

Trip report USA: Point Reyes, West Coast, Red Wood, Montana, Yellowstone & Yosemite

20 May 2014 – 9 June 2014

Last year in 2013 I completed my big 7 cat list with a successful trip for snow leopard in Ladakh, India (see my trip report 2013). So what new plans I had to make? Since cats are my favourite, I decided to go for the smaller cats as well. Bobcat is one I thought to be a possibility in USA and since there is lots more wildlife to see In USA, I planned a trip for USA wildlife for the period end of spring.

So I red some reports of www.mammalwatching.com and soon found that Point Reyes national seashore is somewhat the best place to go and try for bobcat. Further I visited Yellowstone in September 2007 and that was such a great visit I wanted to return. Here we obviously would go for grizzly, American black bear and wolf. So a road trip was planned!

I travelled with my brother who is also a wildlife fan. So we could spend a lot of time going on track. But we also made a visit to San Francisco for some cultural experience and a great place to visit.

I will split this report in sections:

- 1) Point Reyes and the West coast
- 2) Yellowstone and Grand Teton
- 3) Crater of the Moon, Twin Falls, lake Tahoe and Yosemite

Photography is my passion and always when I see wildlife I try to make a good picture of any mammal during the trip. I hope you will enjoy this report and hope it is worth full planning a trip. Please feel free to commend or ask questions!

Specially I want to thank www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such great trip reports. For me it was valuable and a good guidance for this trip I more or less followed advice from previous trip reports.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

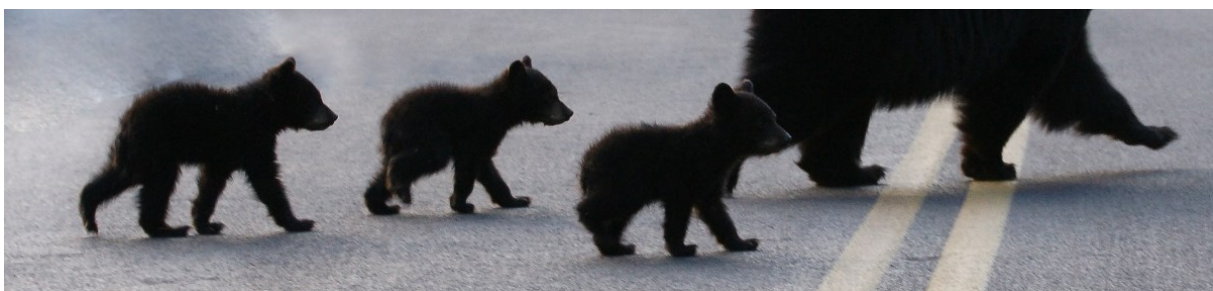
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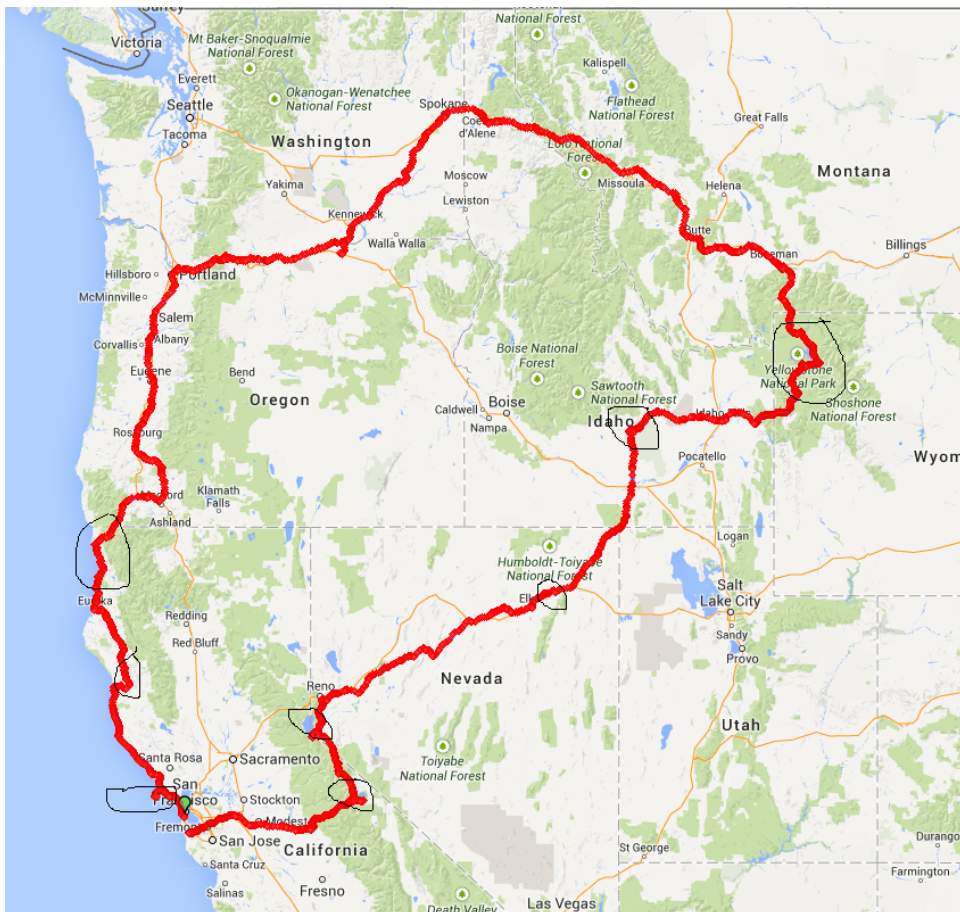


