

Vancouver Island, August 2004

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I attended a conference (SER) in Victoria BC 24-26 August. Victoria is considered to be the best bird-watching region on Vancouver Island, so I spent a few days in the area before the conference, but after the conference I rented a car and went to the west coast. If birdwatching is the only objective, the area around Victoria is sufficient to cover almost all bird species that could be expected in the region, but the scenery in the central and western parts of the island is spectacular, in particular the rain forests with their impenetrable thickets and gigantic firs and cedars.

The approximate itinerary follows:

- August 22 Birdwatching in walking distance from the University of Victoria (UVic) campus, including Cadboro bay and Mount Tolmie.
- August 23 Whale safari south or south west from Victoria. Afternoon UVic campus and Cadboro bay-Cattle point
- August 24 Conference activities. Cadboro bay-Cattle point.
- August 25 Mount Tolmie, Cadboro bay-Oak bay, Upland park
- August 26 Conference activities. Cadboro bay-Oak bay-Upland park-Mount Tolmie
- August 27 Ogden point breakwall, Clover point, McMicking point (around Victoria) Saanichton bay, McIntyre Reservoir, Quick's bottom (north from Victoria) Sproat Lake Provincial Park (central Vancouver Island)
- August 28 Around Tofino: Grice bay, Long beach, Cox point, Florencia bay, Rain forest trail
- August 29 Stamp falls (central Vancouver Island)

Most of the birdwatching sites were found in Keith Taylor (2000) – “The Birder’s Guide. Vancouver Island” (Steller, Vancouver). Information about this book and other information about birdwatching in British Columbia may be found on the Internet (<http://birding.bc.ca>).

DIARY

I arrived in Victoria on the 21st and checked in at the University Campus Housing in the evening.

22/8. Woke up, fell out of bed, dragged a comb across my head. Looked out of the window to hear the sound of a **red-breasted nuthatch** and to see a couple of **chestnut-backed chickadees**, a **wilson’s warbler** and a **townsend’s warbler**.

Found my way downstairs and went out for a walk towards CADBORO BAY, approximately 1.5 kilometres east from the campus. From there I walked south to SPOON BAY and back. Along this walk I saw 5 **double-crested cormorants**, **pelagic cormorant**, **great blue heron**, **canada goose**, some 10 **hooded mergansers**, at least two **black oystercatchers**, 5-10 **greater yellowlegs**, **spotted sandpiper**, 2 **black turnstones**, a flock of about 10 **least sandpipers**, 30-40 **bonaparte’s gulls**, **mew gulls**, **glaucous-winged** and unidentified **gulls**, **common murre**, 3-4 **pigeon guillemots**, 3-4 **marbled murrelets**, 2-3 **anna’s hummingbirds**, 3-5 **belted kingfishers**, **downy woodpecker**, **northwestern crows**, **barn**

swallows, around 15 **cedar waxwings**, many **house finches**, 5-10 **american goldfinches** and **house sparrows**.

I took the bus downtown to buy some things, including some maps. **European starling** was seen. In the evening I took a walk to MOUNT TOLMIE, where I encountered some **anna's hummingbirds**, a few flocks of **bushtit**, 2 **bewick's wrens** and at least 5 **orange-crowned warblers**.

23/8. I joined a whale-safari organised by the conference in the morning. The boat left from Victoria at 10 a.m. and searched for whales for three hours south and west of Victoria, and indeed found 2 **orca whales** (=killer whales), lots of **harbour seals** and at least 200 **sea lions**. Birds identified included 3 **bald eagles**, 5-10 **heermann's gulls**, maybe 25 **pigeon guillemots**, **marbled murrelets** and lots of **common murre**.

In the afternoon the forest just south-east from UVIC produced a female **downy woodpecker**, **northern flicker**, a **pileated woodpecker**, 1-3 **olive-sided flycatchers**, a group of (less than 10) **warbling vireos**, **brown creeper**, **wilson's warbler**, around 5 **spotted towhees**, **house finches** and a **pine siskin**.

Along the beach between CADBORO BAY and CATTLE POINT I saw the same birds as yesterday, plus 3 **harlequin ducks**, **marbled godwit**, around 20 **black turnstones** (Surrey road), some 10 **least sandpipers**, 4-6 **rhinoceros auklets**. A **merlin** was seen at UVic on the way back.

