4 **Western Deer Mice**, a **Western Red-backed Vole** (44.4744, -123.5285), and brief views of **Humboldt's Flying Squirrel** in the Noble Firs at the summit. The best find of the night was a medium-sized, grizzled grayish brown vole seen in riparian alder/Douglas-fir interface (44.4688, -123.5068); though too quick for photos, I got a couple of clear views of it as it scurried through the leaf litter. Definitely not a Townsend's or Creeping Vole, and it lacked the typical reddish dorsal blaze of Western Red-backed Vole. By process of elimination and habitat, it could've been the rarely seen White-footed Vole (the surrounding Alsea area is basically their stronghold), though I'm hesitant to claim this species without more solid evidence.

Douglas Squirrels and **Townsend's Chipmunks** were easy to see on the upper part of the mountain the next morning, alongside Mountain Quail and Sooty Grouse. We left Mary's Peak at 9AM and drove 7h to the Olympic Peninsula, stopping for brunch en route in Centralia and for roadside **Northern River Otter** and **Harbor Seals** near Triton Cove. Hurricane Ridge was very smoky due to wildfires elsewhere in the state and heaving with people, but the Obstruction Point Rd was fortunately quiet. **Yellow-pine Chipmunks** (of the endemic Olympic ssp. *caurinus*) were easy to see, and we located 6 very relaxed **Olympic Marmots** – our top target – in the first alpine meadows at (47.9365, -123.4136). Impressively tame **Mule Deer** were hanging out in the parking area, and we also saw 2 **Townsend's Chipmunks**. We returned to Port Angeles around sunset and spent an hour staking out Aplodontia at the Discovery Trail. Despite seeing more burrows than I've seen elsewhere combined, we had no luck; I couldn't find any freshly dug soil and only 2 somewhat recent haypiles, suggesting the animals were not very active on the surface. I suspect earlier or later in the year (when it's less dry) is better for this species, as for most other fossorial mammals of the Pacific NW.



'Olympic' Chipmunk (*Neotamias amoenus caurinus*) and Olympic Marmot (*Marmota olympus*)

For the night, we met up with Liam Hutcheson, a super talented WA birder and increasingly keen mammal watcher, who I was introduced to through our mutual friend Alex Sowers. We spent 4 hours (10PM-2AM) exploring the road to Sol Duc Hot Springs, which traverses fairly wet, riverside temperate rainforest. *Peromyscus* were the most common small mammal seen, with over 10 recorded; both **Western** and **Keen's Deer Mice** occur here. We saw at least 2 individuals that looked good for Keen's (tail > HB, more grayish in color with longer ears) and at least 5 Western Deer Mice, with the rest a

toss-up. Deer mice aside, it was a productive night, featuring clear views of **Southern Red-backed Vole** (in Western Hemlock-dominated forest with open understory), several **Mule Deer**, **Northern Raccoon** (at the springs), brief looks at a **Snowshoe Hare** (of the brown, non-varying ssp. *washingtonii*), and a **Trowbridge's Shrew**. The most interesting find of the night was a rather robust flying squirrel; both *G. oregonensis* and *G. sabrinus* may occur in the area, and though I lean toward Northern (this animal seemed significantly larger than the *G. oregonensis* I see in CA), I'll put it down as **Humboldt's / Northern Flying Squirrel** for now, pending good field ID criteria. We checked 2 bridges over the Sol Duc River for the rare Keen's Myotis, confirmed by recent (2015) collections here, but only saw night-roosting **Yuma / Little Brown Myotis**.



