



Ultimate BC: Coast & Grasslands Trip Report 2024

[Link: Ultimate BC: Coast & Grasslands Trip Report 2024](#)

During the 2024 tour, our group observed a dazzling **208 species of birds** and no less than **25 species of mammals**. Highlights included stunning views of Black-footed Albatross on the open ocean, a cooperative Common Poorwill and an unforgettable encounter with a Male Sooty Grouse. Sightings of Tufted Puffins and a surprise Manx Shearwater rounded out the morning. Mammals also put on a great show during this tour particularly the whales with a pod of Orcas putting on a show while a Fin Whale made a brief and unexpected appearance.

May 28

After meeting each other the night before, we started the tour off by checking the mudflats for lingering shorebirds at Brunswick Point. The weather was not overly cooperative with a light rain and some wind. Despite the conditions we still had an amazing time scoping the mudflats which provided us with looks at Black-bellied plovers, Whimbrel and Red knot though hands down the highlight of the morning was the presence of not one but two Bar-tailed Godwits taking a break before continuing their journey to breed in Alaska. The stop was capped off with a very late flock of Snow Geese, who despite wintering in large numbers in the lower mainland of British Columbia, are usually long gone by this time of year. Our next stop was a community garden in Coquitlam called Colony Farm. The weather continued to be difficult with light rain being a constant during our stop. Once again despite less than ideal conditions we were able to find many great birds highlighted by a singing Lazuli Bunting, Bullock's Oriole and a late migrant Golden-crowned Sparrow. We also had great looks at Rufous Hummingbird, Western Wood-pewee and Spotted Towhee. One positive result of the low clouds and rain was that these conditions provided us with great views of a flock of 30 Black Swifts as they foraged low over the park. After taking a break for lunch the rain finally became too much to bird in and we returned to the hotel to provide everyone with a break before going searching for owls at dusk. After dinner we went out in search of owls. First we stopped at Ladner

Harbour Park where we almost immediately had success in finding a Barred Owl as it was harassed by a pair of angry Robins and a very aggressive Anna's Hummingbird. Despite being unpopular amongst the smaller birds the Barred Owl was a hit for the guests as it showed well for over a minute before silently flying off into the forest.



Barred Owl © Kathryn Mills

We then headed towards boundary bay in search of Barn Owls. The night was calm and clear which made fruitlessly wandering around a dog park for nearly an hour bearable. Despite a considerable effort we decided to give up and start making our way back to the Van just as we turned around a Barn owl flew in over everyone like a little white ghost and everyone was able to get good looks before it carried on its way. A fantastic end to our first day!

May 29

We started the day off by driving up mount Seymour to search for some of the high elevation targets. The first surprise of the trip turned up just before the summit of the mountain when a Townsend's Solitaire was spotted perched along the side of the road and provided excellent views for the guests! The weather at the top of Mount Seymour was a bit challenging but despite the late May snow we were still able to get some great looks at two lovely thrushes, the subtle and delicate Hermit thrush and the truly stunning Varied Thrush. We also heard but were unable to locate a hooting Sooty grouse. The weather continued to be difficult so we decided to leave and try our luck at another mountain in North Vancouver. Our next stop was Cypress Mountain. This was a short stop before we hopped on the ferry to Vancouver Island but in the twenty or so minutes we were there we managed to add a few nice species with several flyover Band-tailed Pigeons and a very cooperative Male Black-throated Grey Warbler who put on show for everyone! It's truly one of the stars of western birding. We then took the ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo on Vancouver island, though there were very few birds seen on the ride across it was not without its highlight which was a Humpback Whale who breached a dozen times as the boat passed him really putting on a special show for the guests! Once on the island we drove to Ucluelet, our final destination for the day. Heavy rain limited our options for any further birding so we took the rest of the day to rest up in preparation for the pelagic

tour the next day.



Humpback Whale breaching © Patsy Skene

May 30

After a good night's sleep we had an early start to the day with a visit to Radar Hill in search of the friendly Sooty Grouse seen last year. On cue the grouse made his appearance shortly after we had parked and put on a great show to the delight of all the guests.



