

Mini trip report, Oregon, May 2022.

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It wasn't really supposed to go like this. Both our children were due to come home from university at the beginning of May for a hopefully fun-filled two-week road trip down the Oregon coast to California. Unfortunately, the plan got derailed by my daughter contracting COVID19 and having to defer an exam into the second week of May and my son deciding that Victoria just didn't cut it when he could spend the summer in Montréal instead. Tracey, my partner, stated she was still game so long as the trip categorically did not include any time spent searching for mammals. This was a pretty harsh reality for me to accept, but since she conceded the possibility that one could bump into a mammal while doing something entirely different, such as admiring the scenery or going out for dinner, I felt there was still the possibility of salvaging something worthwhile. We decided to take a week and road trip down the Oregon coast anyway. I wasn't planning on posting a report but thought I would do so as a beacon of hope for others travelling when they've been specifically instructed that time cannot be spent seeking out mammals.

The first mammal of the trip was an introduced Eastern Gray Squirrel in our backyard as we were leaving the house to catch the ferry. Normally I wouldn't include this pathetic a sighting, but since this trip was going to be focused on taking what I could get under adverse circumstances, it goes on the list anyway. The crossing from Victoria to Port Angeles was lovely and calm but, unfortunately, not productive for mammals. We drove the van down to Seal Rock, part of Olympic National Forest, to camp for the night overlooking the Hood Canal. Lots of birds were present but the only mammal of the evening was a Douglas' squirrel. The setting, however, was beautiful and being early in the season we were able to camp overlooking the water. A proposed late night drive through the forest to admire the scenery was voted down.

We continued driving south the next day, stopping for lunch at the Country Kitchen in Centralia, Washington, where I was reminded of the gargantuan proportions of American restaurant servings. After picking up some supplies in Portland we drove east to Ainsworth State Park for the night, following the older US Route 30 instead of the interstate. We saw an introduced Eastern Fox Squirrel at one of the small state picnic areas along the way. It really is incredible how widely Eastern Gray and Eastern Fox Squirrels have been introduced in western North America.

The next morning started with a quick visit to Multnomah Falls and a hike to the top. We drove back to Portland, stopping first to return a dog carrier we had picked up the previous day hoping that it would allay Piper's(our dog) anxieties in the van. Putting Piper in it achieved absolutely nothing except to keep her out of sight so that we could only extrapolate her worries from the occasional sorrowful noise. In celebration of Mother's Day we went downtown to Zeus' Café for brunch followed by a visit to Powell's Books and then to the Portland Art Museum for an exhibition on Frida and Diego. Lots of Homo sapiens but a distinct paucity of other mammalian species observed. A drive out Interstate 26 to Cannon Beach and we were on the Oregon coast with spectacular views and sea stacks loaded with nesting seabird colonies. We continued south to Nehalem Bay State Park, arriving just at dusk.

A walk the next morning produced a couple of sightings. One was of an Elk walking through the coastal forest near the beach and the second was a brief look at a California Ground Squirrel. We drove on to Cape Lookout State Park and hiked along the muddiest trail I've encountered in a couple of years to the end of the cape. Back at the Cape Lookout campground there were numerous California Ground Squirrels as well as a couple of Brush Rabbits. This state park gate was manned, unlike most of the self-registration places we had encountered so far. As I was waiting in the line to request a campsite an extremely obnoxious old lady was haranguing the poor park attendant about fallen branches in their campsite, the overhanging branches which would irreparably damage their 40 foot camper, etc. After picking a site and returning to the entry post the lady was back with her equally unpleasant husband. He parked said 40 foot motorhome in the exit lane in everyone's way. As I was checking in I heard sudden screeching. A chap backing up his small SUV had lightly bumped into the corner of the motorhome. As can be imagined, this provoked a lively discussion. After this bit of Kabuki theatre we wandered on the beach enjoying the abundant birdlife.





The next morning we passed a couple of Mule Deer by the side of the road in Cape Kiwanda, a spot where we also saw some Tufted Puffins just offshore. We stopped for lunch and a walk on the beach in Newport and visited the Heceta Head Lighthouse before camping at Sunset Bay State Park. Wandering down the entrance road after dark revealed a Common Gray Fox.

Next morning arrived cool and sunny. We drove down Cape Arago to a lookout over Simpson Reef. On the sandy beach of Shell Island just offshore were a collection of Harbour Seals, Northern/Steller's Sea Lions, California Sea Lions and several Northern Elephant Seals. Although not new species, it was lovely to see all four species in close proximity and to listen to the bellowing of the sea lions. We did a hike to the North and South Capes at Cape Arago and got a brief but decent view of a Townsend's Chipmunk.