American black bear family crossing in Yellowstone

Places visited for wildlife:

- PR = Point Reyes national seashore
- WC = West Coast (st Patrick's point)
- RW = Red Wood NP
- AG = Avenue of Giants
- MT = Montana
- YS = Yellowstone NP
- GT = Grand Teton NP
- CM =Crater of the Moon NP
- YOS = Yosemite NP

Map of the trip route



Part one Point Reyes, the West Coast and Red Woods.

Day 1 We arrived in San Francisco and made a quick visit to town where we watched the *Californian sea lions* in the harbour @ pear 39.

Day 2,3,4 Another morning visit to town we drove the 49 mile scenic drive and visited the golden gate bridge. In the afternoon we crossed the golden gate and headed to Point Reyes national seashore. The drive was quite long, along a winding road passing the coast and hills. Along the way we saw our first *mule deer* in a field but they ran off. They are more shy outside the park than inside. It took us much longer than expected. So our first evening visit to Point Reyes was a short one. We camped just out of the park next almost next off the exit to Point Reyes on a camp situated near the main road. It is about 2 miles from the visitor info. In point Reyes there is no public camp, you can only camp on 'walk in campsites'. But since we wanted to drive around scanning more area we camped just outside of the park, which was ok.

So we took off for a short evening drive to try for the bobcat. Close to the camp we saw at 70 yards from the road a *grey fox* in some bushes field, it disappeared quickly. I think it is rare to see it in daylight? We drove more or less straight to Pierce-point road where it was supposed best area. But didn't see much. We did see the *Tule elk* at the end of pierce point road at the lands-end part. On the way back we spotlighted short around the visitor information centre and found a *raccoon*, *fallow deer* and also *mule deer*. Back at the campsite a *grey fox* and a *raccoon* were scavenging around.

So a bobcat wasn't easy to get since conditions were quit good first evening... Next days we spend morning and evenings driving around the park roads and made some short hikes here and there. We did see a few *coyotes* and *mule deer*. Also we got at pierce point road two *black-tailed jack rabbits* and a *brush rabbit*, the brush rabbits are quit shy. But later during a hike around Abbots Lagoon a young brush rabbit sat on the track and was easy photographed. Near the lighthouse we spotted the *elephant seals* and *California sea-lions* and also saw a *northern grey whale* from the beach!