24/8. It rained most of the day which made it easier to concentrate on the conference starting off. I did take a walk down CADBORO BAY-CATTLE POINT as usual. Given the migrating season I was surprised that so few new birds, particularly waders, were found. During the whole week similar numbers (probably the same individuals) of all species were present. Around 5 **western sandpipers** were found today in addition to the formerly encountered birds. I also saw a **turkey vulture** and a **song sparrow**.

25/8. The morning was spent at MOUNT TOLMIE. There I saw, e.g. **downy woodpecker**, **bushtits**, around 5 **bewick's wrens**, **cedar waxwings**, 10-30 **orange-crowned warblers**, **black-throated gray warbler**, 2 **townsend's warblers**, 2-3 **wilson's warblers** and a **dark-eyed junco**.

After breakfast I walked between CADBORO BAY and OAK BAY (mostly raining). Same birds as usual, and I managed to identify 5 **california gulls** and around 50 **glaucous-winged gulls**. On the way back I passed through UPLAND PARK, where I saw at least 11 **california quails**, a male **downy woodpecker**, **pacific-slope flycatcher**, **black-throated gray warbler**, **spotted towhees** and **house finches**.

26/8. A long walk in the afternoon covering CADBORO BAY-OAK BAY, UPLAND PARK and MOUNT TOLMIE. Not much new along the beach except for 2-3 **cliff swallows** above Cadboro bay. In Upland park a **pileated woodpecker** and a **western wood-pewee** were found. One or possibly two **common nighthawks** were observed hunting over Mount Tolmie and the neighborhoods in the evening light. Very nice!

27/8. This morning I checked out of the hotel and went downtown to pick up my car from Avis. I checked some localities around Victoria, including OGDEN POINT BREAKWALL, CLOVER POINT and McMICKING POINT. Nothing special, even though Clover point held some waders and gulls. I headed north along the Saanich peninsula to SAANICHTON BAY. Here I found more than 50 **canada geese**, 2 **bald eagles**, 2 **turkey vultures**, 4 **least sandpipers**, an adult **long-billed dowitcher** (in a nearby pond, typically enough), a juvenile **short-billed**

dowitcher, lots of **gulls** and a **belted kingfisher**. I also stopped by MCINTYRE RESERVOIR, which was short of almost everything except a **pie-billed grebe**.

Before I headed north-west on the main island, I made a stop at QUICK'S BOTTOM in the outskirts of Victoria. A **turkey vulture**, **rufous hummingbird**, **willow flycatcher** and **orange-crowned warbler** were seen.

At four p.m. I entered SPROAT LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK near Port Alberni. Most birds were found near the park entrance north of the highway, including a male **hairy woodpecker**, **steller's jay**, quite a lot of **american robins**, **swainson's thrushes** (in all about 5 individuals seen in the park) and a **black-throated gray warbler**. On the lake side of the park I saw a female **hairy woodpecker**, **cassin's vireo**, **black-throated gray warbler** and a **dark-eyed junco**.

In the evening I arrived in Tofino and checked in at the Backpacker's Inn where I had made a reservation from Sweden.

28/8. Light rain, which seems to be more of a rule than an exception in this region, where the natural habitat mainly consists of rain forest. The tide was low when I arrived at GRICE BAY in the morning, so I had expected huge amounts of shorebirds, but all I found was 4 **short-billed dowitchers**, a **least sandpiper** and quite a few gulls, including a **mew gull**. About a hundred **green-winged teals**, 2-3 **bald eagles**, 5-10 **steller's jays**, around 10 **orange-crowned warblers** and a **possible macgillivray's warbler** were also seen.

Next place I did was LONG BEACH, where most of the tourists seemed to enjoy the surfing possibilities. This did not seem to bother the around 1000 **western sandpipers**, 1-2 **least sandpipers**, 4 **sanderlings**, around 50 **semipalmated plovers** and a **greater yellowlegs** that were gathered there. 7 **black turnstones** flew by and around 100 geese – **probably greater white-fronted geese** – passed above on their way south.

Finding out where COX POINT was didn't turn out so easy, the map in the Birder's guide was insufficient. It is a very rocky piece of shore, attractive for wandering tattler and surfbird. I didn't find these species but I will try to explain the way since it should be a good place to go. A few kilometres (maybe 3) south of Tofino there are a couple of roads to the west, including "Lynn" and "Chesterman Beach Rd.". It is possible to park on Chesterman Beach Road and walk south a kilometre, but probably better to drive about 1 kilometre and drive down one of the small roads there and walk shorter. On the beaches here I saw around 150 **western sandpipers**, 11 **sanderlings**, 10 **semipalmated plovers** and on the water I could see a young **great northern loon**, a **red-necked grebe** and 2 **marbled murrelets**.

