

Darrington to Chesaw 7/6-7/10 ~ Washington State Mammal Trip Report

7/6/24 - Orcas Island to Darrington

After nearly missing the 2:20pm ferry off of Orcas Island, we arrived in Darrington around 6pm. Since we had a few county bird targets, we covered good habitats such as Whitehorse Community Park and Swauk Prairie Rd. Upon flipping one of the lids on a handful of electrical boxes at Whitehorse Park, we found one that was inhabited by a family of six DEER MOUSE.



Two of six Deer Mice found at Whitehorse Park

Two hours later into the evening while driving Sauk Prairie Rd, we spotted a small rodent on the side of the road. Though I initially assumed it was a shrew based on its diminutive size, upon pulling off to investigate I determined it was my lifer CREEPING VOLE.



Creeping Vole alongside Sauk Prairie Rd.

We watched it seemingly frozen in front of us for a couple minutes before it scampered off into the roadside brush. Having yet to find a Common Nighthawk, we doubled back to the bridge we initially crossed getting onto Sauk Prairie Rd. Here, we not only found four of our target Common Nighthawk, but I spotted a lone BLACK BEAR foraging in a nearby clearcut. I often scan thinned out burns and grassy slopes in hopes of spotting a foraging Black Bear. So fortunately upon scanning the closest open area, I was lucky enough to spot one probably a mile or two away. Later in the evening, we drove up a forest road to find a spot to spend the night. Despite the extensive night driving, the only species of interest we found were a few Western Toads.

7/7 - Darrington to Wenatchee

On the way back down the forest road we slept on at sunrise, I was successful in hearing not only my target Olive-sided Flycatcher, but one or two DOUGLAS' SQUIRREL joining in on the morning chorus. Further down, I was almost certain that I briefly saw a Snowshoe Hare darting off the road. Continuing on our route for more target birds, we spent an hour or so walking along the trail at Trafton Trailhead Park twenty or so minutes to the east. Here, we saw two TOWNSEND'S CHIPMUNK, though we were unsuccessful locating most of our bird targets. The habitat along the trail looks perfect for Long-tailed Weasels and apparently they have been seen there before. Unfortunately, no other interesting mammal targets were seen. Much later in the afternoon outside of Wenatchee, we began the short ascent up to the canyon we were planning on sleeping in. Despite it being 100°, this did not deter a pair of CALIFORNIA GROUND-SQUIRRELS from running across the hot asphalt in front of the car. After a short lunch, we decided we could push on and drive an hour or so north to another camping road outside of Pateros. On the way there, we spotted an EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL at a quick stop at Daroga Park. I always take note of the large squirrel species in eastern Washington as each town seems to have their default species with very little overlap. Once we reached a good camping area, I stepped outside with my bat detector and picked up on nearby myotis echolocating at 27 kHz and 45-47 kHz at Black Canyon.

7/8 - Pateros to Chesaw

While driving down from our campsite in Black Canyon just after sunrise, we came across a WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL running along the side of the road. Western Gray Squirrels can be quite hard to find in Washington as they are localized to only three distinct populations. This individual belonged to the population that lives in the forest along the east slope of the Cascades. Continuing on, we stopped at a few other short stops for a couple specific bird targets. In doing so, we located our target Black-necked Stilt and Western Grebe with a bonus immature Northern Pacific Rattlesnake crossing the road by Little Soap Lake. An hour or so later, we headed over to our next main stop, Cameron Lake Road. While driving the road here, we came across a fleeing YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT on the shoulder. A half hour later, I was happy to spot a male PRONGHORN ~150 or so feet away. While many have found Pronghorn along this road, this was my first time seeing an individual from the Okanogan population in Washington. We also saw a couple MULE DEER in the nearby yards while cruising the road.



Adult male Pronghorn Antelope foraging in plowed field along Cameron Lake Rd

Though we did find quite a few birds of note later in the afternoon, the mammal highlights were scarce. We did come across a handful of WHITE-TAILED DEER mostly along Mary Ann Creek (6) outside of Chesaw. Around here we also sporadically encountered a few COLUMBIAN GROUND-SQUIRREL as well as heard the frequent chatter of RED SQUIRREL where the habitat was appropriate. Red Squirrels are typically very common in dry coniferous forest in eastern Washington as they are quite vocal which makes picking them out easier. Later that evening close to where we camped for the night, we came across a small colony of Columbian Ground-Squirrels at the resort on Bonaparte Lake. This is an abundant species in this part of the state with many heard only doing their high-pitched “peep” alarm call at multiple locations. We ended the night with no mammal highlights, but a pleasant chorus of singing birds and

Common Nighthawks.

7/9 - Chesaw to Whinthrop

Early in the morning around sunrise, we woke up at our campsite by Beaver Lake and started with a slow drive around the Beth Lake area. During our drive into the Beth Lake campground, we had our first confirmed views of a SNOWSHOE HARE sitting along the road. 20 minutes later when we stopped at one of the outlets of Beaver Lake to listen for birds, Sara spotted our first MUSKRAT of the trip casually swimming through the open water. Continuing our itinerary while the morning was still young, we encountered a number of Snowshoe Hares hanging out along the side of the main highway leading out of the Beth/Beaver Lake area. As we descended into Chesaw, White-tailed Deer became a frequent sighting as many were still hanging out in the fields from the night before. With the morning set aside for finding birds, not many other mammals were seen until later in the afternoon when we left the area. Though Red Squirrels were readily heard throughout the morning, our first FOX SQUIRREL sighting was a pair spotted by Sara just outside of Oroville. Omak and other small cities/towns in this area seem to have a healthy population of Fox Squirrel. While the remainder of the afternoon was spent in the car with the AC full blast (it was 104°) we did stop briefly at the Loup Loup Campground on the way to Winthrop. Here, on the drive in, we had the first CASCADE GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND-SQUIRREL hanging out on a rock along the side of the road.

An hour or so before dusk when we were driving up Thompson Ridge Rd, we saw a couple more Golden-mantled Ground-Squirrels as well as a few Red Squirrels and a handful of Least/Yellow-pine Chipmunk. Once it was dark, we drove a 10 mile section of road counting the number of Common Poorwills and Flammulated Owls we could locate. Upon arriving back to our sleeping spot, we spotted a small mouse scurrying around the hillside. After waiting around the bush it disappeared into for a few minutes or so, it reappeared and bounced away up the hillside. Though the looks were fleeting and only very poor documentation was captured, the only species that matched the coloration and behavior of this mouse was a PACIFIC JUMPING MOUSE.

7/10 - While the return trip home wasn't particularly eventful mammal-wise, we did observe multiple PIKA calling on a pull out leading up to Washington Pass around mid morning (48.5521479, -120.6304816). This was a new mammal for the trip and the only highlight beyond brief views of Townsend's Chipmunks by the Washington Pass parking area for the day.