But no bobcats... Problem was also the weather. It was dry, but fog was common, specially mornings and visibility was low... In the morning you drove off from the camp more inland with clear skies but more close to the coast fog was heavy... and visibility low.

So I just thought, keep on trying and we stayed an extra night (4 total). After two days of no luck and a lot of driving I thought it would become a hard job. On the third day I decided to take a walk instead of driving and I stopped at Abbots lagoon. Here also *otters* are sometimes seen (I saw only tracks). There are some meadows around the lake of which I thought they would be good bobcat terrain. It turned out to be a good decision. The weather was cloudy but not foggy yet. An hour before dark and an empty track, there were no cars at the parking (Which wasn't that common there, since we usually saw some cars parked at the parking). Anyway while walking near the lake half a mile along the track... bingo! A *bobcat* was walking in the high grass of a meadow. Luckily at a point where the grass was a bit short. The cat in high grass is hardly visible, it is just as high as the high grass and so can easily be missed. I remembered from other trip reports that the bobcats not always are shy, so I tried to get some closer. That worked well (staying low) I got rather close and luckily could make even a portrait!? The bobcat wasn't very amused and wandered off to the more thick bushy terrain on the lagoon side of the track and was gone. What a luck with this unexpected close encounter!

Next day we tried one more time driving around. In the evening we found another bobcat along the Ranch road to Marshall Beach. In last light a *bobcat* walked in bushy grass. This one ran off fast, so we had only a short glimpse and a snapshot. Still making us happy off course. So our goal was reached ☺, now we could go further in search for bears and wolves next target, but first a visit to the red woods.

Day 5 drive to Avenue of the Giants along the coast. We did see a mule with a fawn in the roadside, the fawn was still very young. In a harbour of a little town swam two *harbour seals*. Also a *Californian Sea lion* was here. An *osprey* were fishing over the harbour.

The Avenue of the Giants is indeed impressive! All its majestic tall trees truly beautiful. No much wildlife to see though.

Day 6 further along the coast to Redwood NP. We made a short visit to St Patrick's point State park. Here we saw some *harbour seals*. Also *brush rabbits* where in the bushes and on the road they were less shy than at

Point Reyes. Going more north we saw the **Roosevelt's elk** in some fields, most female deer. Further in a field with high ferns we saw some stags only showing their antlers.

Day 7 From Redwood NP we continued in to Oregon and followed the Columbia river east. At a parking spot I saw an **American red squirrel** and a **least chipmunk**, but no photo's. Further in to Idaho we overnighed and next morning made a short visit to a state park. Here we saw some **Columbian ground squirrels**.

Part two Yellowstone & Grand Teton

Day 8 we drove to Yellowstone and took the northern entrance. Since we arrived late afternoon, we choose to drive quickly to some campsites. They turned out to be all full. So we had decided to drive around first in the park and then leave by the north east entrance to stay in a hotel. Yellowstone was again truly beautiful, such great nature! We saw **bighorn sheep** near the river, **mountain elk** here and there, just as **pronghorn** in the more open plains and **bison** almost everywhere, sometimes in herds sometimes single bulls. In direction to Norris we drove into a 'bear jam' and to our luck there was a big female **grizzly** around in some open area. She was on the move so we didn't see her for long before she disappeared in the woods. This was a much better view than the only one grizzly we saw in the Lamar valley in 2007 far away at a mile distance or so.

On our way outside of the park after sunset driving through Lamar we saw **a wolf** crossing in our car lights just in front of our car! Unlucky it was too quick to get a photo... but what a score on a first Yellowstone afternoon-evening!

Day 9-14 we stayed in the park for several days and camped at Norris (took a place in the morning) and also stayed a night at the central campsite. We did see **Uinta ground squirrels** around the site. Every morning and evening we drove around in search of wolf and bear. The first early morning we saw a female **moose** in first light next to an open wetland just inside the park after entering the east entrance. In Lamar we saw two single black wolves. There was a Bison carcass which was already a week old on the other side of the Valley and this was frequently visited by grizzly and wolf. But it all was quite far away, only telescope gave a bit viewing.