FLORENCIA BAY (drive "Wickaninnish Rd." and turn left – it is the beach south from Wickaninnish Beach) produced a **bald eagle**, 150 **western sandpipers**, **sanderling**, **short-billed dowitcher**, around 25 **black turnstones**, **semipalmated plover**, **steller's jay** etc.

The RAIN FOREST TRAIL was not suitable for birdwatching since the paths were edged by impenetrable and obscure vegetation where nothing could be seen, but it was spectacular. **Chestnut-backed chickadees** and a likely **fox sparrow** (sooty) was all that was seen. GRICE BAY in the evening (flooded) produced a **song sparrow**.

29/8. I drove towards Nanaimo in the morning to take a ferry to Vancouver, visit a friend and go home. On the way I made a brief stop in STAMP FALLS, where I saw 2 **winter wrens**, **chestnut-backed chickadees** and **american robins**.

Epilogue: - STANLEY PARK, Vancouver, 30/8. 3 **double-crested cormorants**, **canada geese**, **mallards**, 2 **wood ducks** (Beaver lake), **red-breasted sapsucker**, **pacific-slope flycatcher**, **black-capped chickadees**, **chestnut-backed chickadees**, **bushy tit**, **american robins** and a **probable macgillivray's warbler**.

LIST OF SPECIES

Great northern loon *Gavia immer*: A young bird seen outside Cox point 28/8.

Pied-billed grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*: One individual seen in McIntyre Reservoir 27/8.

Red-necked grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: An adult outside Cox point 28/8.

Double-crested cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*: Rather common by the coast near Victoria, and also seen in Stanley Park in Vancouver.

Pelagic cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*: Seen in Cadboro bay 22/8 and at McMicking point 27/8.

Great blue heron *Ardea herodias*: Seen daily in small numbers on the coasts near Victoria. Around 50 individuals seen in Grice Bay 28/8.

Anser sp.: Around 100 unidentified geese (most likely Greater white-fronted geese *A. albifrons*) flying south at Long Beach 28/8.

Canada goose *Branta canadensis*: Seen by the coasts near Victoria, at least 50 individuals in Saanichton bay 27/8 and noted in Stanley Park, Vancouver 30/8.

Wood duck *Aix sponsa*: 2 birds seen in Stanley Park, Vancouver (Beaver Lake) 30/8.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Seen along the coasts near Victoria, in Grice Bay 28/8 and in Stanley Park 30/8.

Green-winged teal *Anas crecca carolinensis*: About a hundred birds seen in Grice Bay 28/8.

Harlequin duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*: 3 individuals seen at Spoon Bay (between Cadboro bay and Cattle point) 23/8 and 24/8. 5 individuals at McMicking point 27/8.

Hooded merganser *Mergus cucullatus*: Rather common between Cadboro bay and Cattle point.

Turkey vulture *Cathartes aura*: Seen at Cadboro bay 24/8, at Saanichton bay 27/8 and in Quicks bottom the same day. It was also frequently seen along the road, some 10 individuals noted north from Victoria 27/8.

Bald eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*: 1+2 individuals seen at the whale-safari 23/8, a young and an old bird seen at Saanichton bay 27/8, 2-3 individuals seen in Grice bay 28/8 and one adult noted in Florencia bay 28/8.

Accipiter sp.: 2 unidentified Accipiters seen 26/8 near UVic and Cadboro bay.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: One bird seen near UVic 23/8 and a juvenile or female seen at Cadboro bay hunting for sandpipers 24/8. The pacific dark form is seen in this area.

California quail *Callipepla californica*: A flock of at least 11 birds seen in Upland park 25/8.

Semipalmated sandplover *Charadrius semipalmatus*: Some 50 individuals seen at Long Beach, around 10 birds at Cox point and a single bird at Florencia bay. All observations on the 28/8.

Black oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*: Almost daily observations along the coast in the Victoria area.

Greater yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*: Almost daily observations along the coast in the Victoria area. Also noted at Long Beach 28/8.

Spotted sandpiper *Actitis macularia*: Almost daily observations along the coast in the Victoria area. Surrey road was the most reliable site for this species.

