



WINTER IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST:
SKAGIT to VICTORIA
Monday-Sunday, 11–17 January 2010

Many people characterize the Pacific Northwest as a land of temperate rainforests. The region certainly hosts impressive stands of giant Douglas-fir and Sitka Spruce, but the habitat diversity goes well beyond these wet forests. Broad fertile valleys, expansive tidal mudflats, and the inland waterways of northwest Washington and southwest British Columbia support an amazing variety of birds, especially in winter. The winter weather here is moderated by the region's maritime influence, and birds from the arctic find it quite acceptable compared to winter on their breeding grounds. In addition, the lushness of the onshore habitats and the richness of the open waters offer bountiful winter feeding grounds. From the Skagit Valley and Puget Sound to the rocky shores of Vancouver Island, excellent birding awaits. Combine an outstanding birding experience with the warm northwestern hospitality and some of North America's finest wines and seafood, and you will remember this week-long adventure for years to come.

*Your host and guide,
Stephen Shunk*

TRIP SUMMARY

From the High Cascades and Coast Ranges to the broad deltas of some of the continent's largest rivers, the Pacific Northwest offers one of the continent's best winter birding spectacles. Hundreds of Bald Eagles line the shores and fields of the region, and raptor numbers in general reach epic proportions. Large flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans join thousands of Snow Geese in the productive agricultural lands. Open waters host even more waterfowl, including thousands of Brant and hundreds of White-winged Scoters, Harlequin Ducks, and Long-tailed Ducks. Up to five different loons and all three western cormorants can be easily observed, as well as up to six different Alcids. Shorelines will be littered with Glaucous-winged and Mew Gulls, with Glaucous and Thayer's Gulls often mixed in. And though raptors and waterbirds may appear dominant, we will also enjoy a number of special passerines.

Skagit to B.C.

We will travel in a large loop that begins and ends in Seattle. Our initial departure may be diverted by local birds being reported in the Seattle area, but the tour generally starts at the Skagit Valley, where we will stay three nights in the quaint port-town of La Conner. Here we will explore the Skagit and Samish flats; Samish, Padilla, and Skagit bays; and Fidalgo Island. In the Samish Flats, we begin our quest for the handsome Gyrfalcon, which occurs here almost annually. We will certainly be distracted by many dozens of other raptors, including a chance for 4 other falcons, plenty of Rough-legged Hawks, and regular Short-eared Owls. We then work our way north to Birch Bay, where we will enjoy rafts of Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, plus all three scoters and at least three loon species before heading into British Columbia.

Delta to Vancouver Island

Between Delta and Ladner, B.C., the immense Fraser River flows into the Pacific, creating habitat for some of the most impressive winter bird concentrations anywhere. The Ladner Christmas Bird Count boasts mind-boggling tallies of a few key species, including 20-year averages of: 35,000 Dunlin, 30,000 American Wigeon; 25,000 Glaucous-winged Gull; and 20,000 Northern Pintail; plus 250 Bald Eagles and a dozen Snowy Owls—annual averages! Here we can see well over 100 Bald Eagles while scanning the mudflats of Boundary Bay, and the shoreline will be crawling with Dunlin that will repeatedly flush in pulsating masses to the slightest threat of danger (with good reason, as multiple Peregrine Falcons overwinter on the bay and they are quite adept at subduing a tiny Dunlin).

With two nights in Tsawwassen, we will sort through dozens of Common Loons in search of a Yellow-billed, followed by the ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia. This will be our first premium seabird realm, with loons, cormorants, and sea-ducks scattered about, and an excellent chance to see Common Murre and Rhinoceros Auklet. The drive from Sidney to Victoria will be punctuated by two stops: a search for one of the most important target birds of the trip, the Eurasian Skylark, which frequents the tilled agricultural lands of the Saanich Peninsula; and lunch at a lovely European-style café and chocolate shop. We will have some quality time to explore the gorgeous Victoria harbor before boarding our southbound ferry back to Washington.

Strait of Juan de Fuca and Admiralty Inlet

The Strait of Juan de Fuca should also produce a broad array of gulls and seabirds, including our first good chance for Ancient Murrelet and probably our best chance for Black-legged Kittiwake. We then head to Point No Point for a lovely beach walk and excellent study of seabirds, loons, gulls, and possibly a longspur or Snow Bunting wandering the shoreline. After spending the night in nearby Pt. Townsend, we will ride the ferry to Keystone Harbor and back, where many Alcids and sea-ducks ride the tides back and forth feeding in the rich waters of Admiralty Inlet. We will be much closer to the water here than we were on earlier ferries, so we should get excellent looks at the adorable Ancient and Marbled Murrelets. Finally, we will bisect the Kitsap Peninsula and cross the Tacoma Narrows bridge en route to Seattle airport.