Continuing south we stopped at Cape Blanco lighthouse where we had a nice chat with a wildlife photographer but unfortunately saw no significant wildlife. Because I had limited control over the itinerary we stopped at the historic Hughes House, built by early dairy farmers from Ireland. We continued on to Brookings and then turned inland to spend the night at Alfred A. Loeb State Park. Several California Ground Squirrels were present as well as our first Western Gray Squirrels of the trip. A short hike that night was productive. I got views in the thermal imager of a medium-sized mammal up in a tree, most likely a Ringtail. I got a better view of a Dusky-footed Woodrat that had been attracted to some hard-boiled eggs left in the day use parking area. A couple of Mule Deer were also sighted. Perhaps the most interesting sighting of the night was of a collection of Rough-skinned Newts in a quiet shallow backwater of the Chetco River.







The next morning's walk along the Chetco River revealed more Mule Deer and Western Gray Squirrels. Our first stop in California was at an agricultural checkpoint at the border. Likely because we had no booze or weapons to inspect, the officer examined our limes instead and announced that they could not enter the state. This was somewhat surprising to me as we had purchased them in central Oregon, a few hours' drive north. Perhaps the officer was throwing a daiquiri party that night. We were allowed to retain some previously sliced limes with the instructions that we should throw them away somewhere. The logic of this interaction escaped me but experience has taught me not to argue with folks in uniform in the USA and so we continued on without a murmur.

Redwood National and State Parks were spectacular. We saw a couple of herds of Roosevelt Elk as well as a few Mule Deer. The Prairie Creek Redwood Park campground was full so we stopped and did a hike up Cal-Barrel Road. This was absolutely gorgeous with huge redwoods, Douglas firs and hemlocks. We continued back to Crescent City and then on Highway 199 through the Smith River National Recreation Area. We camped at Panther Flats in an area of secondary growth along the Smith River. I had high hopes of finding Siskiyou Chipmunks but didn't encounter any. The night was drizzly with a musical backdrop provided by a chap in the neighbouring campsite playing "Thank God I'm a country boy" over and over again to the accompaniment of his large dogs barking and howling.



The next morning I did a reconnoitre around the campground again looking for Siskiyou Chipmunks without success. Tracey suggested that “Country Boy” had likely eaten them all.

We continued north the next day, stopping at Cave Junction to check on possibilities for the Oregon Caves. A couple of interesting birds were seen in the parking lot, Acorn Woodpeckers and Scrub Jays, which to the best of my knowledge don’t make it into Canada. It was likely too late in the spring for bats to be present in the caves so we pushed on up to Seaquest State Park in Washington for the night.

The next morning we drove into St. Helens National Volcano Monument. The road was clear and the vistas absolutely stunning. As well as seeing the not-unexpected elk and mule deer we also got good views of Mountain Goats from the ridgeline visitor centre, which was a pleasant surprise. The afternoon was spent tracking down an alpaca wool producer outside of Yelm. While waiting for Tracey I had time for a lengthy observation of a Douglas squirrel and the mental exercise of imagining it transforming itself into a Tufted Ground Squirrel. We stopped at Mount Vernon for great Mexican food and then crossed the border back into Canada that evening.



List of mammal seen:

1. Eastern Gray Squirrel-*Sciurus carolinensis*
2. Eastern Fox Squirrel-*Sciurus niger*
3. Western Gray Squirrel-*Sciurus griseus*
4. Douglas' Squirrel-*Tamiasciurus douglasii*
5. California Ground Squirrel-*Spermophilus beecheyi*
6. Townsend's Chipmunk-*Tamias townsendii*
7. Dusky-footed Woodrat-*Neotoma fuscipes*
8. Brush Rabbit-*Sylvilagus bachmani*
9. Elk/Wapiti-*Cervus elaphus/canadensis*
10. Mule Deer-*Odocoileus hemionus*
11. Mountain Goat-*Oreamnos americanus*
12. Common Gray Fox- *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*
13. ? Ringtail-*Bassariscus astutus*
14. Harbour Seal-*Phoca vitulina*
15. Northern/Steller's Sea Lion-*Eumetopias jubatus*
16. California Sea Lion-*Zalophus californianus*
17. Northern Elephant Seal-*Mirounga angustirostris*