One black wolf was a bit closer around 200 yards but never very close.

Our first **American black bear** we saw the third day and it was grazing in the roadside accompanied by lots of cars. A mother with three cubs was frequently seen at the beginning of the road to Mount Washburn/Dunraven pass. We got some good views of her and the young cubs. The cubs ran around a lot and frequently climbed trees. Mother bear decided to cross the road, which was a funny sighting with the little cubs behind.

At some points in the park we saw **mule deer** but not too often. In Silver Creek we saw **a beaver** and I think also a **nutria** (it was much smaller). Also we saw a few **coyotes** but they are not commonly seen.

After some days we decided to go to Grand Teton since we heard a mother grizzly '399' with her two cubs was frequently seen there in the northern part of the park. I happen to miss this bear for over 5 times! First I was too early and twice I was just too late to see her. This was quite frustrating because almost everybody had seen her there. We did see a single grizzly at the spot where 399 used to be seen. But this was an animal that was on the move and we only saw it from far walking up a ridge disappearing in the forest.

Driving around Teton I found a **moose** at 'moose Wilson road' and in the woods also **mountain elk** and **mule deer**. At the Mormon village were **coyote pups** playing for their den under one of the cottages. That was truly funny to see when they played around. To my surprise we saw in twilight an **American porcupine** trying to cross the road, but it decided to turn around because of traffic. It was all too quick for a photo but a great sighting and as I heard of rangers rather uncommon. We did see **yellow-bellied marmot** here and there. Especially at the end of the pilgrim creek road there was a little cottage and around there they are easily seen.

During our stay in Yellowstone and Teton we saw a total of **13 different grizzly** and more or less the same number of **American black bears**. Also we saw some **10 different wolves**. 5 animals in Lamar (more or less 4 sightings) and 5 of the canyon pack (only one view). Almost every morning and evening somewhere wolves were seen in and around Lamar but always far away and telescopes needed.

Since Yellowstone is very touristic most animals are easily seen and because of the traffic/bear jams you sometimes cannot miss it. Usually if there are cars on the roadside, also park rangers are there to control traffic and they are strict: no stopping on the road!

I think the period of the year we chose was right. There were snow covers in the higher areas and in the woods but also green parts in the open areas. It seemed the bears were still very active, so sightings were frequent. Close encounters with grizzly are not so common, being lucky is quit the magic word. We spoke people who stayed three days and didn't see a grizzly... But we spend lots of hours driving at the very early and late moments of the day so that will improve results. For wolves I think spring is not the best period, probably autumn is better when the cubs will need more food and start walking around.

Although in September that time I was there only one grizzly showed its self far away and no American black bear was seen.

Part three Crater of Moon twin falls, Yosemite and lake Tahoe

Day 15 we had to go back to the San Francisco and planned a short visit to lake Tahoe and Yosemite. We decided to drive through Crater of the Moon NP. We arrived late but had some good views of the weird outcrops. A quick visit to the park we did see a probably **yellow-pine chipmunk**. Also a probably **mountain cottontail** (both according to the mammal list of the CM park). We continued to Twin Falls where we overnigheted. Our only **long-tailed weasel** crossed the road somewhere on the way to Twin Falls.

Day 16 We drove to Lake Tahoe and overnigheted here on a campsite. **Golden mantled squirrels** and probably **least chipmunk** where abundant at the campsite. We drove on to Yosemite and had a stopover at mono lake. This is a strange looking phenomena. The sea gulls were eating the flies on the muddy flats.

We entered YOS on the eastside over the pass. This is truly a beautiful drive and has great views. Here we saw **Mule deer** at some places and a **cinnamon American black bear** in the valley. All campsites were full so we had to camp outside the park and missed an evening drive... Next day we brought a short morning visit to the main valley and saw **Californian grounds squirrels** and **Western grey squirrels** around the visitor information centre.

Return to San Francisco enjoying a last diner downtown and flying home next day.



