

WINTER WASHINGTON & BRITISH COLUMBIA JANUARY 31 – FEBRUARY 7, 2009

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The temperate, maritime climate and rich food resources of the north Puget Sound region of Washington and British Columbia make it an especially attractive winter home for the myriad birds of prey, diving birds, and waterfowl that return here each year. Impressive arrays of raptors hunt the river deltas along the north Sound. Scores of Bald Eagles are seen on an average day, Peregrine Falcons and Merlins are to be expected, and this tour will make a special effort to track down at least one of the very small number of Gyrfalcons that typically winter here. Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tails of several morphs, Northern Shrikes, and dozens of harriers keep watch over the open fields. The high peaks of the Olympic Mountains form a majestic backdrop and limit precipitation in the heart of this excellent birding area.

Short-eared Owls are almost a certainty, flying moth-like above the expansive river deltas. Snowy Owls are irruptive—present some winters in numbers and absent other years. Northern Saw-whet and other owls are possible, usually on a day roost in the woods. Large flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra swans whiten the winter fields, and Eurasian Wigeons are sprinkled through nearly every large flock of American Wigeons. The deep bays host large rafts of sea ducks and Pacific Loons; the elusive Yellow-billed Loon is possible (we see it on about half the tours); and Harlequin Ducks, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and Long-tailed Ducks are up close and plentiful, among over 30 species of waterfowl typical in winter. Rocky shorebirds include flocks of Black Turnstones, often mixed with some Surfbirds, and possibly a Rock Sandpiper.

Throughout the trip we will have ready access to the excellent, varied cuisine of the Pacific Northwest. The tour features several ferry crossings through the exceptionally scenic inland marine waters of the region, where we will watch en route for Ancient and Marbled murrelets, among other alcids, loons, and sea ducks. We'll also ferry to Victoria, B.C., to find Sky Larks and visit lovely downtown Victoria. Past tour sightings have included such rarities as Arctic Loon, Northern Hawk Owl, Great Gray Owl, Xantus' Hummingbird, Dusky Thrush, Falcated Teal, Tufted Duck, Emperor Goose, King Eider, Slaty-backed Gull, and Brambling, although no one rarity can be predicted for the upcoming tour. Among the many other likely birds are Brant, Black Oystercatcher, Thayer's Gull, Mew Gull, Glaucous Gull (some years), Marbled Murrelet, Northwestern Crow, Varied Thrush, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Anna's Hummingbird, Hutton's Vireo, and Golden-crowned and "Sooty" Fox sparrows.

January 31, Day 1: Arrival in Seattle. Participants may plan to arrive in Seattle any time today and check-in at the airport hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. Please schedule arrival times early enough so everyone can convene in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for orientation prior to going to dinner.

NIGHT: Marriott SeaTac Airport, Seattle

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February 1, Day 2: Seattle to Sequim. Our first full day will offer an introduction to the birds and scenery of the north Puget Sound, along with the possibility of following up leads on rarities within a reasonable distance. We will then ferry across the Sound to the Kitsap Peninsula and drive on to Port Angeles, at the base of the snow covered Olympic Mountains. Expect a good sample of seabirds and waterfowl today; as we will cover areas where many loons and grebes, cormorants, and diving ducks are regularly found. We may also see Mew and Thayer's gulls and perhaps Eurasian Wigeon, Brant, or Marbled Murrelet.

NIGHT: Best Western Olympic Lodge, Port Angeles, WA

February 2, Day 3: Port Angeles and Sequim-Dungeness Area. Today begins with a circuit of good birding areas in the Port Angeles to Sequim-Dungeness vicinity. We'll watch fields, fences, and snags for Northern Shrike, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon; check the wigeon flocks for Eurasians; and scope the shorelines and bays for a whole host of wintering diving birds, shorebirds, and ever-watchful Bald Eagles. As the day progresses, we will move on to the Port Angeles waterfront, a great place to study beautifully plumaged Harlequin Ducks and compare as many as four grebe species (Horned, Eared, Red-necked, and Western). This is also where the wintering flocks of Black Turnstones and Surfbirds sometimes harbor a Rock Sandpiper or two. Time-permitting, we may travel on to the mouth of the Elwha River, at the foot of the Olympic Mountains. From a vantage point on a gravel dike at the river's mouth, one can often find a huge bathing and roosting contingent of six or seven species of gulls, including numerous Thayer's and possibly a Glaucous. The adjacent brushy ponds often produce birds like Hooded Merganser, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, kinglets, Hutton's Vireo, "Sooty" Fox Sparrow, and sometimes an American Dipper.

NIGHT: Best Western Olympic Lodge, Port Angeles, WA

February 3, Day 4: Port Angeles to Victoria to Tsawwassen, B.C. A morning ferry takes us across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Victoria B.C., and the birding enroute can be very good. The crossing is rich in seabirds and often a good area for Ancient Murrelets. We'll search for Sky Larks north of Victoria, where they have maintained a foothold for over 100 years. On a sunny February day, the Sky Larks should be hovering overhead singing their long, musical songs. Lots of other winter Northwest birds are possible on the island. Sometime after lunch, we board a second huge ferry to make the crossing from the Saanich Peninsula to Tsawwassen, on the B.C. mainland. The route is spectacularly scenic, as we wind through evergreen covered islands. The Active Passage area usually contains hundreds of Pacific Loons, Brandt's Cormorants, and gulls.

