

Mammal watching in the Pacific Northwest, summer 2019

With notes on birding, locations, sounds, and chasing chipmunks

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How to use this report

For this report I've chosen not to do the classic chronological order, but instead, I've treated every mammal species I've seen in individual headers and added some charismatic species that I've missed. Further down I've made a list of hotspot birding areas that I've visited where the most interesting bird species that I've seen are treated.

If you are visiting the Pacific Northwest, you'll find information on where to look for mammals in this report and some additional info on taxonomy and identification. I've written it with a European perspective, but that shouldn't be an issue.

Birds are treated in detail for Mount Rainier and the Monterey area, including the California Condors of Big Sur. For other areas, I've mentioned the birds, but there must be other reports for more details. I did a non-hardcore type of birding, just looking at everything I came across and learning the North American species a bit, but not twitching everything that was remotely possible. That will be for another time.

Every observation I made can be found on [Observation.org](https://www.observations.org), where the exact date, location and in some cases evidence photos and sound recordings are combined. These observations are revised by local admins, and if you see an alleged mistake, you can let the observer and admin know by clicking on one of the "Contact" options in the upper right panel.

I also had no opportunities to catch rodents (no life traps nor permits), nor did I do anything with bats, except for some Big Brown Bats *Eptesicus fuscus* I saw and photographed flying around at dusk. My girlfriend didn't like night drives too much either, so I only did that once, with success.

My point is that you can see a much higher number of species of both birds and mammals than me. With this report, I'll give you tips on how to do so regarding mammals.

All photos are taken by me (except for the Siskiyou Chipmunk which was taken by my girlfriend).

Black-footed
Albatros,
Monterey Bay
Canyon.



INTRODUCTION

In July and early August I travelled with my girlfriend from Vancouver to San Francisco. Besides birds and mammals, we also visited three cities (Vancouver, Seattle and San Francisco) and skipped the most hardcore birding. If you need a trip report on birding, I recommend to look further, as we did not visit every hotspot possible. We did bird though, and I have added tips and tricks for some species here too, such as California condor at Big Sur, pelagic birding and high altitude species at Mt. Rainier. The main focus on this report however, is mammals. We have looked for mammals throughout the area, only ignoring species where special material is needed, such as mice and bats. In total we saw [36 species of mammal](#), excluding 2 exotics, a hairless primate and everything we only saw dead. [181 species of birds](#) were observed. Additionally I also looked at insects and some plants, but not very actively. My total list can be found [here](#). In this report, I will not give a day-by-day account that is normally seen in trip reports, but I will provide a list of species with information on locations, tips on techniques, remarks on taxonomy and recognition. This includes species that we dipped, missed or simply did not have time for, where I will provide info for if you want to do it better than me.

This is a report with written from a European viewpoint and I might be giving attention to species that all Americans have seen numerously, but I hope that there is information for everyone here. If there are mistakes, do not hesitate to contact me!

ITINERARY AND PLACES VISITED

Our itinerary can be found in the map in figure 1. We started in Vancouver, took the ferry to Vancouver island, spent some days at Tofino, one night at Cape Lazo and then took the same ferry back to Vancouver. From there we took the train to Seattle where we rented a car a day later to leave for the Northern Cascades. From that point onward, our route was straightforward. In hindsight I would have done things differently for the first part. It was beautiful, but the fact that we had to catch a train and return our first rental car at a fixed time meant that we had needless stress and could not stay longer on

Vancouver Island. I recommend visiting Canada and the U.S. on two separate holidays, because the rent is often not possible or very expensive to return a rental car in another country. My advice is therefore combine 1.5 weeks Vancouver Island with a similar time in the



Canadian mainland, visiting the Rockies and perhaps the Great Plains. The same for the U.S., where our itinerary could for example be combined with Yellowstone or Southern California as a replacement of Vancouver Island. A list of hotspots for birding and mammal watching can be found in the chapter "Hotspots". Other tips are: plan your campgrounds during weekends because in summer, they are often full! Wildcamping is sometimes possible, but prepare that thoroughly.

SPECIES ACCOUNT

Cascade Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel *Callospermophilus saturatus*

This species, endemic to the Cascade mountain range, is easy to see at campgrounds, picnic areas and busy hiking paths at higher altitudes in the Cascades. We saw them in high numbers at Lake Wenatchee State Park and at Mount Rainier. It's closest relative, the **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel *C. lateralis*** was not observed on our route, but should be common in other mountain ranges, including frequently visited parks such as Banff (BC), Yellowstone (WY) and Yosemite (CA). The differences between the two species are slight, with *C. saturatus* having gray flanks, while *C. lateralis* has white flanks. I have seen pictures however where *C. lateralis* has gray flanks as well, so it would be interesting to dive into that matter some more and look for example at sound differences. The *C. saturatus* I have heard made various calls, but were hard to record as they made their sounds unpredictably.



Vancouver Island Marmot *Marmota vancouverensis*

A painful point, as we missed this highly endemic, highly threatened marmot due to a number of circumstances. They are not active during the rain and due to unfortunate planning (rental car return, train ride, and ferries that were fully booked), we had way too short time during the worst rain that we had of the entire trip. When it finally stopped, we could visit one burrow we knew thanks to Ruben Vermeer, but other than a displaying Sooty Grouse and some American Red Squirrels, there was not activity. If you do want to see this species, count on two days in this general area, so you have a backup day for bad weather. Normally the species is not hard to find at the higher altitudes of the skiing area of Mount Washington. According to the people from the ski-lift ticket sale, they were frequently seen around the top (easily accessible with said ski lift, also during summer), but the burrow where we went to is reachable with a 30 minute hike.