Tule Elk (PR)



Mule deer (PR)



Brush rabbit (PR)



Bobcat (PR)



Bobcat (PR)



Coyote (PR)



Black-tailed jackrabbit (PR)



Second Bobcat (above) and Mule deer family (below) (PR)





Coyote (above) and Striped skunk (below) (PR)





Mule deer (above) and Tule elk (below) (PR)





Raccoon (PR)



Tracks of North American river otter (PR)



California quail (PR)



Elephant seals @ Point Reyes NS



Mule deer (PR)



Grey fox (PR)



California quail (PR)



Tule elk (PR)



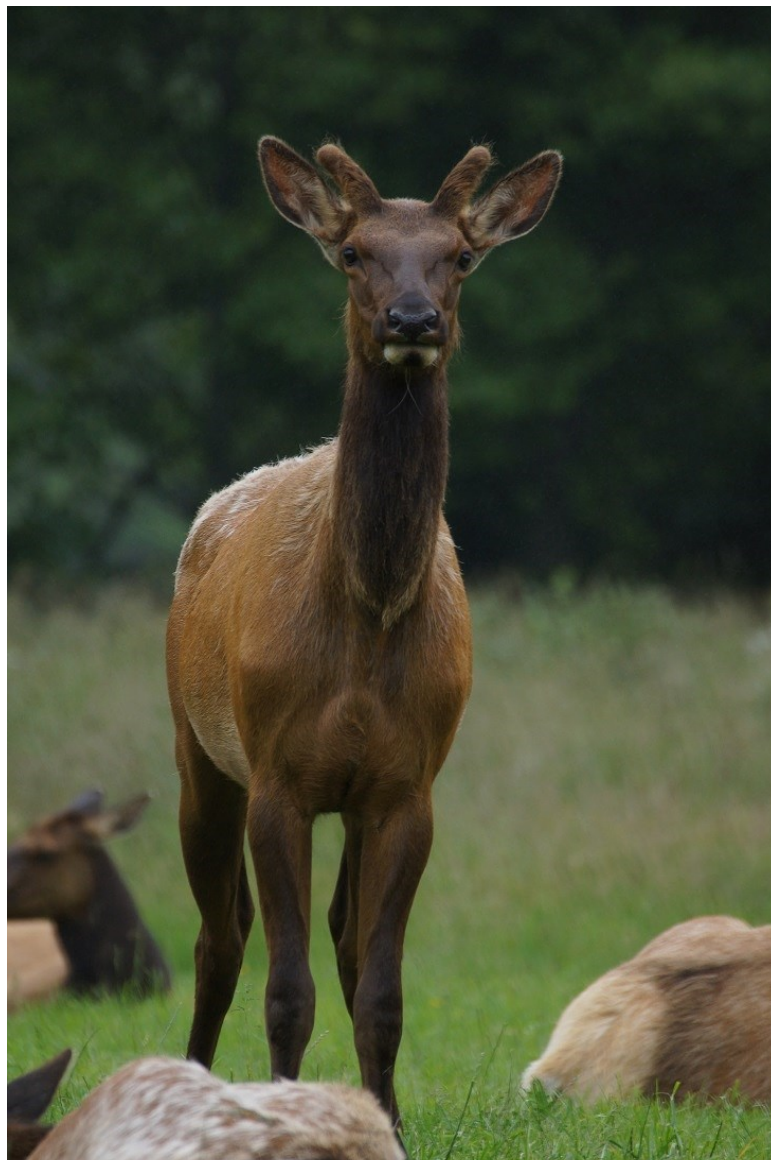
California sea lion @ pier 39 (SF)



Brown pelican (SF)



Osprey (above) and Roosevelt elk (below) WEST COAST





California gray *whale* (*Eschrichtius robustus*) (WEST COAST)



Harbour seal (WEST COAST)



Columbian ground squirrel (OREGON)



Pronghorn (YS)



Bison (YS)



Bison calf



American black bear cubs climbing trees (YS)



American black bear (two different animals) (YS)





American black bear cub



Bison herd



Coyote (YS)



Yellow-bellied marmot (GT)



