



BC Birding with Canadian Geographic 2025 trip report

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Our British Columbia Birding Tour with Canadian Geographic started strong with a delightful day of birding in the metro Vancouver Area. We walked around the ʕéxətəm (tla-hut-um) Regional Park's community gardens. This part of the old Colony Farm offered great views of classic western BC species. Notably, the group saw their first Black-headed Grosbeaks of the trip singing away in the surrounding Aspen trees. We were also granted with an array of very active Rufous hummingbirds and Spotted towhees, busy with the tasks of the nesting season. A group of bulky dark silhouettes were then seen flushing from the canopy: Band tailed pigeons! A lifer for a lot of participants, some of whom were shocked to learn the existence of this beautiful native pigeon species.



Spotted Towhee © Michael Kennedy

We proceeded to walk the trails around the meadows and shrubs, counting multiple Willow flycatchers and getting distant looks at one of the highlights of the trip, the Lazuli bunting, a species that would follow us all along our itinerary. As time passed, some raptors started filling the skies and offered a great identification clinic. While scanning for the predators, we noticed swifts in the distance. Vaux's got very close as another species flew in the distance. The dark coloration, long wings and gliding flight style revealed the identity of these Black swifts, a truly awesome and mysterious bird!



Lazuli Bunting © Michael Kennedy

After lunch, we made our way to Minnekhada Regional Park to bird this beautiful mix of mature forest and riparian habitat. There, we saw our first Western Tanager of the trip, leaving us in awe with its magnificent colors. It was quickly elected by some as one of the great North American passerines. The colorful tanager almost overshadowed some truly great birds that were seen at this location such as an Olive-sided Flycatcher, a Black-throated Grey Warbler and a fledgling Pileated Woodpecker. However, even more unforgettable was the Black bear mom and cubs that played around us (at a reasonable distance of course).



Bear bear and cubs © Michael Kennedy

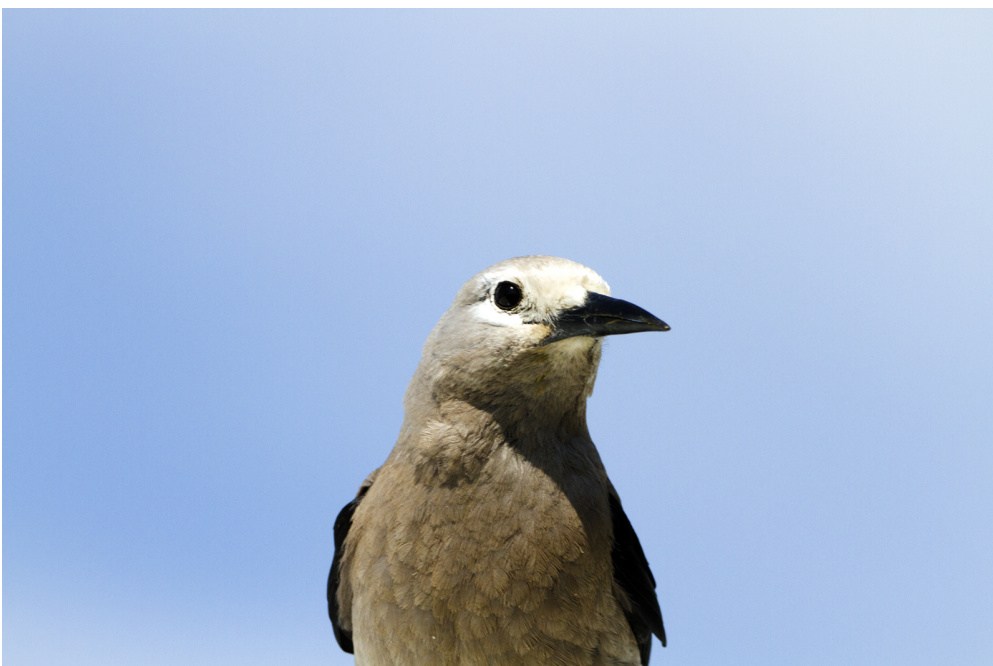
Gathering our forces after dinner, we went out to seek for owls and other nocturnal birds. A stop at Ladner Harbour park gave us the chance to see a singing Barred Owl from up close, a true stunner! We then went to a beautiful park in the rural periphery of Vancouver where we stumbled upon a roost of Bald Eagles. As we searched for the elusive Barn Owls, we could hear the Common Nighthawk's cry in the night. On the second day, as we made our way to the mountains, we stopped at Willband Creek Park to search for wetland specialists. The beautiful habitat did not disappoint as we had great views of an American bittern. Distant at first, it ended up flying directly over us several times. As we walked the trails back to the vans, a group of small passerines then caught our attention. They were a flock of Bushtits zooming in the bushes, chasing each other around and chirping their adorable calls. We managed to reach Manning Park with still enough energy to get a taste of the mountainous forest in the afternoon. It was at the nearby Lightning Lake that we saw our first Townsend's Warblers, some *Auduboni* Yellow-rumped and a brood of 11 Barrow's Goldeneye soaking up the sun. The next morning, in Manning Park still, the group was up at sunrise to benefit from the high activity of the cool morning in the boreal forest of Strawberry Flats. Amongst the morning chorus, we could hear Swainson's, Hermit and Varied thrushes, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins and many warblers (Townsend's, Macgillivray's, Yellow-rumped and more). As we made our way through the forest, a couple of Pine grosbeaks offered the best views a birder could hope for, chasing each other and gathering nest material. At the fork of a trail, we even managed to seek out a Three-toed woodpecker's nest! We then saw the pair going back and forth, bringing food to the cavity. The group hovered around at a safe distance of the nest, marveling at the privilege of such a find. Other highlights were quick views of Red-breasted Sapsucker, Red

Crossbills flying over and appearances of our first Mountain Chickadees.



