

Central Cascades to the Coast ~ Oregon, December 2024

A few weeks ago, my girlfriend Sara and I got word of a pelagic sea-birding trip scheduled for December 7th leaving out of Newport, OR. Enticed by the prospect of a December pelagic and the chance of seeing a few new Oregon birds, we booked two spots on the boat and invited my friends Jacob Miller and Liam Hutcheson to join us. At 5pm on Friday, we set out to Bend where we'd spend the night at Sara's parents place until 3am the following morning.

Bushy-tailed Woodrat	1
Gray Fox	1, maybe 2
Northern Fur Seal	1
California Sea Lion	15
Steller Sea Lion	12
Harbor Seal	5
Fin Whale	6
Dall's Porpoise	4



12/8 - Bend to Newport (03:15 to 07:10)

We departed for Newport around 3:15 Saturday morning with the intention of arriving at the marina by 7. Despite cold December temperatures, there appeared to be some noticeable mammal activity along the roadside after crossing over Tombstone Pass at roughly 5am. Our first mammal that unfortunately only Jacob was able to see while alive, was a BUSHY-TAILED WOODRAT that decided to run straight under the front right wheel of the car. After a quick U-turn, all of us had great looks at the unfortunately deceased Woodrat. Despite Jacob hitting it, we were pleased to see that it at least appeared to be in perfect condition. Ten minutes later, a bit closer to Sweet Home, we all had brief views of a GRAY FOX that quickly dashed in front of the car. Fortunately, it stuck around at the forest's edge long enough for us to maneuver the car so that all of us had good, though brief, views in the headlights. Only a few minutes earlier, we had seen a medium sized mammal cross the road

a bit too far up to identify. After seeing the Gray Fox, we suspect this mammal might've been another individual.



Roadkill Bushy-tailed Woodrat near Cascadia, OR

12/8 - Newport to ~28 miles offshore (07:30-13:00)

After a long car drive to Newport, we finally arrived at the marina where we met up with the rest of the pelagic trip attendants. Upon first stepping on the boat, we noted our first two marine mammal species of the trip. Only a few feet away, we observed a single CALIFORNIA SEA LION and HARBOR SEAL loafing at the water's surface by some Surf Scoters. After making it out past the jetty where more California Sea Lions were lurking at the water's surface, it took roughly another hour to spot the next new species of mammal for the day. About 5 miles offshore, we came across a single weather station that was packed to the brim with ~10 STELLER SEA LIONS. As the boat approached, we had good views as a few stumbled off the structure and flopped into the water. Approximately 10 miles west of the weather station, a call for either porpoises or dolphins was made. Though I only had poor looks, others had a closer angle on them and identified them as DALL'S PORPOISES. Unfortunately, unlike my past experiences on pelagic trips, the porpoises didn't stick around to bow ride.

Maybe 8 miles west past the point where we had the porpoises, we stopped the boat and started throwing some popcorn and fish oil off the stern in hopes of attracting whatever birds might be in the area. This method is called "chumming", and is one of the best ways to attract pelagic species of bird due to their excellent sense of smell. With a nice breeze passing through

the chum spot, it wasn't long before we started seeing a few tubenoses on the horizon presumably coming into the slick. All of a sudden, there was a call from the bow of a possible pod of Fin Whales spotted at about 12 o'clock. I rushed to the bow and was able to quickly confirm the presence of 3-4 FIN WHALES. While they weren't incredibly close, they certainly weren't too far out as they provided good views as they slowly made their way around to the port side of the boat. Satisfied with my views, I headed back to the stern to check up on the bird action. All of a sudden, I heard a loud "PFFFFFFT" and was shocked to watch another Fin Whale surface maybe only 30 yards off the stern! Super content with my views, I returned to watching the birds swarm the chum slick.



iPhone photo of a Fin Whale. ~25 miles offshore of Newport, OR

12/8 - ~28 miles offshore to Newport (13:00-16:00)

While the way back to shore is never as exciting as on the way out, the journey back wasn't without highlights. While most of these highlights were bird related (Mottled Petrel!), I was one of the few who got great, though brief, views of a breaching NORTHERN FUR SEAL. While this was the last new mammal of the trip, on the way back we were treated to more views of California and Steller Sea Lions, and a Harbor Seal or two.

Happy holidays and good mammal-watching,

Alex Sowers

