

Vancouver Island plus Columbia River Gorge – Few days in Total

I'll make this really short. I flew up to Seattle to visit friends both there and in Portland and they both are awesome cities. When in Portland, my friend and I visited Columbia River Gorge which is an amazing looking place, and we just hiked a little bit for fun. She's not much of a wildlife enthusiast or anything so we didn't walk quietly or look too hard. We hiked the ~3 mile loop that starts at horse tail falls, and she actually did spot some squirrels while we were on the trail (I'm not sure which species). Later on in the trail, probably around 6:30pm or so, another small squirrel-looking thing ran on the trail towards us and then turned off to the side and at that point you could see its profile, and it wasn't a squirrel at all!!! It was a **long-tailed weasel**!! We both saw it very clearly and as soon as I could tell that it was a weasel I got really excited and wanted to stop for a second and try to find it again for a picture, but it climbed one of the many trees and I didn't see it again. But that was so cool, a "lifer" while hiking with the lady!! And a good one too, as I have taken an interest in mustelids and felines over most other animals. Other than that we also saw a **black-tailed deer** on the drive back, and some more squirrels.

After visiting more friends in Portland and in Seattle I drove to Vancouver Island mainly to see grizzly bears and sea otters since I feel like they are both American species that I'm deeply lacking on my list and in my photo albums. In fact, 10 years ago in summer of 2002 I was the only one who missed a grizzly in Yellowstone out of a group of 8 which included my family and a friend family, so I've been aching to see one. While on the island I did do some hiking but didn't see much besides squirrels (also unidentified, very small) and more **black-tailed deer**. I know Pumas, martens and wolves all exist on the island but luck wasn't on my side, apparently. Remember I did see a puma briefly in Costa Rica but couldn't get a picture. The other two would be lifers but I know there are better places than VI for both. I did contact some people based on recommendations I received on the mammal watching blog, but nobody could tell me specific places to see the 3 and I received a lot of conflicting info. Tofino and the Pacific Trail seem good but they were even further out of the way considering I only had 3 nights on the island and 2 of them were in Port McNeill. At night I didn't do anything because I was so tired from the long drive (Portland to Port McNeil directly because I woke up late and hung-over from partying) and because I had to wake up super early to be at Telegraph Cover for Tide Rip's grizzly bear watching tour <http://www.tiderip.com/index.htm>.

So I was at Telegraph Cove at 6:20 to make sure I didn't miss it because my GPS really sucks and made me miss a ferry the day before. The trip itself is highly recommended in my opinion! It's very educational and has good food and enthusiastic guides that really do their best to spot and explain about the animals. Leaving Telegraph Cove we saw some **Dall's Porpoises** and a single **Steller Sea Lion**. Later on, since it was low tide we saw a **black bear** foraging on the rocks along the shore. The place itself is amazing looking too – the whole area is just awesome. Vancouver Island in general is gorgeous, and it's extremely difficult to find a spot on the island that isn't stunning. But Rip Tide's grizzly bear watching tour does take you from Telegraph Cove which is on the island to Knight's Inlet which is an inlet/sound/fjord in main land Canada. Knight's inlet and Glendale Cove in particular are prime grizzly bear hot spots so your chances are extremely high, especially if you go between August 25th and mid-September. If you happen to not see grizzlies they will give you a voucher for a free re-run on the next available tour. We saw 4 **grizzly bears** in total – one mother with 2 cubs and another sub-adult female

which caught a salmon and was very entertaining to watch. We also saw **Black-tailed deer**, **Harbour Seals**, many birds which I didn't note besides the obvious **bald eagle**, and **Orcas** on the ride back. The Tide Rip tour does occasionally see **gray wolves** along the shores during low-tide, rarely **pumas**, and even more rarely **American Martens**. I was ****REALLY**** hoping for any of the 3 but they are all pretty unlikely, and I did see a lot of mammals for one day including 3 lifers (dall's, stellers and grizzlies). There is also a resident family of **North American River Otters** at the Telegraph Cove marina which would have been yet another nice lifer, but no luck despite coming up early, and also the evening before for dinner and otters..



Grizzly and Black-tailed deer with young sharing a moment

At night I just did a quick, 2-hour drive around between 3am-5am to try my luck on some side-roads and gravel roads but all I saw was a feral cat, a tiny animal crossing the gravel road which must have been a **mouse** of some sort, and more **black-tailed deer**. Surprisingly I saw no Elk while on VI. But that's ok because I've seen plenty of Roosevelt Elk in my day...

The following day I did the Sea Otter tour with Zeballos Expeditions. I enjoyed the tour a lot, though I'd have to say the pre-trip experience was a little skittish.. I was in contact with Christina over email but there were no other confirmed participants on my scheduled tour, and since the cost is per tour not per person I didn't want to take a solo tour. But then she told me some kayakers are going out at noon so I can join their boat which would mean that the first hour and a half of the trip would just be taking them to their drop-off location and then we can go out wildlife watching as long as I want and it's going to be substantially cheaper than taking a solo tour. So I chose that option, but I couldn't get a hold of them the day before to confirm and she didn't answer my last email, so I figured I'd just drive up there and talk to her. I feel like it could have been handled better on both sides (mine included) if I had made up

my mind and confirmed, but also if they were more reachable, but all of that doesn't matter because it ended up working out. We took 3 guys to drop them off at a nice, beautiful little island and then continued in the "search" for the extremely abundant sea otters. We saw plenty of **Sea Otters**, as well as some more **Dall's Porpoise** and **Harbour Seals**. They also see **black bears** on occasion during low tide, **humpback whales** and **pacific white-sided dolphins**, and very rarely **wolves** and **cougars** as well. Dan, the boat driver and of Zeballos Expeditions owner with his wife, told me to look out for some **beavers** in a pond to the left of the road on the way back from Zeballos to the highway, but I didn't try very hard to see them because I've seen them before as well. Not much else on the drive back to the southern part of the island, to Nanaimo which is where I took the ferry back to the real world.



Sea Otters on the Pacific side of Vancouver Island

That night I once again did not drive anywhere because I had to wake up early to take the ferry and visit my friend in Seattle so I didn't want to be tired. I guess Alaska or Yellowstone is calling my name for some wolves, Chile or Paraguay for photogenic pumas and perhaps Crater Lake in Oregon, Sequoia NP or Maine for martens. Overall I would say I had a good time, and saw a lot considering the main purpose of the trip was to visit friends and not to go mammal-watching and I was only out 'in the field' for 3 days. I guess if I had stayed the night at Knights Inlet Lodge (very expensive) I would have had a very decent chance for martens

Trip list:

Dall's Porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*)

Orca (*Orcinus orca*)

American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)

Grizzly (Brown) bears (*Ursus arctos*)

Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*)

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)

Steller Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*)

Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Black-tailed deer (*O. H. columbianus*)

*Unidentified mouse

*Unidentified Squirrels (Probably at least 2 different species)