Miscellaneous Birds and More

In addition to the species described above, we will enjoy some excellent terrestrial birding. We should see Northern Shrike in the Skagit area, and Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadees will be scattered throughout the region. Winter Wren and Golden-crowned Kinglet will be amazingly abundant, and Varied Thrushes will be common in many areas. Spotted Towhee, “Sooty” Fox Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Sparrow should be daily occurrences, and we may find Red Crossbill and Evening Grosbeak. Winter usually brings surprises to the region, and we will monitor the bird reports for Bohemian Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. All of our trips to this gorgeous region produce over 100 species, and, weather permitting, the scenery will feature stunning views of the Cascade and Olympic Mountains and the lush islands and rainforests of Puget Sound.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Extensive birding experience is not required for this extended weekend adventure. In fact, this particular tour will appeal to a wide range of birders. Those with more advanced skills may be able to identify more of the anticipated species, while less experienced birders can be guaranteed excellent looks at many potential life-birds. Your guide, Stephen Shunk, is a patient, experienced educator, and he will work diligently to help each participant learn bird identification, as well as general natural and cultural history of the region.

This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Each day will involve plenty of light walking, although the weather may force us to do some birding from the vehicle. While we will occasionally walk over rugged terrain, individual walks will be short and at a “birdwatcher’s pace,” allowing each participant equal chance to view birds from all angles. We will eat breakfast at about 7:30 a.m. each morning, and we will often bird until sunset, although the short winter days will allow us plenty of evening time for relaxation and a review of our day.

The group will travel in a large 12-passenger van, and we will take a maximum of seven participants, allowing everyone their own window seat. We will repeatedly enter and exit the vehicle from an entrance that is high off the ground, although a step-stool will be provided. This is a non-smoking tour. We will stay in non-smoking hotels and eat in non-smoking restaurants.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Cold to mild temperatures predominate in winter in Northwest Washington, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience fog, rain, snow, or extended periods of sun, all in one day. It can also be very windy on the flats. You should be prepared to be outside for short periods in wet winter weather. Please pack conservatively, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and field guide. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we will have at least one spotting scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning. We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photographs.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend three nights in La Conner, WA, two nights in Tsawwassen, BC, and one night in Port Townsend, WA. The tour fees below include lodging at both single and double occupancy. If you are traveling with a birding partner and wish to share a room, we will do our best to accommodate you, although rooms with two beds may be limited. If we are unable to place you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages from dinner on Monday, January 11, through lunch on Sunday, January 17. We will eat most meals in restaurants that appeal to a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or even in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring some foods that will satisfy your personal preferences.

We will eat breakfast out on most mornings, though coffee and tea will be available for early risers in the hotel lobbies. We will eat some lunches in restaurants and some in the field. Dinners will usually be eaten together at casual local eateries, often at dusk. In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide foods and beverages for snacks and meals in the field. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of your birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks for your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

Your trip fee includes transportation from Seattle. Please arrive at Sea-Tac Airport by 2:00 p.m. on Monday, January 11, to allow time for some afternoon birding en route to La Conner. We will return to Sea-Tac by noon Sunday for 2:00 p.m. or later departures. If you plan to drive to Seattle, we will send you directions to the hotel as the trip date approaches. If this schedule is difficult for you, let us know and we will do our best to help with your travel plans. If you need assistance with travel, we recommend DTR Travel of Colorado: <http://www.dtrtravel.com/>.

Our daily route will follow the itinerary below. However, we may adjust some of our specific birding destinations depending on a number of factors, including tides, local bird reports, weather, and our success at finding certain species. If you have additional questions about the route or certain birding spots, please contact us at your convenience.

NOTE: We will be traveling into and out of Canada, so you must bring a valid passport for the border crossings.

Monday, January 11

Meet at Sea-Tac Airport at 2 p.m. for afternoon birding, dinner, and drive to La Conner.

Tuesday, January 12

Birding in the Skagit Valley; dinner and night in La Conner.

Wednesday, January 13

Birding in and around the Samish Flats and Padilla Bay; dinner and night in La Conner.

Thursday, January 14

After breakfast in La Conner, drive north through Lummi Flats, Birch Bay, and Semiahmoo Bay, into British Columbia. Evening on Boundary Bay, night in Tsawwassen.

Friday, January 15

Birding Boundary Bay, Reifel Sanctuary, and Ladner. Dinner and night in Tsawwassen.

Saturday, January 16

Birding in Ladner area and via ferry to Victoria; Skylarks and Victoria Harbor, then another ferry to Port Angeles and drive to Pt. No Point; dinner and night in Port Townsend.

Sunday, January 17

Birding Admiralty Inlet, then return to Sea-Tac airport by noon for 2 p.m. departures.

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and beverages from Monday afternoon through Sunday afternoon; lodging at single or double occupancy; transportation from Seattle; facility, permit, and license fees; ferry tariffs; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guide(s). The fee does not include guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

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| <i>SINGLE TOUR FEE:</i> | <i>\$2,350 single/\$2,050 double</i> |
| <i>NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT:</i> | <i>\$95</i> |
| <i>BALANCE AFTER DEPOSIT:</i> | <i>\$2,255 single/\$1,955 double</i> |

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a maximum of 7 participants on this tour.

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 60 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 60 and 30 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 30 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future.

You may send your non-refundable \$95 deposit to the address below to hold your spot, with the balance due 45 days prior to trip date. For more information, please call 541-408-1753 or e-mail steve@paradisebirding.com. *We look forward to seeing you in Washington this winter!*

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