Cascade Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, common on Campgrounds and Hiking Paths in the Cascade mountain range, including Mount Rainier. Note the gray (not white) flanks.

Olympic Marmot *Marmota olympus*

During the planning of the trip, we had to make some concessions as we had lots of things we wanted to see, and we decided to skip the Olympic peninsula and therefore had no chance on seeing the second highly endemic, highly threatened marmot of the West Coast. The locations for this species are freely visible on observation.org and apparently the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Centre and Eastward on the ridge towards Eagle Point is the place to be.

Yellow-bellied Marmot *Marmota flaviventris*

There are not many places to see this species on our route as this is a more inland species. By far the best spot to see this one is at Pearygin Lake State Park near Winthrop. There is a nice colony freely accessible at 48.489, -120.149. This area is a perfect place to visit to get some more variation in your West Coast trip, as it is filled with a totally different scala of species from both the Eastern America and the prairies, see Hotspots.



Hoary Marmot *Marmota caligata*

The place to be for this species is Mount Rainier. They are particularly common and tame around the skyline trail at Paradise. We saw significantly less individuals at Sunrise and there you have to look for them along the Huckleberry creek trail from the start until the start of the forest going to the Forest Lake. They were remarkably silent for marmot standards.

Chipmunks *Neotamias* – introduction

The Western United States are filled with chipmunk species. They are attractive and often easy to find at picnic places and campground, but not all of them! If you want to see all possible species, read their accounts carefully and do

your own research, because I missed three of them at the end. Additionally, they are not that easy to identify. Some occur next to each other, though most species are easily identified based on their distribution range. It is much more fun to identify them by their appearance and sounds, and therefore I encourage everyone to make sound recordings (with your phone is good), preferably of their alarm calls. Keep in mind that chipmunks have various calls and even have different alarm calls for avian and terrestrial threats. Therefore you might contribute to the knowledge about these animals by recording as well. Alarm calls are given while chipmunk

Yellow-bellied Marmot, Pearygin Lake (top) and Hoary Marmot, Huckleberry creek (left).

stands alert with their tail completely straight while the animal switches directional position every few seconds. Be wary that iNaturalist and observation.org are full of wrong identifications at the moment of writing, which is atypical, because these platforms are usually quite good for mammals.

Least Chipmunk *Neotamias minimus*

This species is found more inland than most other species. Before I saw them at the Ryegrass Rest Ground Westbound at Highway 90 (46.948, -120.209), which is the place for Piute Ground Squirrel, see below, I was uncertain about some observations in the Cascade range. At this moment I think I wrongly identified these as the young Townsend's Chipmunks *N. townsendi* and/or Yellow-pine Chipmunks *N. amoenus*. Both species have tails longer than their bodies when they are young and regularly run with their tails straight up. The actual Least Chipmunks *N. minimus* were very straightforward in identification, as their jizz is very typical. They are more nervous, have their tails nearly always straight up during running and are paler and less saturated than the other species.

Yellow-pine Chipmunk *Neotamias amoenus*

This species is nicely colored, with conspicuous black and white stripes on the back and bright orange flanks. Far further East one should be wary of **Red-tailed Chipmunk *N. ruficaudus***, which has a red underside of the tail (instead of orange), but this species only occurs in the east of Washington. Yellow-pine Chipmunks can be confused with Least Chipmunk (see above) and Townsend's Chipmunks. Usually Yellow-pine is well separated from Townsend's by the orange flanks and the more pied stripes, but there are some individuals where the characteristics are not that clear. Be sure to record calls of these animals as it might be possible to separate them by voice. An alarm call to an avian predator (Cooper's Hawk in this case) can be found [here](#). It belongs to [this](#) individual in the Eastern Cascades, where the species was most common. Other places where I saw this species were Mount Rainier, Washington Pass, Sullivan Lake and the Oregon coast.

Townsend's Chipmunk *Neotamias townsendi*

The most frequently seen chipmunk during our trip, common at all camp grounds and pick nick areas in the Cascades, Mount Rainier and the Oregon coast until it is replaced by Siskiyou Chipmunk *N. siskiyou* at the Northern Redwoods. Most are dark saturated brown with a pale lower back stripe and a brownish higher back stripe. The only alarm call I heard was a very strange, low pitched "[woop woop woop](#)". Click [here](#) for the recording of this call I made in the Cascades. This is said to be a typical alarm call for terrestrial danger.

Siskiyou Chipmunk *Neotamias siskiyou*

Seen in the Northern Redwoods south to the Klamath River, after which it is replaced by Allen's Chipmunk *N. senex*. All my observations come from the Mill Creek Campground. They were common there, but I was not able to record the alarm call there, only social calls. According to Reid (2006) the alarm call is a single V-shaped high pitch call, given every 4 seconds. Siskiyou chipmunks are slightly smaller than *N. townsendi* but for the rest rather look alike. Sound is the best identification method.

Allen's Chipmunk *Neotamias senex*

The next Chipmunk in line is Allen's Chipmunk *N. senex*. They have a slightly wider range further inland, but I saw them only at the Coastal Redwoods, both at "Big Tree" at Prairie Creek and at Hidden Springs campground at the Humboldt Redwoods. Similar looking to *N. siskiyou* and *N. townsendi* and again the best separation is their alarm call, which is an excitable barking at medium frequency of several notes in a row (Reid, 2006).



Top row: Least Chipmunk (2x), Ryegrass Rest Station (WA). Townsend's Chipmunk, Colonial creek Campground, Northern Cascades (WA).

Middle row: Yellow-pine Chipmunk (2x), Bear Pond, Eastern Cascades (WA) and Sullivan Lake, Okonagan Range (WA).

