



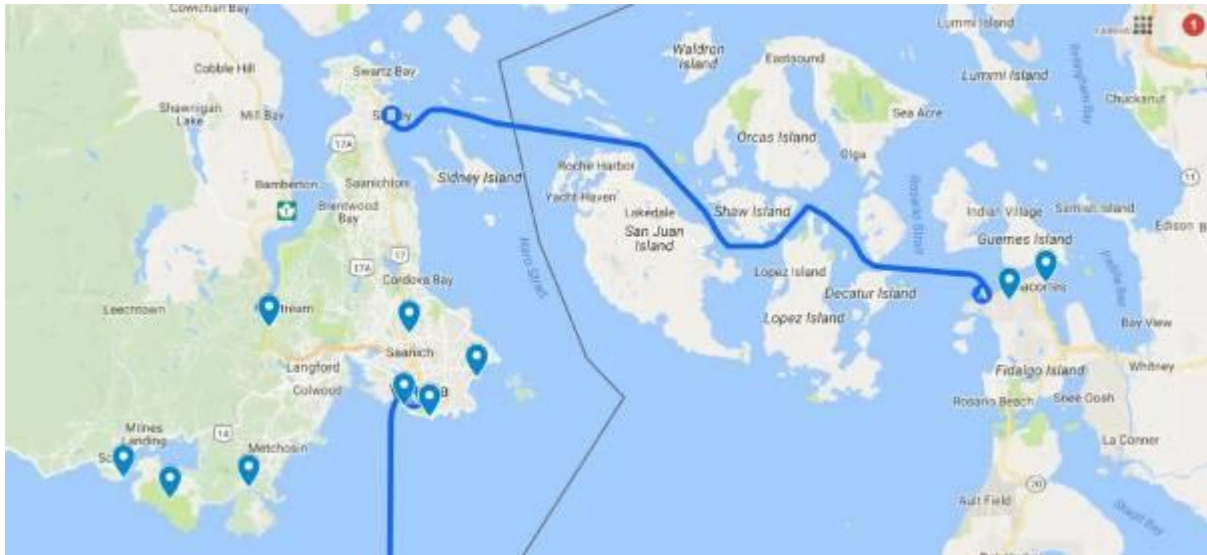
**VANCOUVER ISLAND CUSTOM BIRDING TOUR
AUGUST 2017**

By Anna Wittmer



Surfbird (photo by Ben Warner on this tour)

This was a fantastic Vancouver Island birding tour with a wonderful pair of participants. We found our number one target, **Eurasian Skylark**, and a nice variety of sea- and shorebirds. Several of the avian highlights were **Surfbird**, **Black-throated Grey Warbler**, and **American Dipper**. We were also treated with marine mammals such as orca, gray whale, Black Sea harbor porpoise, and harbor seal.



A map showing the ferry routes we took and the main birding locations we visited

Day 1, 17 August 2017. Washington State to Vancouver Island

We started our tour by driving to Anacortes, Washington, to catch the ferry through the San Juan Islands to Sidney, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island. We arrived early in Anacortes and stopped by Cap Sante Park. A **Northern Raven** chased a **Bald Eagle** at eye-level as we stood atop a cliff overlooking the scenic Padilla Bay. We saw the first of many **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** that we would see over the next few days. We also encountered the only **Black-capped Chickadees** of our tour. Next we visited Cranberry Lake Park, which didn't yield much variety, but it was beautiful! The pines smelled lovely. We saw many **Brown Creepers** and **Red-breasted Nuthatches** before heading to the ferry terminal.



A view of Cranberry Lake (photo by Anna Wittmer)

While waiting for the ferry we ate lunch and added **Pelagic Cormorant**, **Northwestern Crow**, **Pigeon Guillemot**, **Mew Gull**, **California Gull**, and **Glaucous-winged Gull** to our trip list. Aboard the ferry through the San Juan Islands a pod of four orcas swam close to the boat, including at least one baby! We also got our first looks at **Common Murre** and **Marbled Murrelet**.

Once we arrived in Sidney we chose to look for Eurasian Skylark right away. Walks through weedy fields flushed several **Savannah Sparrows**, but no luck on the lark. We ended the day with a fantastic seafood dinner, including delicious salmon chowder with in-house baked bread at the Rumrunner Pub & Restaurant in Sidney. We stayed the night at the Travelodge Victoria Airport Sidney.

Day 2, 18 August 2017. South to Victoria

We started the morning at Cattle Point, where the high winds kept our visit brief. Nevertheless, we were able to find **Harlequin Duck**, **Black Oystercatcher**, **Black Turnstone**, **Surfbird**, and **Heermann's Gull**.



