

BC Coast & Pelagic Trip Report (Aug 25 - 30, 2025)

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Stunning views of Laysan Albatross—the undisputed bird highlight of our tour © Yousif Attia

Our 2025 BC Coast and Pelagic tour had incredible weather, an outstanding collection of people and a pelagic trip out to the continental shelf that birding dreams are made of.

Day 1 - Arrival in Vancouver

Our tour began on the evening of August 25th where our group met in the hotel lobby for brief chat and introductions before heading off to dinner at the nearby steakhouse. The forecast for the next few days was looking good and everyone was excited about getting out to Vancouver Island on the following day.

Day 2 - Vancouver to Ucluelet

We opted for an early traditional Canadian breakfast (ie, at Tim Horton's) so we could maximize our birding time out at Boundary Bay. The tide was quite low but our crew managed to see some large flocks of Black-bellied Plover, along with smaller numbers of Sanderling and Western Sandpiper. There was an incredible number of Great Blue Herons all along the shoreline with 24 tallied at this one location.



Birding the famous Boundary Bay mudflats © Yousif Attia

From Boundary Bay we made our way to the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal. We weren't able to track down the Pacific Golden-Plover that has been in the area, however we were able to get great views of Black Turnstone and Black Oystercatcher (a target for several of the participants) along with Pelagic Cormorants and even a migrant Yellow Warbler while waiting for the ferry to depart. The weather could not have been better for our ferry crossing to Nanaimo. It was fairly quiet bird-wise but we did manage to see a Caspian Tern which flew by at close range along with our first Harbour Porpoises. But the mega-highlight of the crossing was seeing a pod of five Orcas swim by the ferry. Despite Orcas being a constant target for folks visiting the island, getting to see some—especially at close range—was an absolute treat.



Jody leads the search for birds and cetaceans (whales & porpoises) on the ferry from Tsawwassen to Duke Point © Yousif Attia

After arriving on the island the temperature started to climb and we headed off to a favourite coastal picnic spot of Yousif—Rathrevor Beach Provincial Park. As the crew enjoyed a nice picnic spread, we managed to find a nice mix of forest and coastal scrub bird species including: Bewick's Wren, Spotted Towhee, incredibly tame Oregon Juncos, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. With full stomachs we packed up and headed west across the island. The enthusiasm for the incredibly scenic drive was tempered slightly by seeing the effects of the large forest fire along the far shoreline of Cameron Lake. We made a quick bathroom and refreshment stop in Port Alberni where the temperatures rose to a whopping 37 degrees Celsius. But those high temperatures wouldn't last. By the time we reached our accommodations in Ucluleet we were in fog and the temperatures dropped down to 17 degrees Celcius—a 20 degree drop in temperature in less than 2 hours. The crew settled in for the evening and even managed to find our only owl of the tour—a Great Horned Owl—after dinner.

Day 3 - Birding Pacific Rim National Park

Based on the forecast we decided to push our pelagic trip to Thursday and bird Ucluelet and Pacific Rim National Park today. Our first stop was the local harbour where we had nice views of Western and Least Sandpipers along with a nice lesson in Gull identification (a favourite pastime of Yousif Attia) where we had nice scope views of California, Glaucous-winged and Olympic (Glaucous-winged x Western) Gulls. From here we drove up to the Kwisis Visitor Centre in Pacific Rim National Park which ended up being one of the most productive birding stops on the entire tour. The ocean winds produced perfect conditions for sea watching which was highlighted with over 300 Short-tailed/Sooty Shearwaters flying by. We did manage to confirm 6 Short-tailed Shearwaters that were flying uncharacteristically close to the beach. Among the 30 species we tallied here included: Harlequin Duck, a loon hat trick including ridiculous views of Red-throated Loons, Wandering Tattler (another major target for our crew), Common Murre, and even some Red Crossbills (Type 3) flying around the parking lot.



A short drive up the road to the airport produced a roadside Pacific Wren, Barn Swallows and a family group of Red Crossbills (Type 3) including juveniles, perched obligingly on a wire. No trip to the Tofino area is complete without stopping for lunch at Tacofino—a favourite food truck of many, including the tour leaders. Nice views of Steller's Jays complemented the incredibly fresh seafood tacos. We gave the crew some free time late in the afternoon and then we enjoyed a relaxing meal down at the harbour.