Bottom row: Siskiyou Chipmunk, Mill Creek Campground, Del Norte Redwoods (CA). Allen's Chipmunk, Hidden Springs Campground, Humboldt Redwoods (CA).

Yellow-cheeked Chipmunk *Neotamias ochrogenys*

This was a painful miss, mainly because of lack of preparation. Whereas the Northern Chipmunks are omnipresent at campgrounds and other recreation areas, from this point Southward, I didn't see any chipmunks at comparable areas anymore. We first tried it at Laguna Point near Cleone, but only California Ground Squirrel *Otospermophilus beecheyi* was present here. According to the people working at the state park, the chipmunks were very rare and one of them remembered vaguely that she had seen them at Russian Gulch just North of Mendocino. When we arrived there the employee at the entrance said that there were no chipmunks there, only ground squirrels and we decided not to go there and not pay the 8 dollar day use entrance fee. Instead we went to try at some remnant redwoods at Navarro River State Park, as this should be their habitat. No chipmunks were there and time forced us to move on and officially dip this chipmunk. When I finally had internet again at the end of the day, frustratingly enough there were lots of chipmunk observations from Russian Gulch, at the non-coastal part of the park, probably an area where the employee did not come often... In conclusion, it seems that Russian Gulch State Park is the place to be for this localized endemic chipmunk.

California
Ground
Squirrel,
Laguna
Point

Sonoma Chipmunk *Neotamias sonomae* and Merriam's Chipmunk *N. merriami*

The two other chipmunks I missed. I did not take the time to look for Sonoma Chipmunk because I'd rather see Northern Elephant Seal *Mirounga angustirostris* (good reason, right?). For Merriam's chipmunk, I should have visited more inland forested areas at Monterey and San Francisco, for which I again had no time.

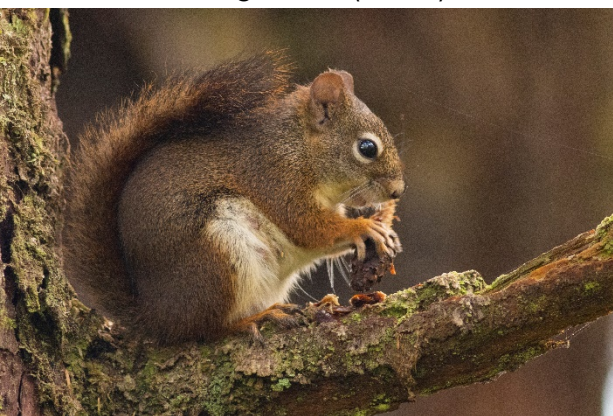


California Ground Squirrel *Otospermophilus beecheyi*

This species takes over the role of chipmunks at coastal Californian campgrounds and picknick areas, though it is of course much bigger with a digging lifestyle. I also saw several individuals at Umtanum creek trail between Ellensburg and Yakima, in Washington. Listen here for [an alarm call](#) to a nearby Bobcat.

American Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

I only expected to see this species on Vancouver Island. I indeed did see them there, both at Long Beach (Tofino) and Mount Washington, but they were also numerous at Bear Pond in the Eastern Cascades. A lovely species that is best separated from Douglas' Squirrel *T. douglasii* by their less saturated backside with more red and their white belly instead of yellow. [Very vocal](#).



American
Red
Squirrel,
Combers
Beach,
Vancouver
Island

forests. Often found [calling from tree stems and foraging on the forest floor](#). Seen from Vancouver city parks to Californian redwoods and coastal forests. Distinctive call is often heard and differs subtly from American Red Squirrel. A different call, given when in alarm (not sure to what) can be heard [here](#).

Douglas' Squirrel *Tamiasciurus douglasii*

A common squirrel both in wild remote areas as on campgrounds and picknick areas in



Douglas' Squirrel, White River Campground, Mount Rainier.

Western Gray Squirrel *Sciurus griseus*

This species has become quite rare due to competition with the much smaller invasive **Eastern Gray Squirrel *S. carolinensis***. We saw the latter in city parks of Vancouver and San Francisco. The Western Gray Squirrel remained elusive for us. The observations are scattered and I do not know a reliable place to see it. They are sometimes seen at the Del Norte Redwoods according to the rangers and I saw nice photos on observation.org near the Point Reyes Station. The Western Gray Squirrel is recognizable by size (almost a small cat), a darker gray without rusty hairs and a relatively longer tail and more pointed snout.

Townsend's Ground Squirrel *Urocitellus townsendi nancyae*

When I was preparing my trip to the U.S., the only *Urocitellus* I could find that was slightly on my itinerary was this [Piute Ground Squirrel on iNaturalist](#) from the disjunct population between the Yakima river and the Columbia river in Washington. I decided to visit the area (for which I am very glad because I saw interesting other species such as Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow and Least Chipmunk as well) and with some patience one ground squirrel. According to Reid (2006) the population here is a disjunct population of Piute or Great Basin Ground Squirrel *U. mollis*. This concept has been updated and it is now thought that it is a population of Townsend's Ground Squirrel *U. townsendi* with a deviant number of chromosomes (Thorington et al. 2012), which explains the dark color nicely. I found two burrows on the Ryegrass Safety Rest Area Westbound (46.947, -120.209) on Highway 90. Remember that this rest area is only reachable traveling from East to West and that if you want to twitch it coming from the West, you'll have to travel via Vantage. Coming from the North, we had no problem accessing this terrain. It is a nice prairie like region with stunning views of the snowy summit of Mount Rainier in the distance. I needed some patience before I finally saw one, because they are quite shy. Best technique is sitting at the picnic tables and keeping the closest burrow in view, which is at the eastside of the area within the asphalted roads. See screenshot of google streetview in Fig. X. There is another burrow (for backup) on the westside near the fence.