Sooty Grouse © Blair Dudeck

We then made our way to The Whale Centre where we set off in search of a wide variety of seabirds. Our first stop was at Cleland Island, a rugged coastal rock that is home to many seabirds as well as marine mammals. The most obvious avian residents of Cleland are the Pigeon Guillemots, a lovely black and white near-shore Alcid with highlights of brilliant red feet and inner mouth who were constantly chasing each other around the island while making their high pitched squeak calls. We also found a Wandering Tattler, three Whimbrels and a dozen or so Harlequin Ducks in and around the rocky shoreline. The Tattler in particular can be a difficult bird to see this time of year and is usually a difficult target to check off! Even with all these great birds the star of the show was the Tufted Puffin which flew in and circled the boats several times providing great looks for everyone! In addition to the birds Cleland is also home to California sea lions which we got to see, hauled out on the rocks, and rafts of Sea Otters in the nearby kelp beds. Just as we were about to leave Cleland, Joachim spotted a rare Manx Shearwater as it zoomed over the waves, a very good bird for British Columbia on any pelagic!



Tufted Puffin © Blair Dudeck

We then headed straight out about 25 nautical miles to the point where the continental shelf drops off, this creates upwelling which brings lots of nutrients to the ocean surface which in turn attracts many pelagic species. On the way out we had to make a short stop for a group of approximately 20 humpback whales including mothers with calves! This group of whales put on quite the show with many big dives and tails to look at. While we were watching the whales a flock of Sabine's Gulls flew by just beyond the whales which unfortunately meant we were not able to get very close to these beautiful birds. After navigating the field of whales we eventually made it out to the shelf and almost immediately had our first big pelagic target show up when a Black-footed Albatross sailed past the boats. It was then followed by several Northern Fulmar arching over the waves. We also saw good numbers of Sooty Shearwaters with the occasional Pink-footed Shearwater mixed into the flocks. Just as it was nearly time to turn back we came across a feeding frenzy with Black-footed Albatross, Fulmars and shearwaters everywhere! These birds were soon joined by a large number of Fork-tailed storm petrels which flitted about the waves like small gray kites. We quickly realized that the source of the feeding frenzy was a pod of Resident Killer Whales that were feeding on fish in the area. To our amazement the pod included a mother with what appeared to be a nearly brand new

calf! As we watched the birds and Killer Whales flying and swimming all around us another giant made its appearance, a Fin Whale, one of the largest species of whale on the planet. This giant made a few brief appearances before disappearing as quickly as it had arrived. This brought an end to our time on the shelf and we had to start our way back to Tofino and back to our hotel to regain our land legs for the rest of the day.



