

9/28-9/29 Selkirk Mountains Trip Report

During a weekend between school weeks, I headed up to the Selkirk Mountains with my brother and girlfriend in order to target Brown Bears and felines. Despite missing the two mammals we were specifically targeting (Brown Bear and Lynx), we were successful in finding quite a few other mammals as consolation!

of Individuals

Individual sightings

Red Squirrel	6 6
Golden-mantled Ground-Squirrel	1 1
Red-tailed Chipmunk	10 3
North American Porcupine	1 1
Pika	4 2
Snowshoe Hare	2 1
Black Bear	1 1
Striped Skunk	2 2
Raccoon	1 1
Elk	3 1
White-tailed Deer	4 2



Saturday 9/28

Late afternoon to dusk

After a Birding at WSU club field trip to Sprague Lake, we began our journey straight to the Selkirk Mountains with the exception of a brief stop at the Spokane Reptile Expo. While leaving Sprague Lake, we spotted a lone NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE hobbling across the road. While I've often seen roadkill porcupines in habitat I wouldn't deem good for porcupines, this was my first time seeing a live porcupine in a barren grassy environment. Few mammals were observed until later after the sun had set aside from calling RED SQUIRRELS where habitat was adequate. While driving down the road from Salmo Lookout after it had gotten dark out and we'd reached our destination, we were happy to see two or three SNOWSHOE HARE darting in and out from the road. Occasionally, we'd stop and one would run out in front of the car and freeze in the headlights.

Sunday 9/29

Predawn to late morning

With an early predawn start to Sunday, we were hopeful for anything while roadcruising while it was still dark. Unfortunately, the first mammals we found were seen after we'd finished roadcruising and started hiking the Salmo Divide Trail. As we started hiking, the morning chorus of Red Squirrels began and soon we began to hear the squeaky outburst of chatter characteristic of RED-TAILED CHIPMUNK. In Washington state, Red-tailed Chipmunk is only found in the montane coniferous habitat in the very NE corner of the state (reaching as far south as Mt Spokane), so it's always fun to get the opportunity to see this species. As we walked further down the trail into a section traversing a talus rocky slope, the first few calls of PIKA were heard. On the way back to the trailhead, we were able to get views of multiple chipmunks and two Pikas. Afterwards, we collected our chairs from the campsite and headed up to the Salmo Lookout. The first mammal we located while scanning for Brown Bears, was a group of three ELK only maybe a hundred or so feet into the United States. We watched as they subsequently crossed into Canada over the next 10 minutes. An hour or so later while scoping to the south, I spotted a single BLACK BEAR gorging itself on berries a couple miles south as the crow flies. This bear was probably the largest and most spherical bear I've ever seen! We continued scanning for another hour or so with no success until it was time to have some lunch around noon.