Townsend's Ground Squirrel, Ryegrass Rest Area, Highway 90. Only one individual seen at the burrow, quickly went underground as soon as it noticed it had gotten attention. Best technique is to sit and wait at the picnic tables, see next page.



Location of the burrow on Google Streetview. Best technique is to sit at the picnic tables on the right and just have lunch until one pops up. There is another burrow at the far west end of the rest area.

American Pika *Ochotona princeps*

High on both my and my girlfriends wishlist, we took some time to find these very cool Lagomorphs. Mount Rainier has some good populations and the rangers at the visitor center can often tell where to find them. At Sunrise there is much more suitable habitat than at Paradise, so I definitely recommend spending a sunny morning there. The highest density is at Huckleberry Creek trail, where several individuals call at the boulder fields around 46.924, -121.657. I also saw one at the easy trail toward Frozen Lake (46.919, -121.662) but keep in mind that on sunny days in the summer, this trail is incredibly busy with tourists. According to the rangers, they are the easiest looking down from Sunrise Point, but I only awwed at the stunning scenery at that point and did not look down (46.917, -121.587). If for some reason you do not visit Sunrise (which I don't recommend though), according to the rangers, they can also be found walking up from the Christine Falls and there are a few observations from the Skyline trail at Paradise as well. For some reason I did not see **Snowshoe Hare *Lepus americanus*** and I don't know what the best way is to see it.

Brush Rabbit *Sylvilagus bachmani*

Mostly I saw the introduced **Eastern Cottontail *S. floridanus***, mainly around Vancouver and Seattle, but around San Francisco, it was finally jackpot with Brush Rabbits, where they are common in coastal areas such as the Rodeo Lagoon on the Marin Headlands and at Sunset Beach State Park at the Monterey Bay.

American Pika, more often heard than seen, but this one shortly showed itself long enough for a few photos. Sunny mornings are the best time to see them. This one was on the busy Frozen Lake trail at Sunrise, Mount Rainier.





Bobcat *Lynx rufus*

Completely unplanned, my girlfriend found our first species of *Lynx* on the grassy plains [of Point Reyes](#). It was a brilliant observation in the late afternoon while we returned from the Elephant

Bobcat, same individual as on front page. Found when I went to check why the California Ground Squirrel was alarming. Kept looking straight at me for a while, then jumped away.

Seals. Later I saw that they are more frequently seen on the Point Reyes peninsula, so it might be good technique to drive around there in early morning or evening scanning every now and again. We saw our individual from here: 38.049, -122.974. Later even saw [a second Bobcat](#) at a different location. I did not believe I could have a better observation than on Point Reyes, but I was proven wrong when I went investigating an alarm call of a California Ground Squirrel *O. beecheyi* while I was birding at the Elkhorn Slough Preserve North of Monterey. I could not believe my eyes when a bobcat popped out of the bush right in front of me, looking me straight in the eyes! After several seconds (which felt like an



Bobcat at Point Reyes, late afternoon.

eternity) it jumped away and with elegant leaps got to the cover of the next bush. Amazing observation! Good birding spot too with a nice wetland (36.841, -121.738).

Gray Fox *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

High on my wishlist since I was a little kid, I was hoping to see this species. However, I could not find a reliable location where they would be visible during daytime. Even though my girlfriend hates driving at night, I could convince her to join me in the Giant Redwoods. The first night, in the Del Norte Redwoods, did not yield a single mammal, but the second (and last) time, we hit the jackpot with [two Gray Foxes](#) and a Striped Skunk! All of them seen from the legendary Avenue of the Giants in Humboldt Redwoods State Park. The two foxes were seen crossing the road in the headlights, showing themselves for a few moments in the torchlight afterward. We saw them at these locations: 40.300, -123.894 and 40.287, -123.897. Remember to watch for the black tail tip as best separation from Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. During the whole trip we did not see a single Red Fox by the way.

Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

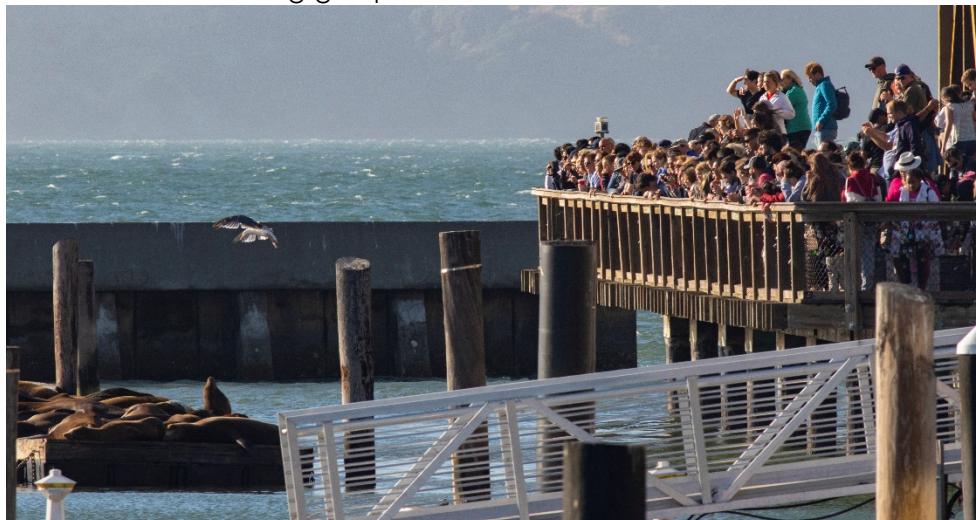
In July, most California Sea Lions *Zalophus californianus* have left the West Coast of Vancouver Island, leaving it to the Steller Sea Lions. This slightly bigger species is hard to separate from the California Sea Lion without direct comparison, except for their sounds. While the California Sea Lions make the classic "Oink Oink Oink"-sound featured in many old Disney cartoons, the Steller Sea Lions sound completely different, with guttural and burping growls. Listen to [the recordings I made](#) of this species here and compare it with the California Sea Lions I recorded as well here below. We saw Steller Sea Lions on several locations on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, but only got close enough to hear them at our whale watching trip with Ocean Outfitters from Tofino. They were present on "Sea Lion Rock", visible from the Long Beach at camping Greenpoint as well.