Killer Whales © Blair Dudeck



Fork-tailed Storm-petrel © Blair Dudeck



Black-footed Albatross © Blair Dudeck

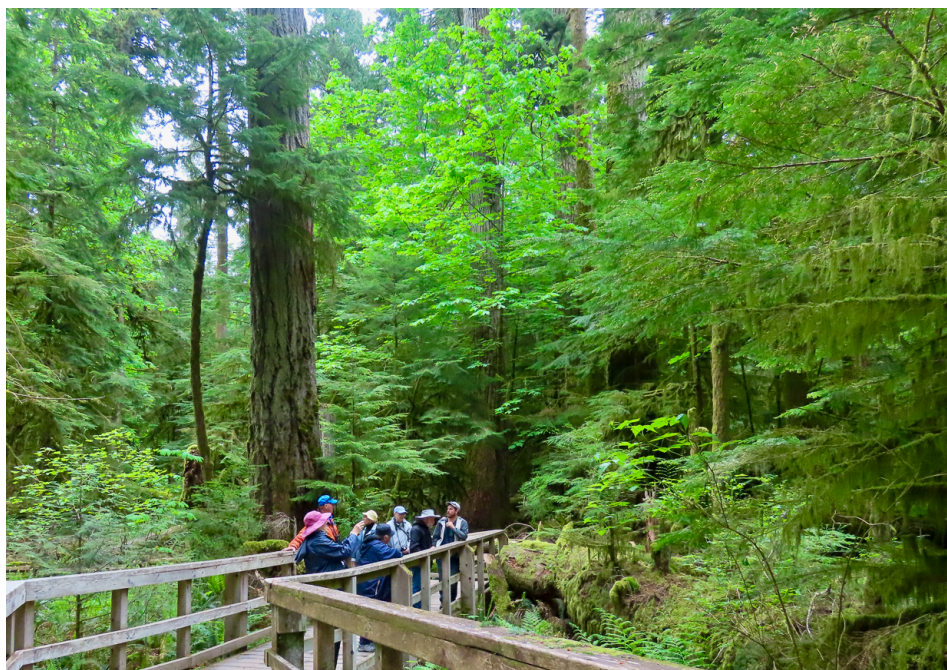
May 31

We started the day birding at Chesterman's beach near Tofino, there we found a pair of late staying Western Sandpipers and a Semipalmated Plover, foraging in the high tide line while a pair of Caspian terns flew overhead. We also were able to get great looks at all three species of Cormorant. Birding the little forest near the parking lot turned up great looks at Steller's Jay, Sooty Fox Sparrow and a beautiful male Townsend's Warbler. Our next stop was Grice Bay in Pacific Rim National Park in hopes of finding some late migrating shorebirds. Unfortunately the only shorebirds present were some extremely distant Whimbrel. The only other highlight from this stop was seeing a Bald Eagle fly off with a whole Mink! The final stop was at Comber's Beach. We started with a walk through the west coast forest where we found an active Chestnut-backed Chickadee nest and were able to spend some time watching the parents make feeding trips to the little cavity. We also got good looks at Western Flycatcher and Pacific Wren. Working our way to the beach we found a mixed flock of gulls bathing in the freshwater creek that runs to the ocean. Most of the gulls were Glaucous-winged and California though a very late Herring Gull was a nice treat. Walking back to the car we found singing Warbling Vireos and Wilson's Warblers, a very nice way to finish up the day.

June 1

After breakfast we left Uceulet and started our journey to Victoria. We made a few birding stops along the way. The first of these was just outside of Uceulet where we stopped at a small campsite on the side of the road, this site is well known for Hammond's Flycatcher and this day was no different as we quickly found a pair flitting about in the Alder Canopy. This stop also treated us to several low flying Vaux's Swifts, not always an easy species to see, and several Band-tailed Pigeons feeding on Mountain Ash berries. Our next stop was the world famous Cathedral Grove, home to some of the largest and oldest trees in the world! In addition to the breathtaking flora, we also had some fantastic birds at this location. First we found a pair of Red-breasted Sapsuckers which were

nesting in one of the many massive firs. This species is always a treat to see and a much wanted target for everyone. We also got amazing views of two Western Tanagers that came in close to the group with the male showing off this brilliant orange-red head. After our short but eventful stop at Cathedral grove we were once again on the road. We took one final break before getting to Victoria when we stopped at the Cowichan River Estuary. This is always a productive birding location on the mid-Island providing breeding habitat for many local species. Highlights included very close looks at a boisterous Bewick's Wren as it sang up a storm in full view. We also saw many Cedar Waxwings, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Violet-green Swallows and Black-headed Grosbeaks. All in all a very good way to finish up a day of traveling!



Cathedral Grove © Kathryn Mills

June 2

We started the day with an early visit to Panama Flats, a very birdy wetland located in the center of Victoria. Highlights were a Bank Swallow (rare for the west coast), Blue-winged Teal, Marsh Wrens, and a very showy Male Anna's Hummingbird. Our next stop this morning was a local birding hotspot called Munn Road, here we added Macgillivray's Warbler, Willow Flycatcher and Hooded Merganser. After our quick morning's birding we headed back out on the ocean on a whale watching cruise out of the Victoria harbor. We added many new species to the trip list on this boat ride including, Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, Marbled Murrelet and Heerman's Gull as well as several mammals such as River Otter, Steller's Sea Lion, and Harbor Porpoise. We finished the day with a trip out to Jordan River, another local hotspot where we added the often difficult to find Hutton's Vireo. The drive back to the hotel provided some excellent mammal viewing including two Black Bears and a pair of very young Sitka Black-tailed deer.

June 3

We departed from Victoria and took the ferry back to the mainland to start our journey to the interior of British Columbia. We broke up the drive with a stop at Minnehada Regional Park. Here we found a nesting Sandhill Crane along with many waterfowl species with new chicks including

pied-billed grebes, Wood duck, Hooded Merganser and Bufflehead. Other highlights included Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western-wood pewee and Red-breasted Sapsucker. We finished the day arriving at Manning Park Lodge where we were welcomed by several friendly Columbian Ground Squirrels and a very cold looking Ruby-crowned kinglet.