Townsend's Warbler © Michael Kennedy

We then made our way up the sidewinders of Manning park to reach the Cascade Lookout, towering over the area. There, we patiently waited for the visit of the rulers of the mountains: the unique Clark's Nutcrackers. These marvelous corvids, familiar to humans in these parts, gave unmatched photo opportunities for our group that was too busy to care for the multiple chipmunks and Golden-mantled ground squirrels climbing onto us. Steller's Jays later joined us to add a little bit of colour to the party.



Clark's Nutcracker © Arnaud Valade

The rest of the day was spent on the road, as our travelers rested and marveled at the majestic landscapes going from the boreal forests of the altitudes to the sage brush habitat of the Okanagan Valley. Once in Osoyoos, we stopped for lunch as the locals asked us what kind of people we were with our earthy colored apparel and optical gear. "Birders! I know a good spot closeby" our server said. We decided to try it out and it did not disappoint. Haynes Point Provincial Park, a narrow strip of land cutting lake Osoyoos in half, offered very good birding and close proximity with the birds. We could appreciate a rare sight of a Virginia Rail family with young and our first looks of the very orange Bullock's Orioles. Our first true taste of sage brush habitat was on the morning of the fourth day when we went to Haynes Lease, a beautiful trail at the foot of a typical Okanagan canyon. Even from the van going up there the birding was great and we saw our first Lark sparrows, Western bluebirds and the infamous California quails on fence posts. Making our way to the territory of an anticipated Canyon Wren, we found a pair of cooperative Peregrines, Chukar, Rock Wrens and a cinnamon coloured Black Bear, calmly foraging on the cliffs. The Canyon Wren finally showed, climbing onto the rock faces, granting us its beautiful cascading song.



Black Bear © Arnaud Valade

Nighthawk road was next on the list, where we heard our first Brewer's sparrows and got a proper introduction to Western meadowlarks and Say's phoebe. We proceeded towards Spotted lake but made a quick stop to a lookout standing above a small Eutrophic lake on a ranch. This micro habitat offered a shelter for prairie wetland specialists that did not yet make it on our list: Wilson's Phalaropes, Coots, Cinnamon Teals and the gorgeous Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Birding wasn't the main purpose of going to the beautiful Spotted lake of the Okanagan but we got easily distracted by a Golden Eagle hovering lazily in the distance.



Yellow-headed Blackbird © Arnaud Valade

That same afternoon, we went out again to explore the enigmatic Anarchist Mountain overlooking Osoyoos. There, the open Ponderosa pine forest hosted some nesting Lewis's Woodpeckers whom we observed going in and out of a cavity from the other side of the valley for as long as we could. All of us were in wonder of its unusual flight style and colours setting it apart from other woodpecker species.



Anarchist Mountain © Arnaud Valade

Our final day of birding started at Road 22 and the dykes outside Osoyoos. This piece of land offers

great diversity, from fields to marshes to woodlands and brushy habitats. The group got a chance to see Bobolinks, a colony of Cliff Swallows nesting under a bridge and a long awaited Belted Kingfisher, a species that had eluded us until now. We were then very lucky to grasp quick but satisfying looks at some Yellow-breasted Chats in the understory. This elusive bird kept slipping in and out of the dense vegetation, as its partner sang further away.



Birding in Osoyoos © Arnaud Valade



Birding in Osoyoos © Carol Patterson

Heading north, we made a stop on McKinney road to explore some more Ponderosa pine forest habitat to seek out some Okanagan Valley specialities. We sought out a Gray Flycatcher, its understated beauty quietly admired by all. This forest proved to be full of activity and good birds kept coming and going such as a very cooperative Townsend's Solitaire, Pygmy Nuthatches and Cassin's Finches.



Townsend Solitaire © Arnaud Valade



Pygmy Nuthatch © Arnaud Valade

Farther along the way to Kelowna, we birded the rocky cliffs and grasslands of White Lake protected area where we saw a colony of White-throated Swifts chirping loudly and zooming in and out of crevices. In the prairies, we saw a beautiful Mountain Bluebird, patiently letting itself get admired by the travelers. There, we also caught good views of Western Kingbirds, Lark and Clay-colored Sparrows and some more Golden Eagles to top it off. After settling in Kelowna for our final night, we decided to make an evening outing to Robert Lake to tick off some waterbirds and shorebirds before the end of the trip. The alkaline lake proved to be one of the highlights for many as we could easily watch great quantities of ducks, grebes, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Phalaropes go about their business, barely noticing our presence. We observed broods of baby coots playing around and preening only a few feet away from us as some magnificent Black-necked stilts sat on the other side of the lake. Sated by so many wonderful birds and scenery, we headed to the city for our final dinner.



Redhead © Arnaud Valade



Ruddy Duck © Arnaud Valade

During the trip, we managed to see a remarkable 142 species, of which a great deal were lifers for many of us. From the lowland forests of the Vancouver coast to the mountain boreal forests of the Cascade range to the dry prairies and open woodlands of the Okanagan, this short trip transported us through an unbelievable array of landscapes. Any bird watcher or avian enthusiast should once appreciate what British Columbia has to offer as it truly is one of the best destinations for birding in North America. We were lucky to share the trip with such a lovely group with individuals from rich and diverse backgrounds that contributed to the depth of the experience.



© Carol Patterson