Steller Sea Lions at Vancouver Island, seen with a whale watching trip from Tofino

California Sea Lion *Zalophus californianus*

This common sea lion was momentarily absent from Vancouver Island, but beware that they can be found during most of the year there too and that not every sea lion there is automatically a Steller Sea Lion. We saw several hauling groups on various locations from the Oregon Coast southward: from the cliffs at the Sea Lion Caves, in the harbor of Crescent City ([where I recorded their sounds](#)), at the Big Sur near Monterey and at the famous Pier 39 in San Francisco. I find it heartwarming to see how they are one of the most busy attractions of this wonderful city and counted 98 hauling individuals there.



California Sea Lions at the legendary Pier 39 and their *Homo sapiens* spectators

Northern Elephant Seal *Mirounga angustirostris*

I simply had to see these incredible beasts so we rushed to Point Reyes and the [Elephant Seal Overlook](#) (37.997, -122.982). I was not disappointed. Even though the tide was high, we could have excellent views of the hauling youngsters and females, while the bulls (both adolescent and old) were fighting and arguing in the shallow surf. Even there they could rise up far enough to smack each other vigorously with slams that were even audible from the overlook. This was certainly not the only thing we could hear, as their incredible guttural sounds were audible from almost a mile away. I managed to make a bad sound recording with my phone. It sounds like a toilet being unclogged.



Northern Elephant Seals seen from the Elephant Seal Viewing Point at the Southern tip of Point Reyes. Spectacular animals and while the young and females were lying on the beach, both young males and big bulls fought in the surf.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Common in the harbors of Vancouver, Seattle and San Francisco, but also on many other places in between.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*

Not a very difficult species to see anymore, but still one of the highlights of the trip. I saw the Northern subspecies *E. lutris kenyoni* from the Long Beach at camping Greenpoint and several



individuals – including a mother and a young on her belly in the kelp – from the Whale Watching tour by Ocean Outfitters departing from Tofino. The species is reintroduced from Alaska to Vancouver Island around 1970, after they were extirpated in 1929. The Southern subspecies *E. lutris nereis* was pushed back to a single location at Bixby Bridge in Big Sur, which is a nice place to look at if you combine it with California Condor, and the bridge itself is quite photogenic as well. From there they were able to recolonize other parts of

Southern Sea Otter at the harbor of Monterey. This one was seen from the boat towards the whale watching site, but they are easily seen from land as well

California thanks to the protection they were granted, including for example the harbor of Monterey, where you can see them very well and sometimes from a close distance.

North American River Otter *Lontra canadensis*

Although this species seems to be easier to see than its European counterpart *Lutra lutra*, I managed to miss it on the places where the chances were high, such as Combers Beach, Ucluelet, and the Arcata wetlands. I finally saw two individuals thanks to two local birders at the [Rodeo Lagoon](#) on the Marin Headlands just North of the Golden Gate bridge. Here they tend to swim every morning.

Long-tailed Weasel *Mustela frenata*

A nice surprise when we did a morning hike along the Skyline trail from Paradise at Mount Rainier. A Long-tailed Weasel was actively searching a small boulder field for prey and we were able to observe it for a long time until it was chased away by a Hoary Marmot. I think you have to be lucky to see this species and that there is no easy way to twitch it or something.



Long-tailed Weasel giving away exceptional views on a boulder field along the Skyline trail of Mount Rainier



Striped skunk at the northern Redwoods.

Striped Skunk *Mephitis mephitis*

While I was driving back in the dark to the Hidden Springs campground at the Humboldt Redwoods, I had my window open and drove slowly. I suddenly heard a lot of rustling, so I backed up quickly only to find a stunning Striped Skunk in my torchlight, which we were able to observe and photograph for quite some time. This less rare nephew of the **Western Spotted Skunk *Spilogale gracilis*** was our only skunk and I am very happy with the observation. I highly recommend driving slowly at night with the window open when road conditions allow it!

Predators we did not see

Predators are always high on everyone's wish list when they go somewhere, but often you have to put in a lot of time and effort to find them. With 10 species of Carnivora in 3.5 weeks, I am more than happy and it is higher number than I expected! There are of course still species that