June 4

We spent most of the day birding around Manning Park where we picked up many nice interior mountain species including Barrow's Goldeneye, Clark's Nutcracker, Canada Jay, Hermit Thrush, Red-naped Sapsucker, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Evening Grosbeak and what appeared to be a intergrade Sooty/Dusky Grouse which showed traits of both species.



Clark's Nutcracker © Blair Dudeck

After departing Manning Park we headed to Osoyoos in the Okanagan Valley. Along the drive we managed to see several new species including a Golden Eagle, Black-billed Magpie, Eastern and Western Kingbirds and Western Meadowlarks.

June 5

We started the day off with a stop at Road 22 just North of Osoyoos where we saw many great Okanagan valley species such as Veery, Bullock's Oriole, Bobolink, Yellow-breasted Chat, Gray Catbird and Say's Phoebe. We then moved up into the higher elevation pine forest where we added Grey Flycatcher, Pygmy Nuthatch, Calliope Hummingbird, Cassin's Vireo, Cassin's Finch and a surprise Black-backed Woodpecker! After a hearty breakfast back at the hotel we returned to the Pine forest where we added stunning looks at a pair of Lewis's Woodpeckers, as well as Mountain Chickadee, Nashville Warbler, Dusky Flycatcher and a crowd favorite Williamson's Sapsucker. After taking a break for lunch we went for a hike in some of the Pocket Desert habitat only found in Canada around Osoyoos. Here we found Chukar, Ring-necked Pheasant, White-throated Swifts, Rock and Canyon Wrens and a very cooperative and stunning male Lazuli Bunting. As the day drew to a close we watched a pair of Peregrine Falcons soar over the steep valley walls.



Lazuli Bunting © Blair Dudeck

After dinner we drove up nearby Mount Kobau in search of some of the Okanagan's nocturnal species. After watching the sunset on Osoyoos we started our search along the main servious road here we quickly heard a family of Great-horned Owls and then found a Common Poorwil in the middle of the road. Walking further down we finally heard the elusive Flammulated Owl, despite our best efforts we never were able to see this secretive species but just hearing this species was very exciting and a great way to finally end a great day full of lifers!



Common Poorwill © Blair Dudeck

June 6

The day's birding started in the Sagebrush habitat near the US border crossing known as Nighthawk Road. Highlights here included many signing Brewer's Blackbird, Vesper, and Lark Sparrows. Our next stop was more sagebrush habitat at White Lake where we were privileged to see a Burrowing Owl standing guard over its burrow. We also flushed a pair of Gray Partridges and got great looks at both Western and Mountain Bluebirds.



Lark Sparrow © Blair Dudeck

Before lunch we made a stop at a local hummingbird feeder where we got to watch several Black-chinned Hummingbirds, including a stunning male, fight over the feeders with the smaller Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds.



Black-chinned Hummingbird © Blair Dudeck

Our final birding spot of the day was Haynes Point Provincial Park, a peninsula that sticks out into Osoyoos Lake. There we got great looks at Brewer's Blackbird, Gray Catbird, Bullock's Oriole and a whopping 17 Common Nighthawks roosting all over the park. We were also lucky enough to spot a small flock of American White Pelicans fly over.



Common Nighthawk © Blair Dudeck

June 7

On our final day together we had a bit of a travel day leaving Osoyoos in the morning and ending the day in Vancouver. We broke the day up with a few stops along the way. First we stopped in Kelowna at Robert Lake where we added several new species to the trip list including cinnamon teal, eared grebe and distant views of American Avocet! We then traveled to Abbotsford where we made our final stop at the beautiful and peaceful Willband Creek Park. There we attempted to connect with one of the American Bitterns which had recently been reported. Unfortunately, we had no luck with the bitterns though we did get good looks at Marsh Wrens and a boisterous flock of Bushtits. And just like that, the tour concluded, and we drove the remaining 2 hours back to Vancouver, before having a last dinner together and laughing and chatting all evening about the amazing time we'd had. What a wonderful time with wonderful people. [BC: Coast & Grasslands 2024 species list](#)