



Field Guides Tour Report

Best of the Pacific Northwest 2014

Feb 8, 2014 to Feb 13, 2014
Terry & Karen McEneaney

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).

The Field Guides 2014 "Best of the Pacific Northwest: Skagit Valley & Puget Sound" tour turned out well in spite of the poor and unseasonably cold weather. We began with a rare snowstorm in Seattle, but the weather gradually improved from rain to intermittent showers and finally sunshine on the last day.

We concluded the trip with 105 species (106 taxa) of birds and five species of mammals. We observed more than 100,000 individual birds, with approximately 44,000 Snow Geese in four discernable geographic flocks comprising the bulk of the birds seen. Other impressive bird numbers were the following estimates: 2,000+ Trumpeter Swans, 1,000+ Tundra Swans, 20,000 American Wigeons, 12,000 Mallards, 2,000 N. Pintails and N. Shovelers, 1,500 Common Goldeneyes, 200 Red-breasted Mergansers, 700 Red-throated Loons, 300 Bald Eagles, 100 Red-tailed Hawks, 25 Rough-legged Hawks, 700 Mew Gulls, 500 Ring-billed Gulls, 3,000 Glaucous-winged Gulls, 16,000 Dunlin, 40+ Varied Thrushes, and 500+ Common Murres.

Bird sighting highlights for the tour included: Eurasian Wigeon, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-throated and Pacific loons, Cackling Goose, Ross's Goose, Black Turnstone, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Rhinoceros Auklet, Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl, Anna's Hummingbird, Thayer's Gull, Glaucous Gull, Northern Shrike, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Purple Finch.



We were all smiles here thanks to five days of fantastic birding, seafood, and scenery. (Photo by participant Karen Davidheiser)

The rarest bird on the tour was a spectacular single "blue morph" Ross's Goose (though it probably should be called the "black morph"). Ross's Geese are rarely found in this area, let alone this strikingly plumaged bird. Other memorable sightings include four Cackling Geese, one being an "Aleutian Cackling Goose" (*B. h. leucopareia*) with a white neck collar. Out-of-range winter birds for this area were three Lesser Yellowlegs standing side by side with one Greater Yellowlegs.

Our best observations of bird behaviors included: an adult Herring Gull carrying what appeared to be a vole in its feet (very unusual to say the least), only to be chased by five immature Bald Eagles, outflying them and landing on the ground, only then to be killed by the eagles; two adult Bald Eagles tumbling to the ground during a courtship display; a Peregrine chasing a large flock of Dunlin in Skagit Bay; and the noisy Snow Geese.

The seafood was sensational and in a different league. We all went home ruminating about the seafood quality and recalling the sensational numbers of birds found during this memorable tour.

We're glad everyone made it home safely, and we can't wait to see you when our paths cross again. Do keep in touch! In the meantime, take good care!

--Terry & Karen

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) – Found 4 out of 5 days. Est. 44,000 individuals in 4 separate geographic flocks. Found a few "blue

morph" snow geese in the bunch as well.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Rare in the Pacific NW any time, let alone a very rare "blue morph" or what I like to call "black morph" Ross's Goose.

One individual. 95% of these birds nest in Queen Maude's Gulf in the Canadian arctic archipelago. "Blue or black morph" a very rare find indeed.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – Seen first two days - not as many as other years. No more than 100 individuals. Believe the cold affected their numbers this year, forcing them to move further south.

CAKCLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Found 4 + individuals. The most exciting one was an "Aleutian Cackling Goose" *C.h. leucopareia* with a white neck collar. Nice find.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Seen 4 out of 5 days. Est. 200 individuals.

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – Found four out of the five days. Est. 2,000+ individuals.

TUNDRA SWAN (*Cygnus columbianus*) – Found over 1,000 individuals.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Found 3 out of 5 days. Est. 30 individuals.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – Counted a dozen or so different individuals and seen 4 out of the 5 days in the field.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Est. 20,000 individuals, seen all five days.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen every day. Est. 12,000+ individuals.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Approxiametly 1,000 individuals seen 3 out of the 5 days.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – 2,000 + individuals

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – A few hundred individuals seen.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – About 60 seen.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – Close to 1,000 individuals.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Found about 100 or so.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Over a dozen seen, and mainly paired.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – The most numerous of the scoters--4,000+ seen.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – Found a couple hundred individuals.

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – Less than a dozen found.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Less than a dozen found.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Found about 300 individuals.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – About 1,500 individuals seen.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – Found about a dozen or so.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – Found about 20 individuals.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – About a dozen or so.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Found a couple hundred individuals.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Found eight individuals.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Several hundred individuals found days 3 through 5.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Found around four dozen individuals.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Over 100 individuals observed.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Found one individual in a canal on day 2.