we did not see that could have been possible, and here I shortly mention them with tips of where and how they could be found. The main tip is to make more night- and early morning drives (though I did the latter a lot), covering a large distance. **Cougars *Puma concolor*** and **Black Bears *Ursus americanus*** have a large distribution. The Puma is of course the most difficult to see although I have heard rumors that the most northern part of Vancouver Island might yield the best options. The Black Bears on the contrary are not that hard to see compared to other predators. The fact that I did not see them is probably due to bad luck as many Americans we spoke had seen at least once a Black Bear in the region. The easiest place is of course Yellowstone or the Canadian Rockies and since I want to go there at least once in my life, I am not very mournful that I missed them. Yellowstone and the Canadian Rockies are also a very good place for **Grizzly Bear *Ursus arctos***, while this species only is found in the Northern Cascades within the area covered by this trip report. Both **Canada Lynx *Lynx canadensis*** and **Wolverine *Gulo gulo*** also only reach the area covered by this report in the Northern Cascades, where they are equally hard to find. **Northern Fur Seal *Callorhinus ursinus*** is a very interesting species that spends most of its life at the open sea, where it apparently can sleep too. It only comes ashore to breed and initially I thought they only did that on the Pribilofs off Alaska at this part of the Pacific. I knew there was a small chance of seeing one at sea during whale watching, but I did not manage to see one. It was however confirmed as one was seen with Monterey Bay Whale Watch on the 3rd of August, a week after I was there. I recently learned that they recolonized the South Farallon Islands off San Francisco (Lee et al., 2018), where I did not have time for to go on a trip there. Trips are organized from San Francisco and I have heard great stories about these trips in terms of birds and whales too, so I strongly recommend anyone visiting San Francisco to take such a trip! **Wolf *Canis lupus*** is sometimes seen from boat trips to low tides for watching Black Bears from Tofino. **Coyote *Canis latrans*** should be doable in open landscapes. The elusive **Ringtail *Bassariscus astutus*** remained elusive, so maybe one should do more night drives in Oregon and California to increase your chances. **Northern Raccoon *Procyon lotor***, I only saw as roadkill, but this species is common so I recommend to party until deep in the night and then drunkenly search in dumpsters. For **American Badger *Taxidea taxus***, **Fisher *Marthes pennanti***, **American Marten *Marthes Americana***, **Mink *Mustela vison***, other mustelids and **Western Spotted Skunk *Spilogale gracilis*** you need a lot more luck and especially the latter is becoming difficult, so I recommend preparing the locations for this species thoroughly.

Roosevelt
Elk at
Prairie
Creek,
which
was their
last
refuge
before
their
conserva-
tion
started.
Nowada-
ys easy
to see
here.



American Elk *Cervus canadensis*

I saw a single female elk in the early morning at Sunrise, Mount Rainier, but the most attractive elks are found further South where the Roosevelt Elk *C. canadensis roosevelti* had their last stronghold in Prairie Creek, in the Northern Redwoods. From here they recolonized parts of the West Coast, but they can still be found there too, though it feels a bit like a zoo with all the people stopping along the road to look at them. I do like it however that this was their last resort that kept them from extinction in the wild. There

was a larger herd of females and young [along highway 101](#) South of Crescent city, which we later saw along the Humboldt Road. At [Prairie Creek](#) we saw three large males, where it is an important tourist attraction (but still wild animals). Later on we saw two more large males 156 miles further South [along Highway 1](#).

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus*

This is the most common deer of Eastern North America, but in the West they are vastly outnumbered by Black-tailed Deer *O. hemionus*, although they are allegedly growing in

population in Eastern Washington. This is also the only place where I saw one, of the subspecies *O. virginianus idahoensis*. I did not put in effort to see the endangered subspecies *O. virginianus leucurus* of the Washington and Oregon coast. [My observation](#) was at Bear pond on the Eastern edge of the Cascades near Winthrop.

Black-tailed Deer or Mule Deer *Odocoileus hemionus*

The most common deer in the West and therefore also on my trip, where two subspecies occur. On the Coastal areas from Vancouver Island to San Francisco the Columbian Black-tailed Deer *O. hemionus columbianus* is found, often named "black-tailed deer" by the locals. Further inland there is the nominate Rocky Mountain Mule Deer, often named "mule deer" by the locals. The two subspecies groups of mule deer and black-tailed deer might belong to separate species, but more research is needed. They are mainly differentiated by the amount of black on the tail. Black-tailed deer has black (or dark brown at the base) in a broader in a broader band connected to the base of the upperside of the tail. In mule deers, there is much more white on the upper side of the tail, and the black spot is often not connected to the base, or only in a narrow dark line.



Small deer and their tails. Subspecies from the West Coast (Black-tailed Deer *columbianus*, Vancouver Island) have more solid dark tails, while the inland subspecies (Mule deer *hemionus*, Eastern Cascades) have less black. The White-tailed Deer (Eastern Cascades) have a long tail that is held straight up in alarm. The upper side is brown, without a trace of black



Mountain Goat *Oreamnos americanus*

One of the species I really wanted to see, mainly because of the hilarious Donald Duck/Mickey Mouse cartoon from 1936 called "Alpine Climbers" (very politically (and biologically) incorrect nowadays, with egg-stealing, Edelweiss-plucking and fighting with Mountain Goats, but hey). I had planned them for Mount Rainier, but saw them even earlier at the Blue Lake in the Northern Cascades thanks to a tip of one of the rangers in the visitor center, where one individual came very close and [could even be selfied with](#). Other were seen [with calves on a distant slope](#). If the Northern Cascades are not on your itinerary, they are also reliable on Mount Rainier, where we saw [a distant group from the calm Huckleberry Creek trail](#). The same group was also visible from the busy trail to Frozen Lake. According to the rangers at the Sunrise Visitor Center, the Huckleberry Creek trail is the most reliable place for these animals and therefore a good place to combine it with **American Pika *Ochotona princeps***. Remember not to go to the Olympic peninsula to see this species, as it is an invasive introduced species

Mountain Goat, this confiding individual was seen at the Blue Lake, near Washington pass. Other, more distant individuals were seen here too, as well as on Mount Rainier near Sunrise

there (but do go there for **Olympic Marmot** *Marmota olympus* though).

Bighorn Sheep *Ovis canadensis*

Even though there are some places in the Rocky Mountains where Bighorn Sheep is well doable, on our itinerary it is very rare and only can be observed in some places in the Eastern Cascades. I had seen that they were observed along the Umtanum creek trail West of the Yakima river between Ellensburg and Yakima (WA), so we went there for a hike. Before we arrived on the spot my girlfriend [discovered a group of sheep](#) from the driving car on the other side (which is the East side) of the river a few miles before the Umtanum creek, and we could observe them well (all females). During a short hike up and down the Umtanum trail, we did not see any extra sheep.