Marbled godwit *Limosa fedoa*: One individual seen in Oak bay 23/8 and 25/8, probably the same bird. According to the literature, this observation was a little unexpected.

Black turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala*: Almost daily observations along the coast in the Victoria area. Also seen at Long Beach (7 birds flying by) and Florencia bay (around 25 individuals) 28/8.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: 4 individuals in Long Beach, 11 at Cox point and 1 in Florencia bay 28/8.

Western sandpiper *Calidris mauri*: Seen almost daily in small numbers along the coast in the Victoria area. On the 28/8, around a thousand individuals were seen at Long Beach, around 150 at Cox point and around 150 at Florencia bay. It is not impossible that the same individuals appeared on different spots on the same day since these places were all in the same area.

Least sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*: Seen almost daily in small numbers along the coast in the Victoria area. 4 individuals seen in Saanichton bay 27/8, one in Grice bay 28/8 and one or two birds in the large group of western sandpipers at Long Beach 28/8.

Long-billed dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*: An adult bird seen in a small pond at Saanichton bay 27/8.

Short-billed dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*: One juvenile (or 1st winter) seen in Saanichton bay 27/8, 4 young birds in Grice bay and one juvenile at Florencia bay 28/8.

Bonaparte's gull *Larus philadelphia*: 30-40 individuals seen in Cadboro bay (on the beach) 22/8. Also noted 25/8.

Mew gull *Larus canus*: Noted along the coasts near Victoria 22/8 and 25/8, and in Grice bay 28/8.

California gull *Larus californicus*: Around 5 individuals identified in Oak bay 25/8.

Glaucous-winged gull *Larus glaucescens*: Apparently the most common gull in the area, with daily observations around Victoria, and around Tofino.

Heermann's gull *Larus heermanni*: 5-10 birds seen on the whale-safari 23/8.

Larus sp.: I did not pay very much attention to gulls during this trip, partly due to lack of time and partly because of great difficulties in identifying the larger species, knowing that hybrids occur frequently on the American west coast. However, gulls were common along the coasts, most of them looking more or less glaucous-winged.

Common murre *Uria aalge*: Seen in Cadboro bay 22/8, very common off-shore at the whale-safari 23/8, and seen outside Cadboro bay-Cattle point 23/8.

Pigeon guillemot *Cepphus columba*: 3-4 seen in Cadboro bay 22/8, up to 25 seen on the whale-safari 23/8, seen outside Cadboro bay-Cattle point 23/8 and 26/8.

Marbled murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*: 3-4 seen in Cadboro bay 22/8, seen on the whale-safari and outside Cadboro bay-Cattle point 23/8, and 2 individuals outside Cox point 28/8.

Rhinoceros auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*: 4-6 birds seen outside Cattle point 23/8.

Rock dove *Columba livia*: Seen along the coasts near Victoria and at Mount Tolmie.

Common nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*: One or possibly two individuals hunting in the evening light near Mount Tolmie 26/8, around 7.30 p.m.

Anna's hummingbird *Calypte anna*: Common in the area around UVic and the nearby shores and parks.

Rufous hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*: Noted at Quicks bottom 27/8.

Belted kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*: Almost daily observations along the coast near Victoria, seen in Saanichton bay 27/8 and in Grice bay 28/8.

Red-breasted sapsucker *Sphyrapicus ruber*: Seen in Stanley park, Vancouver 30/8.

Downy woodpecker *Dendrocopos pubescens*: Seen near UVic 22/8 and 23/8, and in Upland park and at Mount Tolmie 25/8.

Hairy woodpecker *Dendrocopos villosus*: A male and a female at different sides of Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8.

Northern flicker *Colaptes auratus*: Seen near UVic 23/8 and at Mount Tolmie 26/8.

Pileated woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*: Seen near UVic 23/8 and in Upland park 26/8.

Olive-sided flycatcher *Contopus borealis*: 23/8 in the forest just south-east of UVic this species was found in the tree-tops, possibly but not certainly more than 1 individual.

Western wood-pewee *Contopus sordidulus*: Seen in Upland park 26/8.

Pacific-slope flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis*: Seen in Upland park 25/8 and in Stanley park, Vancouver 30/8.

Willow flycatcher *Empidonax traillii*: Found in Quicks bottom 27/8.

Warbling vireo *Vireo gilvus*: A group (less than 10) found in the forest just south-east of UVic 23/8.