Mountain elk above (YS) & Bison below (YS)





Grizzly mother and cub (YS)



Grizzly



Grizzly mother and cub



Grizzly



Moose (YS)



Grizzly



Wolf (LAMAR, YS)



Wolf



Canyon wolf pack (YS)



Moose (GT)



Lamar wolf pack



Nutria or beaver? (YS)



Mule deer (YS)



Mountain bluebird (YS)



North American beaver (GT)



Coyote pups (GT)



Coyote pup



Red fox (YS)



Uinta squirrel (YS)



Sage grouse (YS)



American black bear family crossing (YS)



Mule deer (GT)



Coyote hunting (GT) and catching a species of gopher





Golden mantled squirrel (lake Tahoe)



Pelicans (twin falls)



California ground squirrel (YOSEMITE)



Western grey squirrel (YOS)



Red squirrel (YS)



Least chipmunk (LAKE TAHOE)



American black bear, brown phase (YOS)

Utrecht, Netherlands september 2014

Janco van Gelderen

TRIPLIST

Places where mammals were seen:

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Mammal-list

1. Tule elk - *Cervus canadensis nannodes* (PR)
2. Roosevelt elk - *Cervus canadensis roosevelti* (WC)
3. Mountain elk - *Cervus canadensis nelsoni* (YS, GT)
4. Mule deer - *Odocoileus hemionus* (PR, YS, GT, YOS)
5. Moose - *Alces alces* (YS, GT)
6. Bighorn sheep - *Ovis canadensis* (YS)
7. Bobcat - *Lynx rufus* (PR)
8. Wolf - *Canis lupus* (YS)
9. Coyote - *Canis latrans* (PR, YS, GT)
10. Red fox - *Vulpes vulpes* (YS)
11. Grey fox - *Urocyon cinereoargenteus* (PR)
12. Grizzly - *Ursos arctos horribilis* (YS)
13. American black bear - *Ursus americanus* (YS, GT)
14. Striped skunk - *Mephitis mephitis* (PR)
15. Raccoon - *Procyon lotor* (PR)
16. North American beaver - *Castor canadensis* (YS)
17. Nutria - *Myocastor coypus* (YS) (**uncertain sighting**)
18. North American porcupine - *Erethizon dorsatum* (GT) (**no photo**)
19. Bison - *Bison bison* (YS, GT)
20. Pronghorn - *Antilocapra americana* (YS, GT)
21. California grey whale - *Eschrichtius robustus* (PR, COAST)
22. Californian sea lion - *Zalophus californianus* (SF, PR, WC)
23. Harbour seal - *Phoca vitulina* (WC)
24. Northern elephant seal - *Mirounga angustirostris* (PR)
25. American red squirrel - *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus* (YS)
26. Western Grey squirrel - *Sciurus griseus* (YOS)
27. Yellow-pine Chipmunk - *Neotamias amoenus* (CM) (**no Photo**)
28. Least chipmunk - *Tamias minimus* (TH, COLUMBIA)
29. California ground squirrel - *Otospermophilus beecheyi* (YOS)
30. Uinta ground squirrel - *Urocitellus armatus* (YS, GT)
31. Columbian ground squirrel - *Urocitellus columbianus* (ORGENON)
32. Golden mantled ground squirrel - *Callospermophilus lateralis* (TH)
33. Long-tailed weasel - *Mustela frenata* (NEVADA) (**no photo**)
34. Black-tailed jackrabbit - *Lepus californicus* (PR)
35. Brush rabbit - *Sylvilagus bachmani* (PR, COAST)
36. Mountain Cottontail - *Sylvilagus nuttallii* (CM) (**no photo**)
37. Yellow-bellied Marmot - *Marmota flaviventris* (YS, GT)
38. Gopher (live eaten by coyote) unidentified (GT)
39. Otter *Lontra canadensis* (PR) (ONLY TRACKS)
40. Fallow deer - *Dama dama* (PR) (introduced) (**no photo**)
41. Bat (unidentified) (**no photo**)