Bighorn Sheep, seen from the 821 from Ellensburg to Yakima, which is an excellent alternative for the 82 Freeway.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Common not that far out at sea, we saw humpbacks during whale watching from Tofino, Vancouver Island (1 ind.) and from the Ferry from Victoria/Swartz Bay back to Vancouver. This is also a very good spot to see the endangered **Southern Resident Orca's** *Orcinus orca*, but we missed those by a few hours. There are always whale watching companies going for them, so if you have the time visit them from Victoria or from a U.S. harbor. Absolutely spectacular was the feeding frenzy of more than 20 Humpback Whales with Monterey Bay Whale Watch, cooperatively lunge feeding, tail slapping and two times breaching. They were working together with Californian Sea Lions to catch anchovies *Engraulis mordax* quite close to shore, not above the canyon.



Spectacular feeding frenzy of Humpback Whales and California Sea Lions with Monterey Bay Whale Watch.

Gray Whale *Eschrichtius robustus*

This enigmatic migratory species that is connected to the Pacific could not lack from our list, so I was quite anxious for my Vancouver Island Whale Watching trip, where several individuals were observed throughout the summer, while most of their conspecifics spend the summer further North in the Bering Sea. We had (short) views of a single individuals eventually. In hindsight, I shouldn't have stressed so much, because when we were travelling South along the Oregon coast, we decided to check out the so-called Whale Watching Center. Upon arrival it became apparent that no less than [two Gray Whales were swimming in the Depoe Bay](#)! We were able to observe them very well from the observatory and quite close to shore as well (you can also do trips by boat for an hour). The rangers of the observatory explained that 1% of the Gray Whale population (around 230 individuals) remain along the kelp forest and rocky shores to forage there throughout the summer. Only in February there is a slight dip in sightings. There has been some genetic research and apparently the "stayers" form a distinct population. There was a nice panel of places where you can observe Gray Whales along the West Coast, but Depoe Bay seems to be the best. We had [another couple of Gray Whales further South](#) as well.

Dolphins and Porpoises – Delphinidae and Phocoenidae

I've chosen to treat all the dolphins that are possible – seen or not – in one paragraph, because of readability. Monterey Bay Whale Watching was the absolute summit of dolphin watching, with a large mixed species group along the edge of the famous under water canyon. Here, we had around 500 **Pacific White-sided Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus obliquidens***, 250 **Risso's Dolphins *Grampus griseus*** and, the rarest one – 50 **Northern Right Whale Dolphins *Lissodelphis borealis***! The latter species was hard to photograph because they were fast and were actually too close to the boat for my tele lens, but I managed to get some evidence pictures, including the ridiculously narrow fluke. [Lots of the humpbacks and Risso's were filmed by the drone of the crew](#). The canyon is also the place to be for Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli*, but this species is becoming more and more rare according to Nancy and we did not see this species that day, nor did we see it at Vancouver Island, where there are still regular observations. This is in contrast with **Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*** which I saw regularly in the bays of Seattle and San Francisco. We did see another group of Risso's Dolphins close to the shore from the Elephant Seal Overlook on Point Reyes. One of the most sought after Delphinids are of course **Killer Whales or Orcas *Orcinus orca***, but in order to see the transient Orca's you have to be lucky enough that they are there at the moment you are too. They are migratory and unpredictable where they will be hunting for mammals. In Monterey Bay and at Tofino your chances are relatively good, but I advise to look for them from any other cape or lookout on the Pacific coast with telescopes or binoculars for a while. The threatened Resident Killer Whales of Puget Sound are easier and there are whale watching tours from Seattle, Victoria and many other places along the straits and islands of Puget Sound and Juan de Fuca that look for them (which we did not do alas). All other Delphinids are rare in the area, but from August to October, sometimes longer journeys of 12 hours go from both Tofino and Monterey Bay further out at sea to look for birds and rarer whales such as **Beaked Whales *Ziphiidae***. Keep the calendars of these trips in mind, as this must be the complete summit of whale watching and pelagic birding in the Northern Hemisphere!



Pacific White-sided Dolphin (left) and Northern Right-whale Dolphin (right, only part of the very narrow fluke visible above water). It was particularly difficult to photograph these dolphins with my 400mm, because they came too close to the boat, especially when bow-riding, which was done by both species. The photo on the left is a video still I made with my phone

HOTSPOTS

Vancouver Island

An awesome place, way too large to visit all the good spots in the three days we spent there. I recommend going at least a week and do both the low tide boat tour as the whale watching tour from Tofino. The numbers of **waders** on Long Beach are amazing and the sheer wildness of the island, with its temperate natural rainforests of the Pacific Rim National Park and the many other forests and rivers further inland make it that you can spend an eternity here if you would want to. Do not forget to spend some time at the fjords on the east side or on the Sunshine Coast of the adjacent continental B.C., where **Pacific White-sided Dolphins** are common. The auks at the Western coast were very nice and included **Tufted Puffin, Marbled Murrelet, Cassin's Auklet** and **Rhinoceros Auklet**.

Northern Cascades

In terms of birds, mammals and scenery, this area is inferior to Mount Rainier and I did not see anything I missed at Mount Rainier, although I would not have wanted to miss the confiding **Mountain Goat** and it was overall a very nice place to roam around.

Right: Rhinoceros Auklet and Cassin's Auklet, seen from the tour from Tofino. Left: Say's Phoebe, Pearrygin



Winthrop and Eastern Cascades

This area is

biogeographically much more different from the Pacific Northwest than I expected. Morning hikes and tours to Bear Pond and Sullivan Lake yielded many species I did not see anywhere else on the trip and the prairie like landscape of Winthrop and Lake Pearrygin as well. Many bird species, such as **Eastern and Western Kingbird, Catbird, Say's Phoebe, Black-billed Magpie**, many **sapsuckers, woodpeckers, swallows, sparrows** and other American specialties.