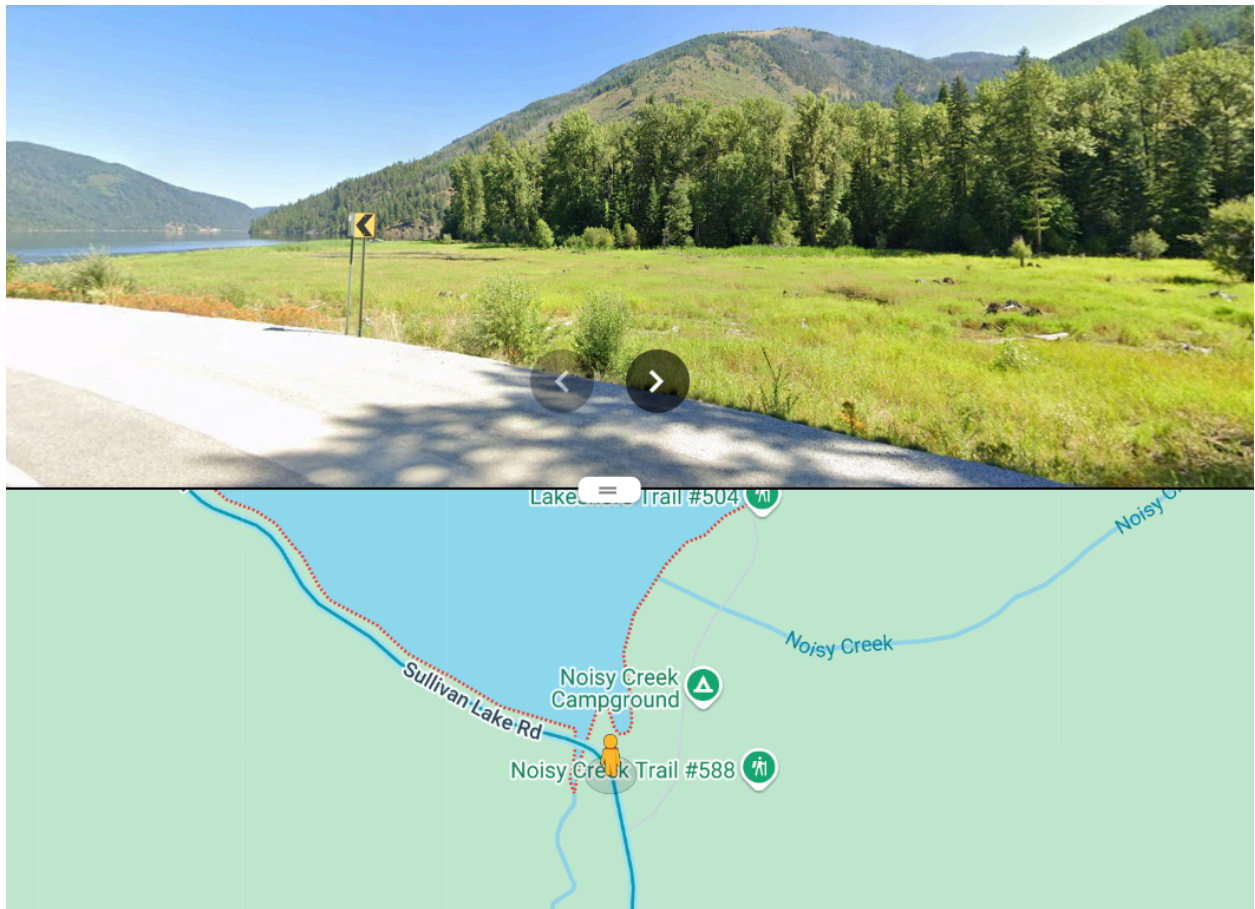
Black Bear viewed from Salmo Lookout on the north slope of Leola Peak

Early afternoon to sunset

After an hour or two of unsuccessfully searching for American Marten in the ever so slightly lower elevation forest, we returned to Salmo Lookout for one last scoping effort. Unfortunately, after another hour of scanning, we came up yet again empty handed with any of the main targets. On the way back down from the lookout, we were fortunate to spot a GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND-SQUIRREL milling about on the side of the road. While this species isn't by any means uncommon in its expected range, considering the cascades of Washington are inhabited by a different species of Golden-mantled Ground-Squirrel (Cascade GMGS), it sometimes takes a trek to the more remote corners of the state to find plain ol' Golden-mantleds in Washington.

After dark

After the sun had set, we packed up camp and began our journey back to Pullman. Considering Sullivan Lake was right on the way back home, we decided to stop and do one last thermal scan of the boggy habitat bordering the south shore line.



Striped Skunk habitat at the south end of Sullivan Lake (by Noisy Creek CG)

Despite our first thermal scan followed by a flashlight scan turning up nothing, our final thermal scan of the bog showed a small low-to-the-ground bright orange blob moving slowly through the tall grass. Soon we realized that not only was it a new trip mammal, but it was also my brother's lifer STRIPED SKUNK. We trudged through the bog out towards the skunk while tracking it's movements with the thermal (as not to spook it with the flashlight), but unfortunately we were unable to get documentation. Thirty minutes later while driving south on SR20, we had much better close-range looks at a single Striped Skunk milling about the shoulder of the road. Unfortunately, it flushed into a culvert upon turning around for photos.

No other mammals were seen beyond a single Raccoon seen at Calispell Lake around 11pm and a handful of WHITE-TAILED DEER.

Good birding and mammal-watching,
Alex Sowers