Cassin's vireo *Vireo cassini*: Found in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8. This species was recently split from Solitary vireo *V. solitarius*.

Vireo sp.: An unidentified vireo seen next to Grice bay 28/8.

Steller's jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*: Seen in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8, a group of 5-10 seen next to Grice bay and one in next to Florencia bay 28/8.

Northwestern crow *Corvus caurinus*: Common in the Victoria area.

Common raven *Corvus corax*: Two birds seen in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8 and a few at Cox point 28/8.

Cliff swallow *Hirundo pyrrhonota*: 2-3 individuals seen near Cadboro bay 26/8.

Barn swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen several times in the Victoria area.

Chestnut-backed chickadee *Parus rufescens*: Nowhere in the world have I encountered a bird species that so totally dominates the bird fauna like this species on Vancouver Island. It was found in all types of habitats with trees, in larger numbers than any other bird. It was less dominant, but observed, in Stanley Park as well.

Black-capped chickadee *Parus atricapillus*: Several birds seen in Stanley Park, Vancouver 30/8.

Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*: Rather common in forests (UVic and Mount Tolmie).

Red-breasted nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*: Very common around Victoria.

Brown creeper *Certhia americana*: Seen near UVic 23/8 and at Mount Tolmie 25/8.

Bewick's wren *Thryothorus bewickii*: Seen at Mount Tolmie 22/8 and 25/8, up to 5 individuals.

Winter wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Seen at Stamp Falls 29/8.

American robin *Turdus migratorius*: Seen almost daily in the area around Victoria (in parks), in larger numbers in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8, at Stamp Falls 29/8 and in Stanley Park 30/8.

Swainson's thrush *Catharus ustulatus*: Around 5 individuals seen in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8.

Eurasian starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Seen around Victoria, e.g., around 50 at Clover point 27/8.

Cedar waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*: Rather common in the parks around UVic.

Orange-crowned warbler *Vermivora celata*: The most abundant warbler found on this trip. Found here and there around UVic, especially at Mount Tolmie, where a group of 10-30 individuals were seen on 25/8. Also found in Quicks bottom 27/8, Grice bay and Cox point 28/8.

Black-throated gray warbler *Dendroica nigrescens*: Found at Mount Tolmie and in Upland park 25/8 and at two places in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8.

Townsend's warbler *Dendroica townsendi*: Found at the UVic campus 22/8, 2 birds at Mount Tolmie 25/8 and 2-3 birds at Mount Tolmie 26/8.

Wilson's warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*: Found at the UVic campus 22/8, 1 or 2 just outside the campus 23/8, 2-3 at Mount Tolmie and near Cadboro bay 25/8.

Oporornis sp.: On two occasions (28/8 at Grice bay and 30/8 in Stanley Park, Vancouver) possible Macgillivray's warblers *O. tolmiei* were seen, possibly confused with drab orange-crowned warbler.

Spotted towhee *Pipilo maculatus*: Common in the parks around UVic. Also found at Grice bay 28/8. This species was recently split from (Eastern) Rufous-sided towhee *P. erythrophthalmus*.

Savannah sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*: Found at Cattle point 26/8.

Passerella sp.: A sooty Fox sparrow (*P. iliaca*) probably seen along the Rainforest trail in Tofino 28/8.

Song sparrow *Melospiza melodia*: Seen at Cadboro bay 24/8 and 26/8, at the UVic campus and one dead on the road nearby on the same day, in Tofino and at Grice bay 28/8.

Dark-eyed junco *Junco hyemalis*: Seen at Mount Tolmie 25/8, in the UVic campus 26/8 and in Sproat Lake Provincial Park 27/8.

House finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*: Very common in the Victoria area (including Quicks bottom). Not always readily told from Purple finch (*C. purpureus*), see below.

Carpodacus sp.: Unidentified *Carpodacus*-finches were frequently seen, most of them probably the common House finch, but Purple finch should also appear in the area.

Pine siskin *Carduelis pinus*: Seen just south-east of the UVic campus 23/8.

American goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*: 5-10 individuals found in a garden close to Cadboro bay 22/8.

House sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Common in the Victoria area.

Mammals:

Harbour seal *Phoca vitulina*: Seen on the whale-safari 23/8 and at McMicking point 27/8.

Sea lion *Arctocephalus townsendi*: At least 200 seen on the whale-safari 23/8.

Orca whale *Orcinus orca*: 2 individuals (a male and a female) seen on the whale-safari 23/8.