Keen's Mouse (*Peromyscus keeni*)

After 4.5 hours' sleep on a nearby FS road, we returned to Pt. Angeles at 7:20AM the next morning in time for the M.V. Coho (aka Black Ball, lol) ferry to Victoria, BC. In return for our great long weekend in CA last summer, my friend (and well-known mammal watcher) Ian Thompson invited us over for a couple days on Vancouver Island. After a shower and lunch at his lovely house, we drove to Mt Washington for arguably the trip's top target – **Vancouver Island Marmot**. Although the area was busy with mountain bikers, it only took about 20 min to find a marmot in their usual spot, about halfway up the main ski run immediately above the Alpine Lodge (49.7453, -125.3015). We saw another (wild) marmot further down, near the Marmot Recovery Foundation's captive breeding facility, as well as 2 **Red Squirrels** (of endemic ssp. *vancouverensis*) and **Mule Deer**. We continued N past Campbell River and snagged a campsite in the gorgeous Pacific Yew Recreation Area at Mohun Lake, where Ian thought there might be decent possibilities for night work. After dinner, we set off for a night drive only to find the campground gate closed; we managed to persuade the attendant to let us out for 2 hours (10PM-midnight). The forest seemed unusually dry and mammals few, but nonetheless we located both **Townsend's Vole** and **Keen's Mouse** (the only *Peromyscus* in the northern third of the island), our key targets, along a short creekside trail (50.0962, -125.4244). More **Red Squirrels** were at the campsite the next morning.

We returned to Nanaimo Fri afternoon (stopping en route to see the regionally endemic Seaside Juniper), said goodbye to Ian, and took the 4PM Coastal Inspiration ferry from

Duke Pt. to Tsawwassen (seeing a **Humpback Whale** or two). The remainder of Fri, all of Sat, and most of Sun involved non-mammal activities around Vancouver.



Vancouver Island Marmot (*Marmota vancouverensis*)

We left downtown Vancouver after dinner around 7PM Sun and drove straight to the border. The US customs queue only took 15 min and we were soon passing through a delightfully traffic-free Seattle en route to Mt. Rainier. We reached Ashford around 11PM, after 4 hours of driving; the conditions were warm (65F) and still – perfect for mammals – and the sightings came thick and fast. A tiny **Creeping Vole** (scurrying off the edge of the road), several **Western Deer Mice**, and 'non-varying' **Snowshoe Hare** (ssp. *washingtonii*) were all seen in the gorgeous low-elevation forest between Ashford and Longmire. We reached Paradise around midnight and spent 2h walking the nearby paved trails, seeing a few **Western Deer Mice** and 4 **Northern Pacific Jumping Mice** well, the latter being one of my key targets here. We had no luck with Western Heather Vole or (the quite difficult) Water Vole, however. Driving to our dispersed campsite in the Gifford Pinchot NF near Ohanapecosh, we saw more **Western Deer Mice**.

After 5 hours' sleep, we left the NF at 8:30AM Mon and re-entered Mt. Rainier NP for **Cascades Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** and **Hoary Marmot**. We were early enough to snag a parking slot in the lower lot at Paradise, which is often more difficult than finding either of these species! A ground squirrel was waiting for us at the edge of the lot, right next to our car. As Jon Hall learned the hard way, this species is easy to see, but only during their narrow activity window in the high country (mid June-mid Sep). We then hiked the gorgeous Sunrise and Golden Gate Trails past Myrtle Falls, seeing several of both **Yellow-pine** and **Townsend's Chipmunks**, a very relaxed **Black Bear**, 2 families of Sooty Grouse, and finally, 4 **Hoary Marmots** just before the switchbacks (46.7970, -121.7270). Another (very fat) **Cascades Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** was by the picnic tables at the visitor center on our return. Driving out the park, I was pleased to see an American Goshawk, a much-awaited bird lifer for me.



Townsend's Vole (*Microtus townsendii*), 'Non-varying' Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus washingtonii*), Townsend's Chipmunk (*N. townsendii*), and Western Deer Mouse (*P. sonoriensis*)

At this point it was time to make tracks back toward CA. We headed S on the I-5 and after a late (Indian) lunch in Longview, ended up at Ridgefield NWR around 4PM. The endangered 'Columbian' **White-tailed Deer**, my main target, was easy to see here even in the afternoon heat, as were at least a dozen invasive **Coypus**. After a nap and a few errands, we tried for Camas Pocket Gopher at Emerald Estates Park near Beaverton; based on iNat records, this species is easily seen here in May-June, but definitely not in August when the soil is too dry and we unsurprisingly struck out (but did add **Eastern Gray Squirrel** to the trip list). We ate takeout dinner at the I-5 Southbound French Prairie Rest Area – a **Gray-tailed Vole** was seen in the grass, and there were some very fresh Camas Pocket Gopher diggings. Even if we didn't actually see the latter here, I reckon this spot is well worth a stop if you're after these 2 Willamette Valley endemics.