A Surfbird with two of the Black Turnstones we saw at Cattle Point (photo by Ben Warner)

To get out of the wind we moved to a more inland part of the park. Here we were treated to both **Anna's Hummingbird** and the seasonally harder-to-find **Rufous Hummingbird**. Although passerines were scarce due to two actively hunting **Cooper's Hawks**, we did find several **Bewick's Wrens** skulking in the brush.



Cattle Point (photo by Anna Wittmer)

Next we visited Clover Point Park. Despite the incessant winds we scored fantastic scope views of **Surfbird** and **Western Sandpiper**. As we continued to scan with the scope we found a closer **Heermann's Gull** and more distant **Rhinoceros Auklet** and **Marbled Murrelet**.



Western Sandpiper at Clover Point (photo by Ben Warner)



Heermann's Gull seen from Clover Point (photo by Ben Warner)

Our next stop included a nearly one-mile walk on the Ogden Point breakwall. This did not yield the Wandering Tattler that we had been hoping for, but we did get better views of **Pigeon Guillemot** and a very close flock of 26 **Black Turnstones**.



Pigeon Guillemots on the Ogden Point breakwall (photo by Ben Warner)

After lunch we drove inland to search for an American Dipper that was nearly guaranteed. We arrived at Goldstream Provincial Park and were immediately greeted by a team of young **Steller's Jays** in the parking lot. As we walked along the streamside path we had some great looks at **Belted Kingfisher** and beautiful old-growth forest. We wandered along without seeing the dipper but didn't want to give up. Finally I climbed onto a cement guard rail and looked beyond a log dam in the stream. There was the **American Dipper** just on the other side! Next came the challenge of finding a way to view the bird other than by standing on the barrier. It didn't take long to find a side trail that went downstream and opened up into a small clearing right next to the bird! We enjoyed a spectacular show put on by the diving and foraging bird. We watched it through the spotting scope and were able to get photos and videos of the active dipper.

Once we were all satisfied with the American Dipper we moved on to look for Northern Pygmy Owl. We did not have any success, or much time left in the day. We could not complain about the incredible scenery, though! As we drove up the mountains the view over the valley and channel was remarkable. Along the way we spotted **Western Tanager** from the vehicle.



American Dipper, a highlight of the tour (photo by Ben Warner)



The view just after spotting a Western Tanager (photo by Anna Wittmer)



Juvenile Steller's Jay at Goldstream Provincial Park (photo by Ben Warner)

Day 3, 19 August 2017. Rocky Point, Whiffin Spit Park, East Sooke Park

We started with an early morning visit to Rocky Point Bird Observatory's Pedder Bay bird banding station. We stayed to watch several of the net runs and talk with the local researchers. Near the banding operation we saw a family of **California Quail**. We saw them several times as we foraged for our morning snack of juicy, wild blackberries. Also in this area we found **Lincoln's Sparrow** and several **White-crowned Sparrows**. As we walked to the car, a **Eurasian Collared Dove** called from the wires overhead.

After lunch we traveled to Whiffin Spit Park for some afternoon shore birding. Several harbor seals foraged just off the spit. As we scanned the rocky shoreline a mixed flock of shorebirds flew in, including the following: **Semipalmated Plover**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Western Sandpiper**, and **Short-billed Dowitcher**. Before we left we had nice views of four **Common Mergansers**. Next we drove to East Sooke Park, where we had our best views of **Marbled Murrelet** and **Rhinoceros Auklet**. Along a forested trail we came across an interesting interaction of a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** feeding a fledgling **Brown-headed Cowbird**. Perhaps our best bird at this location was **Hutton's Vireo**.

Day 4, 20 August 2017. Sidney Area Birding

On our last scheduled day we were determined to finally see the Eurasian Skylark that we had come for. Early that morning we unsuccessfully checked three different areas for the lark. A local birder, Ann Nightingale, joined us in the search. We took a break for lunch and stopped on the way at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary. As we started on the trail we found **Willow Flycatchers** and **Warbling Vireos** singing from the dense vegetation. Many **Cedar Waxwings** flew overhead and landed in the fruiting shrubs. We met another local birder along the path, and after a short discussion he offered to lead us to another part of the park to see several of the targets we still had. We followed his vehicle to the other side of the park into the Christmas Hill area. Almost immediately he found **Western Wood Pewee**. Maneuvering around the hill we came across **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, **American Bushtit**, and **Northern Flicker**. Soon after this we came onto a flock of warblers. Multiple **Orange-crowned Warblers**, **Wilson's Warbler**... It wasn't long before our local guide was pointing out a much-anticipated **Black-throated Grey Warbler**! During lunch Ann called to say that she had found the skylarks and had secured permission to walk through the fields where they landed! After quickly finishing lunch we met Ann again and walked through a weedy berry field. Many **Savannah Sparrows** flew out of the weeds, and a **Bald Eagle** and several **Turkey Vultures** soared overhead. Finally, a **Eurasian Skylark** flew out of the weeds, sang as it flew into the air, and quickly dropped back down into the grass. Then another! We ended up with three definitive individuals, and possibly two others, flying out of the weeds, singing as they flew and just before darting back down to cover.