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – Found a couple hundred individuals on four out of the five days.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – About 300 or so individuals found.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – Found a couple on day two.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) – Observed at least 100 individuals.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Most numerous of the cormorants- several hundred individuals observed.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Found over 100 individuals.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Quite common, 80-100 individuals observed and found every day.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Found less than 20 individuals.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Found two individuals total on two occasions--days three and four.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Difficult to estimate due to double counting, but estimate 300 or so individuals representing every age class.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – The most common buteo numbering 100 individuals and different color persuasions.

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – One individual for sure.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Found 20 or so individuals, including a couple dark morphs.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – A couple dozen seen.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Less than 20 individuals found.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Close to a couple dozen found.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – One individual on day four accompanying 3 out of season Lesser Yellowlegs.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – There were three individuals accompanying a Greater Yellowlegs on day 4. So we had good looks at both species for comparative purposes. Got to see them on both days 4 and 5. Normally LEYE are much further south this time of year. Most winter in South America, a few winter central California south. Easy ID.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – Around a dozen individuals found.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Found a little over a dozen individuals on day two.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – The most numerous shorebird here in the winter, estimate over 16,000 individuals. One flock was chased by a peregrine.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – In excess of 1,000 individuals, many moving with the changing tide.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – Found around 250 + individuals-seen 4 out of the 5 days.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – Found about 30 or so individuals. Some were resting in groups of eight.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

MEW GULL (*Larus canus*) – Several hundred individuals found during the course of the tour.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few hundred individuals found.

HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*)

THAYER'S GULL (*Larus thayeri*) – One individual on day 2.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – Thousands observed.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – One individual found on day two.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto xanthocyclus*) – Found 50-100 individuals. [I]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Found about 30 or so.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*) – One individual nearly ran into the van during the night in a rain storm on day 4.

Strigidae (Owls)

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – Less than half dozen found in total and found three out of the five days

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Found quite a few--estimate 20 or so individuals.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (PACIFIC) (*Picoides villosus sitkensis*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Found over 25 individuals total and seen every day- all of the red-shafted race. One y-s/r-s intergrade.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Observed about three individuals.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Found one individual of the "black morph" or PacNW F.c. suckleyi race. Handsome bird.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Found two individuals-both of the very dark F.p. pealei race, hence "Peale's peregrine". Super looks at this bird before it took off creating mahem for any birds in its way.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*) – One individual right at dusk--nice to have on winter bird tour.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Less than one half dozen individuals found.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Well over 100 individuals mostly coming off roosts.

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – Dozens of this strange sounding corvid.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – At least 20 individuals- maybe more.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Found about a dozen or so.

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Found close to a couple dozen individuals.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Found one individual coming to a feeder.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (*Troglodytes pacificus*) – Found close to a dozen individuals and some fine looks at this chocolate-colored wren.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Can recall seeing two individuals.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Found less than half dozen individuals.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Found one individual on day two.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – One individual in Wash Pk.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – Found one individual on day one at Bayview.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Found close to three hundred individuals.

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Found in excess of two dozen of these birds. Amazing.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A couple thousand at least. [I]

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – At least a dozen or so.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – One lone individual on day four.

FOX SPARROW (*Passerella iliaca*) – About a dozen or so seen, all were of the 'Sooty' group and two of the 'slate-colored' group.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Dozens, perhaps as many as several hundred. All of the M.m. morphna PacNW subpecies, the darker rusty form.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolnii*) – Found one individual on day one.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – Over one hundred individuals found.

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – Found at least 30 or so individuals.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – Close to 100 individuals found, all of the "oregon" race, with one individual with dark lores qualifying as 'pink-sided'.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Easily a few hundred individuals.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – In total, estimate 50 individuals.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – About 150 or so individuals.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Estimate 50 individuals.

PURPLE FINCH (WESTERN) (*Haemorhous purpureus californicus*) – About three seen on day two. Found with dark auriculars and smudgy flanks.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – At least 300 found during the course of the tour. [I]

MAMMALS

WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus griseus*) – Mainly at a feeder on days one and two.

CHICKAREE (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*) – Also know as the Douglas Squirrel, a beautiful red squirrel with golden edges.

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*) – Seen on days 3 and 5.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Seen on several occasions.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Found about a dozen or so on days 2,4,and 5. It is no wonder these small dark mule deer with smidges of rusty gold pelage and a solid black tail are also called "Columbian Black-tailed Deer".

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 106 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa