

FIELD REPORT

**WASHINGTON: SEPTEMBER MIGRATION
IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

SEPTEMBER 17–25, 2023



Sooty Grouse by Kevin Burke

**LEADERS: KEVIN BURKE & BRIAN GIBBONS
LIST COMPILED BY: KEVIN BURKE**

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WASHINGTON: SEPTEMBER MIGRATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST September 17–25, 2023

By Kevin Burke

Washington state is arguably one of the most biodiverse areas of the United States. We were lucky to explore the western part of this great state for eight days this September. Late summer and early fall is a wonderful time to visit Washington. The weather is mostly dry and sunny, the birds are good, and the seafood is plentiful. This tour focused on the area of the state west of the Cascade Mountains. This being my first VENT tour, I wanted everything to go off without a hitch. Well, you can't have everything you want all the time. At 9 AM on the morning of the 17th, the morning before we met everyone at the hotel, I received a call saying that the pelagic trip was going to be canceled. There was a huge storm in the Gulf of Alaska that was severely affecting the surf off the coast of Washington and Oregon. We would not be able to go on our pelagic trip this year. That being said, we were given lemons, and we made a lot of lemonade.

Our tour started in Seattle with a nice dinner near the airport and a new plan of action for the trip. As soon as I heard about the canceled pelagic tour, I booked a whale watch in and around the San Juan Islands toward the end of the trip. Something to look forward to. The first full morning we loaded up the van and SUV and headed to one of my favorite places to bird, Billy Frank Nisqually Jr. National Wildlife Refuge. This wonderful refuge has a great mix of wetland edge, mature woods, and tidal river flats. We noted how big and dark the northwest Song Sparrows were. A nice mixed flock of passerines was present on the boardwalk with Warbling Vireo, Wilson's Warbler, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Black-throated Gray Warblers and Golden-crowned Sparrows. One of the highlights of the morning walk was a close encounter with an American Mink. A great way to start our trip. We also had a great encounter with a Red-breasted Sapsucker. In the afternoon we made our way to the coast and stopped at the Hoquiam sewage treatment plant. We had good looks at a Greater White-fronted Goose, California Gulls, and Peregrine Falcon. Westport was our destination for the evening, and we headed to settle in to the "Chateau" Westport.



Red-breasted Sapsucker by Brian Gibbons

The next morning, we arose to go birding around the mid-coastal area. We made the best of our canceled pelagic day by birding several productive places starting with Westhaven State Park in Westport. We had a nice flock of passerines including Audubon's Warbler, Bushtits, and many Steller's Jays flying out of their nightly roost. The water was productive there too. Red-necked Grebes, Common

Murres, and the striking Heermann's Gulls all gave great looks. We next birded around the Westport marina, where we observed the Marbled Godwit flock that winters there. The afternoon found us back in Hoquiam to try for the elusive Sharp-tailed Sandpiper that never showed for us. As the day wound down, we stopped at Bottle Beach for some distant looks at ducks including American Wigeon and Northern Pintail.

One more full day on the coast stirred up some great birds. A quick morning stop at Bottle Beach gave us nice looks at Sooty Fox Sparrows, Western Sandpipers, and a flyover Merlin. Our next stop was in Tokeland, just south of Westport. We found another large flock of Marbled Godwits with a surprise tucked in: a Bar-tailed Godwit. We picked it out of a couple of hundred Marbled Godwits by its smaller size and white underparts. It even flew, giving us looks at the white rump patch. A great bird for the trip. The afternoon was spent at Gray's Harbor National Wildlife Refuge, which produced the always crowd pleasing Long-billed Curlew and Whimbrels. Northern Harriers glided by the mudflats of the Refuge giving great looks.

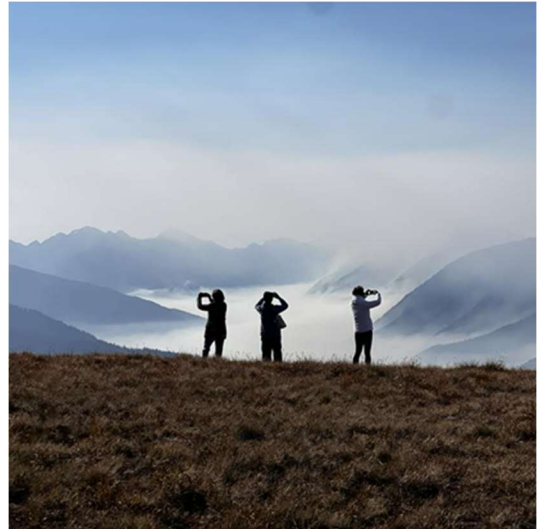


Bar-tailed Godwit by Brian Gibbons

Our next day was a transition day up the coast to Port Angeles. We started with a stop in Ocean Shores at the North Jetty. Black Turnstone and Wandering Tattlers were abundant on the jetty. Sanderlings scurried up and down the beach, and Sooty Shearwaters streamed by the turbulent surf offshore. Golden-crowned Sparrows and American Pipits foraged on the dunes. We set our sights on the Quinalt Rainforest in Olympic National Park. The area is home to towering Sitka Spruce, Western Red Cedar, and Western Hemlock trees. The moss-covered ground and lush understory is stunning. We took a short hike in the forest and visited the world's largest Sitka Spruce tree. A very busy Pileated Woodpecker let us watch it for quite awhile, while we got fairly good views of Pacific Wren. A quick stop at Ruby Beach on the coast, and we were off to Port Angeles for the night.

A full day awaited us in and around Port Angeles. We pointed our vans towards Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park. The Olympic Mountain range rises quickly from sea level to over 5,000 feet at the top of the ridge. This area is known for having one of the highest concentrations of Sooty Grouse anywhere on earth. As we trudged up the mountain, we passed a dark rock that looked grouse-like. A quick slam on the brakes, and it turned out to be a Sooty Grouse! We pulled over and had a hen and two chicks foraging near the road. They gave us great looks and even walked toward us at one point coming within yards. What an encounter! Big smiles on everyone's faces, we headed to the top of Hurricane Ridge. It was a beautiful morning on the ridge. The smoke from a large fire in the park was visible below the ridge. Migration was in full swing with Varied Thrush, Pine Siskin, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, and Audubon's Warblers all streaming over the mountains. It was an awesome sight to see. We also had some very cooperative Canada Jays posing for pictures. The rest of the day was spent at lower elevations with highlights being Harlequin Duck, Peregrine Falcon, Black-bellied Plover and many more.

Another transition day, this time up to Anacortes. The drive was short, so it allowed for more time to go birding. The Railroad Bridge Park in Sequim is always a treat when in the area. We had great looks at California Quail, Townsend's Warbler, Anna's Hummingbird, and Varied Thrush. Port Townsend was our late morning destination. We had an early lunch overlooking the water. A nice surprise was a flock of Surfbirds huddled on the rocky beach—a species that had eluded us thus far. The Port Townsend to Whidbey Island ferry is around 30 minutes, just enough time to get out on the bow of the boat and look for birds. Our first Short-billed Gull of the trip flew close by. Marbled Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet, and Harbor Porpoise were all spotted from the boat. It was drizzling Northwestern rain this afternoon, but a small respite came when we stopped at Libby Beach Park. Here we had Red-necked Grebe, Horned Grebe, Harlequin Duck, and Common Loon. One last stop at Deception Pass for the magnificent view, and it was up to Anacortes for the night.



Fire near Hurricane Ridge by Brian Gibbons

Our full day of birding around the Anacortes area was altered to include a whale watch in the afternoon. We had some brief morning birding at Klikit Island and Channel Drive. Here we had great views of Band-tailed Pigeon, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Long-billed Dowitcher, and a very cooperative Peregrine Falcon. We had a picnic, and then we hopped on the whale watch boat out of Anacortes. I thought it would be a great way to see the San Juan Islands and another chance to maybe see a seabird or two. A few minutes after boarding the vessel, the captain got a call that Orcas were in the area. So we motored over and had a very prolonged encounter with a pod of transient Orcas. The big bull even came under our boat and slapped its tail a few times right next to us. Several young breached out of the water as everyone on the boat cheered. It was an awesome encounter to have these amazing creatures near our boat for close to an hour. As we trolled away from the Orcas, we were thinking, what is next? Marbled



Harbor Seal by Kevin Burke

Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, a huge flock of Bonaparte's Gulls, and Black Oystercatchers were the bird highlights. The mammals stole the show with Steller's Sea Lions, Harbor Seals, Harbor Porpoise, and a surprise Sea Otter. This wasn't a pelagic trip, but we all came away very happy. We finished our final full day with a nice seafood dinner, reminiscing about all the things we had done.

On our last morning, we headed toward Seattle for departure, but not before a little birding at the Fir Island Preserve. At the entrance to the preserve we had an unexpected encounter with some Yellow-

headed Blackbirds. Common Goldeneye and Western Meadowlark were also new birds added to the trip list. We headed down to Seattle for departure and were pleasantly surprised by the lack of traffic.

I always have a great time in Washington, but this trip was really made special by the company. Brian Gibbons was the co-leader, and his eBird skills and keen eye were very appreciated. Everyone on the trip bonded nicely, which made for a lot of laughs and good times. It was a great tour for my first official VENT trip. I sincerely thank all the participants on the trip and hope to see you all again soon!