Around Lake Pearrygin, where we camped, many of the local specialties can be found. For **waders**, check the Twin Lakes, where the numbers vary with the water depth.

Columbia Plateau

We only visited a very small portion of the mighty Columbia Plateau prairies, from Winthrop to Yakima west of the Columbia river. The most specialties we saw along the Ryegrass Safety Rest area Westbound on Highway 90, including **Sage Thrasher** and **Brewer's Sparrow**. The dams in the Columbia river have caused the natural flow to stop, making it not very suitable for summer birding. The Yakima river from Ellensburg is much more natural with dry steep slopes along the side of (these are also available along the Columbia river though). At the Umtanum trail we were able to do some nice birding. Both East and South of the Columbia river, there are a variety of other species.

Mount Rainier

Mount Rainier is spectacular and this is the only place along our route where I tried to get every specialty bird, including the ones I had to twitch. We were able to do so in 2.5 days. At Paradise, we took a morning hike along the Skyline trail with a deviation along the Dead Horse Creek trail. Along the snow patches at the Dead Horse Creek, I saw one of the two most important

target species: the **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch**. At Sunrise I only saw these flying by in the distance, but here they gave away great views. So did the two **White-tailed Ptarmigan** at the highest point above the Panorama point, where they were at selfie-distance along and on the trail. Other mountain specialties were **Mountain Bluebird**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Golden Eagle**, **American Dipper** and **Clark's Nutcracker**, which were best seen at Sunrise, making the two days totally worth it.



Birds of Mount Rainier: Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Bluebird, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and White-tailed Ptarmigan



Oregon Coast

The Oregon coast is aesthetically exquisite, but for birds not very interesting. A very good exception is Cannon Beach, where on a spectacularly lonely rock on the beach, a large seabird colony can be observed, including a small number of **Tufted Puffin** that breed there. From this point onwards we regularly observed groups of **Brown Pelicans** on northward postbreeding migration. Be mindful of **Harlequin Ducks** feeding alongside the **Pigeon Guillemots**. At Cape Perpetua I had my

Tufted puffin, taking off from its small colony at Cannon Beach.

first **Wrentits**.

Northern California Redwoods

Birdlife in the Redwoods is quite scarce, but these areas with the highest trees (Coastal Redwood) in the world are very impressive indeed. Close to the rivers, most wildlife can be found and we had some nice mammals here as well, such as the original population of **Roosevelt Elk** and further **Gray Fox** and **Striped Skunk**.

Arcata marshes and Eureka Bay

The mudflats of the Eureka Bay are best to be birded from the North Side at the Arcata wetlands. These (former) water sanitation marshes are very good for birds and with upcoming tide it is very good to be on the outer dike from the parking lot and walking east. There were lots of **Marbled Godwits**, **Willetts**, **Long-billed Curlews** and **Western Sandpipers** and **both Semipalmated Plover** and **Semipalmated Sandpiper** were present. Inside the wetlands were **Greater Yellowlegs** and **Long-billed Dowitchers** and chance on **North American River Otter**, many **heron** species and **Marsh Wrens**.



Shorebirds at the Eureka bay at Arcata: Willets, Marbled Godwit, Semipalmated Sandpiper and Western

Point Reyes

This peculiar peninsula consists of open grassy plains grazed by cattle. I could not spend too much time here birding, but it should be a very good spot. Other than **California Quails** and cool **mammals**, I did not see a lot here, but be sure to check the wetlands of the Drakes Estero State Marine Conservation area and the interesting areas between Point Reyes Station and Olema.

Monterey Bay

Monterey bay is world famous for its whale watching with excellent species that are usually highly pelagic. Thanks to an enormous under water canyon that comes close to shore, and the upwelling of nutrients that takes place there, this cold nutrient rich waters are filled with anchovies and there predators, including terrific bird species. July is quite early in the season for birdwatching and the famous 12 hour pelagic trips by **Alvaro's Adventures** or **Debi Shearwater** did not set out at the time I was there. The 8 hour trip by **Monterey Bay Whale Watch** under command of Nancy Black is a great alternative. The absolute birding highlight were the **Black-footed Albatrosses**. Other birds included high numbers of **Sooty Shearwater**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, a **rodgersi Northern Fulmar** and several **Sabine's Gulls**. Later in the year the number of seabird species increases dramatically and august and September are said to be the best with multiple species of storm petrel, shearwater, auklets and more. If you go, be sure to plan multiple days here and check for other pelagics as well. I've seen pelagics departing from other parts of the coast, such as **Halfmoon Bay, San Francisco (Farrallone Islands!)** and the **Oregon coast**, which I should have known before I went there...



Big Sur

This is the place to be for **California Condor**, together with the Grand Canyon in Arizona. All California Condors are descendants of a reintroduction programme and all birds are wingtagged. Birds raised in the wild usually green wingtags, but be sure to check the number on Condorspotter.com. The best area to see them is a 15 mile stretch of coastline 5 miles south of Big Sur, starting at the Grimes Point Overlook (36.205, -121.735) where we saw our first individual directly. The rest of the [group](#) (around 5 individuals, all of which were males) followed quite shortly only a mile further south.

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Some nice big birds: Top left: Black-footed Albatros, Monterey Bay Canyon. Top right: California Condor (yellow 4, raised in captivity, green wingtags are raised in the wild). Bottom left: Bald Eagle, ferry to Vancouver Island, Swartz Bay



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