Family group of the local type of deer on Vancouver Island, Sitka—also referred to as Black-tailed Deer © Jody Allair

Day 4 - Tofino Pelagic

Today was the day. The weather gods were shining brightly on our crew and we had (dare I say) perfect weather for our big pelagic tour from Tofino out to the continental shelf. We got an early start and met the team at the Whale Centre in Tofino where we got the pre-trip instructions and our floater suits. A few of our crew opted out of the big pelagic trip and decided to go on a very successful bears and whales trip along the coast. It took no time at all for our crew to start finding some great pelagic species—even before getting out past the islands. We were treated to tremendous views of Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet and Short-tailed Shearwaters sitting on the calm seas. Closer to the islands we had great views of Wandering Tattler, Brandt's Cormorant and the showstopping Heerman's Gull.



Marbled Murrelet © Yousif Attia



Heerman's Gulls © Yousif Attia

As we got further out we made a stop at Cleland Island to search for Tufted Puffin and the Horned Puffin that was reported a few days before. The Horned Puffin had moved on unfortunately, but the sheer numbers of birds in the area more than made up for it. We had incredible views of Common Murre, Rhinoceros Auklet, Short-tailed Shearwater, one Tufted Puffin, our first Humpback Whale, several harbour seals and Steller's Sea Lions and the big surprise—a very early Ancient Murrelet

which popped up right beside our boat!.



Common Murre and Rhinoceros Auklet © Yousif Attia

From here we headed out to the deep ocean, 45 nautical miles out from shore to the continental shelf. Within the first 20 minutes Yousif called out a flying Cassin's Auklet that decided to come and land right near the boat providing stonking views of this tiny deep water alcid. As we continued to move further out we stumbled upon our first Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels along with a group of 20 Pink-footed Shearwaters, more Short-tailed Shearwaters along with Sooty Shearwaters.



Ridiculously close views of Cassin's Auklet © Yousif Attia



Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel © Yousif Attia

We spotted a distant fishing boat out near the shelf. This was our target for finding albatross. And sure enough as we got closer we could see three Black-footed Albatross following the boat. As we got close we managed to find a mixed species flock feeding on some discarded fish. We had tremendous close-up views of Black-footed Albatross feeding on the water with Pacific Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwater.



Pink-footed Shearwater © Yousif Attia



Black-footed Albatross, Pacific Northern Fulmar, and Short-tailed Shearwaters enjoy some fishing bycatch © Jody Allair

After an extended viewing session we decided to move on to go look for other species along the shelf. Within minutes we could see another albatross coming in from the distance. Marking the biggest highlight of the tour, Yousif quickly yells out “LAYSAN”! This very uncommon species is a tough one to see in Canadian waters and we were treated to point blank views as the Laysan Albatross landed in the feeding flock. Close scrutiny of this bird uncovered bands which at the time of writing have not been confirmed by the banding office. Our best guess for now is that this individual is from one of the Hawaiian nesting colonies.



Laysan Albatross in flight © Yousif Attia

Before heading back to shore we rounded up a few more species including two South Polar Skuas, Parasitic Jaegers, Arctic Tern, Red-necked Phalarope and Sabine's Gull. Other mammal highlights included Sea Otters, Northern Fur Seals and very acrobatic Dall's Porpoise. It was definitely a memorable pelagic trip.



Sabine's Gull © Yousif Attia

We met up with the rest of our crew in Tofino and headed back to Uclulet for a rest before dinner.

Day 5 - Ucluelet to Vancouver

After an excellent breakfast at the local cafe we loaded up the vans and started the journey back to Vancouver. Our first stop was a highway pull off at the Taylor River Rest Area where we were treated with close up views of Steller's Jays and distant fleeting views of Vaux's Swifts and Band-tailed Pigeons.



Steller's Jay © Yousif Attia

We made a brief stop to bask in the glory of the ancient Douglas Fir trees in Cathedral Grove then headed off to the Englishman River Estuary along the east coast of the island. There were a few shorebird species here including Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs and more Western Sandpipers. We also finally tracked down Anna's Hummingbird. After our final picnic lunch back at Rath Trevor Beach Provincial Park we headed to the ferry terminal. From the terminal docks we were treated to a collection of three cormorant species—Brandt's, Double-crested, and Pelagic—all sitting together. We also had nice views of Short-billed Gull along with a couple more hybrid Western x Glaucous-winged Gulls. The ferry ride was fairly quiet bird-wise but the sunny conditions and tremendous mountain views more than made up for it. We made it back to the hotel early in the evening, said our final goodbyes. It was a whirlwind few days, but a tour that will be fondly remembered by everyone. Until next time. Jody Allair and Yousif Attia. [British Columbia Coast & Pelagic tour eBird list](#)