We decided to return to Mary's Peak for the night as it seemed the best option for interesting mammals without a major detour off the I-5. Despite fairly warm (low 60s) temps, mammal activity was lower than a week ago. Slowly cruising the road up the mountain, we did nonetheless see a few **Western Deer Mice**, 2 of what I guess were **Brush Rabbits** (oddly pale and perhaps hybrids with Eastern Cottontail), and best of all – a **Bushy-tailed Woodrat** of the dark gray, coastal ssp. *fusca* bounding across a road cut. After a luxurious 7.5h of sleep in the campground (and a **Douglas's Ground Squirrel** nearby), we just had a grueling 10.5-hour – 620-mile – drive back home. Barring a couple of stops for lunch and dinner, this was essentially nonstop driving with

no breaks for mammals (the only one I'd have wanted to look for – Northern California Pocket Gopher – seemed largely impossible in August).



Cascades Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (*Callospermophilus saturatus*), Hoary Marmot (*M. caligata*) [Nicole], Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*), and Columbian White-tailed Deer (*O. v. leucurus*)

Overall, even with the 2500+ miles of driving, it was a great trip and a wonderful way to see some beautiful parts of the Pacific Northwest. The weather in nearly every site was pretty much perfect. I was expecting around 5 lifers but came away with 10! The western US and Canada are really a dream for independent mammal road trips, with abundant easy opportunities for free (or at least cheap) camping, and we're excited to explore more of it like this in the coming years. Thank you to Liam and Ian for their advice, company, and enthusiasm in the field.

Given the very limited time available at most sites, we missed some of our more difficult target species, but part of the point of this trip was to research these places and figure out how to actually find the tougher mammals next time. In this regard we were fairly successful. I'll have to return to the Oregon Coast Range to find Aplodontia, White-footed and Red Tree Voles, Coast Mole, and Marsh and Pacific Shrews. I reckon it would be best to focus on wetter, more coastal sites than Mary's Peak with better quality low-elevation habitat like Mt. Hebo or 5 Rivers Rd (near Paris). These sites were too far off the I-5 for this trip, but would be good bases on a future pitfall trapping trip (under permits) in June, also the best time for Camas Pocket Gopher near Portland.

Marsh and Olympic Shrews, Coast and Townsend's Moles, and Keen's Myotis are all targetable on the Olympic Peninsula – for these species I'd focus on the wettest temperate rainforests on the Pacific side, slightly earlier in the year (mid June-mid July). According to Liam, narrow roads around Cape Flattery and the Queets and Quinault Rainforests can be excellent for road cruising unusual small mammals (incl. Creeping Vole, Northern Pacific Jumping Mouse, Trowbridge's Shrew, and even Townsend's Mole) – in fact, Cape Flattery is so moist that *Peromyscus* actually seem scarce and voles, shrews, and even moles comprise the bulk of the small mammal community! Early season would also be better for Aplodontia at Pt. Angeles, and it should be possible to try for Western Heather Vole at Hurricane Ridge.

With a couple of extra days, it would've been well worth taking one of the wildlife trips out of Telegraph Cove on the N end of Vancouver Island. In fact, I somewhat regret not squeezing one in since we were fairly close at Campbell River. These (largely boat-based) tours cover the Johnstone Strait between VI and the mainland – August is peak season for Brown Bears, and 'Northern' Sea Otter, Steller's Sea Lion, Black Bear, Humpback Whale, Dall's Porpoise, Pacific White-sided Dolphin, and both (Northern) Resident and Transient Killer Whales are all regularly seen.