Orca by Kevin Burke



Marbled Godwits by Brian Gibbons

ITINERARY

Day 1 September 17 – Evening get-acquainted dinner at Seattle Marriott

Day 2 September 18 – Billy Frank/Nisqually Jr. National Wildlife Refuge/Hoquiam STP

Day 3 September 19 – Cranberry Beach/Westhaven State Park/Hoquiam STP/Bottle Beach

Day 4 September 20 – Bottle Beach/Tokeland Marina/Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge

Day 5 September 21 – Ocean Shores/Lake Quinault Rainforest Trail (Olympic NP)/Ruby Beach

Day 6 September 22 – Hurricane Ridge/Ediz Hook/3 Crabs/Dungeness Landing Park/Railroad Bridge Park

Day 7 September 23 – Railroad Bridge Park/Point Hudson/Ferry from Port Townsend to Whidbey Island/Libby Beach Park

Day 8 September 24 – Kiket Island/Channel Drive/Whale Watch around San Juans

Day 9 September 25 – Fir Island Preserve/Seatac Airport



Port Angeles Wharf by Brian Gibbons

BIRDS

Waterfowl- Anatidae

Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*

Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii*

Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*

Blue-winged Teal, *Spatula discors*

Northern Shoveler, *Spatula clypeata*

Gadwall, *Mareca strepera*

American Wigeon, *Mareca americana*

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*

Green-winged Teal, *Anas crecca*

Harlequin Duck, *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Surf Scoter, *Melanitta perspicillata*

White-winged Scoter, *Melanitta deglandi*

Common Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula*

Hooded Merganser, *Lophodytes cucullatus*

Common Merganser, *Mergus Merganser*

New World Quail- Odontophoria

California Quail, *Callipepla californica*

Pheasants, Grouse & Allies- Phasianadae

Sooty Grouse, *Dendragapus fuliginosus*

Grebes- Podicipedidae

Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus Podiceps*

Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auratus*

Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*

Red-necked Grebe, *Podiceps grisegena*

Western Grebe, *Aechmophorus occidentalis*

Pigeons & Doves- Columbidae

Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*

Band-tailed Pigeon, *Patagioenas fasciata*

Eurasian Collared-dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*

Swifts- Apodidae

Vaux's Swift, *Chaetura vauxi*

Hummingbirds- Trochilidae

Anna's Hummingbird, *Calypte anna*

Rails, Gallinules & Coots- Rallidae

Virginia Rail, *Rallus limicola*

American Coot, *Fulica americana*



Black Oystercatcher by Kevin Burke

Cranes- Gruidae

Sandhill Crane, *Antigone canadensis*

Oystercatchers- Haematopodidae

Black Oystercatcher, *Haematopus bachmani*

Plovers & Lapwings- Charadriidae

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*

Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Sandpipers & Allies- Scolopacidae

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*

Long-billed Curlew, *Numenius americanus*

Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*

Marbled Godwit, *Limosa fedoa*

Black Turnstone, *Arenaria melanocephala*

Surfbird, *Calidris virgata*

Sanderling, *Calidris alba*

Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*

Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos*

Western Sandpiper, *Calidris mauri*

Short-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus griseus*

Long-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Wandering Tattler, *Tringa incana*

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*

Willet, *Tringa semipalmata*

Auks, Murres & Puffins- Alcidae

Common Murre, *Uria aalge*

Pigeon Guillemot, *Cephus columba*

Marbled Murrelet, *Brachyramphus marmoratus*

Rhinoceros Auklet, *Cerorhinca monocerata*

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers- Laridae

Bonaparte's Gull, *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

Heerman's Gull, *Larus heermanni*

Short-billed (formerly Mew) Gull, *Larus canus*

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*

Western Gull, *Larus occidentalis*

California Gull, *Larus californicus*

Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*

Glaucous-winged Gull, *Larus glaucescens*

“Olympic Gull” (hybrid of Western x Glaucous-winged)

Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia*

Loons- Gaviidae

Red-throated Loon, *Gavia stellata*

Pacific Loon, *Gavia pacifica*

Common Loon, *Gavia immer*

Shearwaters & Petrels- Procellariidae

Sooty Shearwater, *Ardenna grisea*

Cormorants- Phalacrocoracidae

Brandt’s Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax penicillatus*

Pelagic Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Double-crested Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax auratus*

Pelicans- Pelecanidae

Brown Pelican, *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns- Ardeidae