Western Wood Pewee at Christmas Hill (photo by Ben Warner)

Due to the solar eclipse the following day the ferries required an extra-long waiting time. As a group we opted not to spend the rest of the day waiting in line, so we continued to bird and left early the next morning. With our extra time we visited the Royal Roads University campus. Here we came across a beautiful **Merlin** that, due to regional differences, was all black. It was an exceptionally gorgeous individual. Near the Merlin many **Violet-green Swallows** were aerially catching insects. On our way back to the hotel we drove along the dike at Esquimalt Lagoon and added **Brewer's Blackbird** and **Trumpeter Swan** to our trip list! We also saw a nice group of **Black Oystercatchers** gathered on an island in the lagoon.



Black Oystercatchers at Esquimalt Lagoon (photo by Anna Wittmer)

Day 5, 21 August 2017. Ending the tour

Early in the morning we boarded the Black Ball Ferry to cross the Strait of Juan de Fuca from Vancouver Island to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. As the morning fog cleared, tiny harbor porpoises danced across the water's surface. **Rhinoceros Auklets** landed just off the side of the boat for spectacular last views of this species. A lone gray whale, which was much larger than the orcas we had seen just days before, made his presence known with a blow and then a dorsal fin. It came up for air twice before taking a deep dive. After showing its flukes we didn't see it again. The ferry ride concluded the Vancouver Island birding tour for 2017. We ended with 78 avian species throughout the tour, which are listed below.



Mew Gull with two sleeping California Gulls (photo by Ben Warner)



Ann Nightingale and Anna Wittmer. Ann, a wonderful local friend, helped us immensely to locate the Eurasian Skylark as well as a variety of other species. Here we are standing next to the fields that yielded the skylarks during our tour (photo Ben Warner).

Vancouver Island bird list August 2017		
I = Introduced, NT = Near-threatened, E = Endangered		
Common Name (IOC 7.3)	Scientific Name (IOC 7.3)	Trip
	ANSERIFORMES	
	Anatidae	
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	1
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	1
Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	1
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	1
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	1
	GALLIFORMES	
	Odontophoridae	
California Quail [I]	<i>Callipepla californica</i>	1
	COLUMBIFORMES	
	Columbidae	

Rock Pigeon [I]	<i>Columba livia</i>	1
Eurasian Collared Dove [I]	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1
	APODIFORMES	
	Trochilidae	
Anna's Hummingbird	<i>Calypte anna</i>	1
Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	1
	CHARADRIIFORMES	
	Haematopodidae	
Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	1
	Charadriidae	
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	1
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	1
	Scolopacidae	
Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>	1
Surfbird	<i>Calidris virgata</i>	1
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	1
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	1
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	1
Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	1
	Alcidae	
Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	1
Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cepphus columba</i>	1
Marbled Murrelet [E]	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>	1
Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	1
	Laridae	
Heermann's Gull [NT]	<i>Larus heermanni</i>	1
Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	1
California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	1
Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	1
	SULIFORMES	
	Phalacrocoracidae	
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	1
Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>	1
	PELECANIFORMES	
	Ardeidae	
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	1
	ACCIPITRIFORMES	
	Cathartidae	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	1
	Pandionidae	
western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1
	Accipitridae	

Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	1
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	1
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	1
	CORACIIFORMES	
	Alcedinidae	
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	1
	PICIFORMES	
	Picidae	
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	1
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	1
	FALCONIFORMES	
	Falconidae	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1
	PASSERIFORMES	
	Tyrannidae	
Western Wood Pewee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>	1
Willow Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii</i>	1
Pacific-slope Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax difficilis</i>	1
	Vireonidae	
Hutton's Vireo	<i>Vireo huttoni</i>	1
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	1
	Corvidae	
Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	1
Northwestern Crow	<i>Corvus caurinus</i>	1
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1
	Alaudidae	
Eurasian Skylark [I]	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1
	Hirundinidae	
Purple Martin	<i>Progne subis</i>	1
Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	1
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1
	Paridae	
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>	1
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	1
	Aegithalidae	
American Bushtit	<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>	1
	Sittidae	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	1
	Certhiidae	
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	1
	Troglodytidae	
Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	1

	Cinclidae	
American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	1
	Regulidae	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>	1
	Turdidae	
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	1
	Sturnidae	
Common Starling [I]	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1
	Bombycillidae	
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	1
	Passeridae	
House Sparrow [I]	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1
	Fringillidae	
House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	1
American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>	1
	Icteridae	
Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	1
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	1
	Parulidae	
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	1
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	1
Black-throated Grey Warbler	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>	1
Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	1
	Emberizidae	
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	1
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	1
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	1
Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	1
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	1
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	1
	Cardinalidae	
Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	1
TOTAL		78