Finally, Mt. Rainier has several other possibilities for mammal watching. I'd like to return and put in more effort for both Western Heather Vole (rocky alpine meadows with mountain heath) and Water Vole (Frog Heaven & Reflection Lake), as the park seems to be one of the better sites for both species. Mountain Goats and 'Cascades' Red Fox are more easily seen on the Sunrise side of the park, compared to Paradise. Wolverines are seen increasingly often in snowfields of Glacier Basin (a 2-3 day backpacking trip); with a fairly visible population of ~20 on the mountain, this is one of the most feasible sites in the lower 48 to actually target this species.

MAMMAL LIST:

1. Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) [I] – William Finley NWR
2. Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus washingtonii*) – Olympic (Sol Duc), Mt. Rainier (Nisqually)
3. Brush Rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) – Mary's Peak [ID uncertain]
4. Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) [I] – William Finley NWR
5. Humboldt's Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys oregonensis*) – Mary's Peak
6. Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) [I] – Beaverton
7. Douglas's Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) – Mary's Peak, Olympic (Sol Duc) (*douglasii*); Mt. Rainier (*mollipilosus*)
8. Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus vancouverensis*) – Mt. Washington, Mohun Lake
9. Cascades Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (*Callospermophilus saturatus*) – Mt. Rainier (Paradise)
10. Hoary Marmot (*Marmota caligata*) – Mt. Rainier (Paradise)
11. Olympic Marmot (*Marmota olympus*) – Olympic (Hurricane Ridge)

12. Vancouver Island Marmot (*Marmota vancouverensis*) – Mt. Washington
13. Douglas's Ground Squirrel (*Otospermophilus douglasii*) – I-5 Manzanita RA, Mary's Peak
14. Yellow-pine Chipmunk (*Neotamias amoenus*) – Olympic (Hurricane Ridge) (*caurinus*); Mt. Rainier (Paradise) (*ludibundus*)
15. Townsend's Chipmunk (*Neotamias townsendii*) – Mary's Peak, Olympic (Hurricane Ridge) (*townsendii*); Mt. Rainier (Paradise) (*cooperi*)
16. Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*) [I] – I-5 N Oak Grove RA, Ridgefield NWR
17. Western Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys californicus*) – Mary's Peak
18. Southern Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*) – Olympic (Sol Duc)
19. Gray-tailed Vole (*Microtus canicaudus*) – I-5 N Oak Grove RA, I-5 S French Prairie RA
20. Creeping Vole (*Microtus oregoni*) – Mt. Rainier (Nisqually)
21. Townsend's Vole (*Microtus townsendii laingi*) – Mohun Lake
22. Bushy-tailed Woodrat (*Neotoma cinerea fusca*) – Mary's Peak
23. Keen's Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus keeni*) – Olympic (Sol Duc), Mohun Lake
24. Western Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus sonoriensis*) – I-5 N Oak Grove RA, Mary's Peak, Olympic (Sol Duc), Mt. Rainier
25. Western Harvest Mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotis*) – William Finley NWR
26. Northern Pacific Jumping Mouse (*Zapus trinotatus*) – Mt. Rainier (Paradise)
27. Trowbridge's Shrew (*Sorex trowbridgii*) – Olympic (Sol Duc)
28. Little Brown / Yuma Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus / yumanensis*) – Olympic (Sol Duc)
29. Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) – William Finley NWR
30. Northern River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) – Triton Cove
31. Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) – Triton Cove
32. American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) – Mt. Rainier (Paradise)
33. Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) – Olympic (Sol Duc)
34. Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Duke Point-Tsawwassen ferry
35. Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) – Olympic (Hurricane Ridge), Mt. Washington, Mt. Rainier (Paradise)
36. White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) – Ridgefield NWR

Humboldt's / Northern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys oregonensis / sabrinus*) – Olympic (Sol Duc)

?? White-footed Vole (*Arborimus albipes*) ?? – Mary's Peak