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea Herodias*

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*

New World Vultures- Cathartidae



Brandt’s Cormorants by Brian Gibbons

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*

Hawks, Eagles & Kites- Accipitridae

Northern Harrier, *Circus hudsonius*

Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus*

Cooper's Hawk, *Accipiter cooperii*

Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*

Kingfishers- Alcedinidae

Belted Kingfisher, *Megaceryle alcyon*

Woodpeckers- Picidae

Red-breasted Sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus ruber*

Downy Woodpecker, *Dryobates pubescens*

Hairy Woodpecker, *Dryobates villosus*

Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus*

Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus*

Falcons & Caracaras- Falconidae

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*

Merlin, *Falco columbarius*

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*

Vireos, Shrike-babblers & Erpornis

Warbling Vireo, *Vireo gilvus*



Peregrine Falcon by Brian Gibbons

Crows, Jays & Magpies- Corvidae

Canada Jay, *Perisoreus canadensis*

Steller's Jay, *Cyanocitta stelleri*

California Scrub-Jay, *Aphelocoma californica*

American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Common Raven, *Corvus corax*

Tits, Chickadees & Titmice- Paridae

Black-capped Chickadee, *Poecile atricapillus*

Chestnut-backed Chickadee, *Poecile rufescens*

Swallows- Hirundinidae

Violet-green Swallow, *Tachycineta thalassina*

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*

Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Long-tailed Tits- Aegithalidae

Bushtit, *Psaltirparus minimus*

Kinglets- Regulidae

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *Corthylio calendula*

Golden-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus satrapa*

Waxwings- Bombycillidae

Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*

Nuthatches- Sittidae

Red-breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta canadensis*

Treecreepers- Certhiidae

Brown Creeper, *Certhia americana*

Wrens- Troglodytidae

Pacific Wren, *Troglodytes pacificus*

Marsh Wren, *Cistothorus palustris*

Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii*

Starlings- Sturnidae

European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*

Thrushes & Allies- Turdidae

Townsend's Solitaire, *Myadestes townsendi*

Varied Thrush, *Ixoreus naevius*

Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus*

American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*

Old World Sparrows- Passeridae

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*

Wagtails & Pipits- Motacillidae

American Pipit, *Anthus rubescens*

Finches, Euphonias & Allies- Fringillidae

House Finch, *Haemorhous mexicanus*

Purple Finch, *Haemorhous purpureus*

Red Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra*

Pine Siskin, *Spinus pinus*

American Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis*

New World Sparrows- Passerellidae

Fox Sparrow, *Passerella iliaca*

Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis*

White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Golden-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia atricapilla*

Savannah Sparrow, *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*

Lincoln's Sparrow, *Melospiza lincolnii*

Spotted Towhee, *Pipilo maculatus*



Song Sparrow by Brian Gibbons

Troupials & Allies- Icteridae

Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta*

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Brewer's Blackbird, *Euphagus cyanocephalus*

Yellow-headed Blackbird, *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

New World Warblers- Parulidae

Common Yellowthroat, *Geothlypis trichas*

Yellow Warbler, *Setophaga petechia*

Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler, *Setophaga coronata*

Black-throated Gray Warbler, *Setophaga nigrescens*

Townsend's Warbler, *Setophaga townsendii*

Wilson's Warbler, *Cardellina pusilla*

MAMMALS

Squirrels, Prairie Dogs & Marmots- Sciuridae

Eastern Gray Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*

Douglas's Squirrel, *Tamiasciurus douglasii*

Townsend's Chipmunk, *Tamias townsendi*

Olympic Chipmunk, *Tamias caurinus*

Rabbits & Hares- Leporidae

Eastern Cottontail, *Sylvilagus floridanus*

Snowshoe Hare, *Lepus americanus*

Dogs- Canidae

Coyote, *Canis latrans*

Sea Lions & Fur Seals- Otariidae

California Sea Lion, *Zalophus californianus*

Stellar's Sea Lion, *Eumetopias jubatus*

Seals- Phocidae

Harbor Seal, *Phoca vitulina*

Weasels- Mustelidae

Sea Otter, *Enhydra lutris*

American Mink, *Mustela frenata*

Deer- Cervidae

Sitka Black-tailed Deer, *Odocoileus Sitkensis*

Dolphins- Delphinidae

Orca- *Orcinus orca*



Sea Otter by Kevin Burke

Porpoises- Phocoenidae

Harbor Porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena*

FISH

Salmon- Salmonidae

Pink Salmon, *Onchorhynchus gorbuscha*

SNAKES

Garter Snakes- Colubridae

Garter Snake, *Thamnophis spp.*

AMPHIBIANS

Tree Frogs- Hylidae

Pacific Tree Frog, *Pseudacaris regilla*



Pacific Tree Frog by Brian Gibbons