Time-permitting, a bit of the late afternoon will be spent birding the expansive shoreline and open fields south of Tsawwassen.

NIGHT: Coast Tsawwassen Inn, Tsawwassen, B.C.

February 4, Day 5: Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia. Today and tomorrow morning we will concentrate our birding in the southeastern portion of the Vancouver area, near the mouth of the Fraser River. The delta flats and the margin of Boundary Bay are some of the most active wintering raptor areas in the Pacific Northwest. Here we may typically find lots of Rough-legged Hawks, a few Northern Shrike, as well as Peregrines, and occasionally Prairie Falcon, or Gyrfalcon, among impressive numbers of more common hawks and eagles. Short-eared Owls are likely and this is an excellent area for Snowy Owls in irruption years. At Reifel Sanctuary we have most years a good chance of seeing a Northern Saw-whet Owl or Long-eared Owl on its daytime roost, among many other species of birds that winter at this refuge (including the northernmost Pacific roost of Black-crowned Night-Herons). Most winters there is likely to be at least one vagrant wintering species nearby. We have seen ultra-rare Xantus' Hummingbird, Dusky Thrush, Brambling, and Falcated Teal on previous tours; birds like Yellow-billed loon, Emperor Goose, or Tufted Duck are more likely. [Please note that the Crested Mynas which formerly nested in Vancouver for over one hundred years were extirpated in February 2003.]

NIGHT: Coast Tsawwassen Inn, Tsawwassen, B.C.

February 5-6, Days 6-7: Northwest Puget Sound River Delta Flats. Today begins with more birding near Vancouver, B.C., visiting areas or following up on birds not covered the last day and a half. As the day progresses, we'll return south into the U.S. Through the afternoon of Day 6 and all of Day 7, we will scrutinize the delta flats along the northwest rim of Puget Sound, the alluvial plain and diked wetlands of rivers with such Native American names as the Samish, Skagit, and Stilliguamish. Again we have the potential of finding the full variety of falcon species (including Gyrfalcon), numbers of Rough-legged Hawks among larger numbers of Red-tails, as well as Short-eared Owls and Northern Shrikes. Large flocks of both Trumpeter and Tundra swans whiten the winter fields, as do tens of thousands of Siberian breeding Snow Geese. Eurasian Wigeons are sprinkled through most every large flock of American Wigeons. Padilla Bay hosts large flocks of Brant and great numbers of other water birds. The Bay also offers more chances for locating a Yellow-billed Loon. On this and other days we will have the option of following up on rarities sighted in the general area of the tour.

NIGHTS: Ship Harbor Inn, Anacortes, WA

February 7, Day 8: Departure from Seattle. The morning offers a few hours to follow up on additional birding possibilities as we prepare to return to Seattle. Please book departing flights from SeaTac Airport for 1:30 p.m. or later.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Bob Sundstrom and Denver Holt.

Bob Sundstrom has led VENT tours since 1989 to destinations including Hawaii, Mexico, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Iceland, Papua New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific islands, Antarctica, the Bering Sea, and many destinations throughout North America. Bob takes a strong interest in both the natural and cultural settings of his tours. He earned his doctorate at the University of Washington. Bob and his wife Sally live in the rural Scatter Creek Valley south of Olympia, Washington. Bob lived in Seattle for more than two decades, continues to teach birding workshops, and leads a program of short, regional tours that begin in the Seattle area. During two seasons of work in the Pribilof Islands, he helped chronicle the occurrence of North American bird rarities. A skilled birder with a special interest in bird song, Bob has served on the boards of several nature and conservation organizations, is a member of the Washington State Bird Records Committee, and is a co-author of *The National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Pacific Northwest*. When not on tour, Bob keeps busy as the lead writer for the daily public radio program *BirdNote*. *BirdNote* is archived at www.birdnote.org.

Denver Holt is a wildlife researcher with many interests. In particular, his research focuses on owls and their ecology. He has been researching owls since 1978, and has published numerous papers in both scientific and natural history journals. He is founder and president of the Owl Research Institute in Missoula, Montana, and has conducted owl-related research in the U.S., Mexico, Panama, and Costa Rica. Within the U.S. he has worked in Alaska, Massachusetts, and Montana. Among other research, Denver has worked on gulls, terns, raptors, and small mammals. He is an avid and inquisitive outdoors person with other interests that include insects, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, plant identification, and geology.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is now ~~\$2295~~ **\$2445** per person in double occupancy from Seattle, WA. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Seattle and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

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The single supplement for this tour is **\$440**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$150.
Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions are available, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: Luggage space in the vans is at a premium. Soft luggage is much preferable to rigid suitcases for making the most of our limited storage space. Please limit your luggage to one medium-sized duffel or soft-sided bag and one carry-on.

CLOTHING/WEATHER: The weather in Western Washington this time of year is typically cool and sometimes chilly, but can be quite comfortable with the right clothing and gear. Daytime temperatures average in the 30s to low 50s and freezing temperatures and/or days in the 60s are possible. The air is typically moist, and in flat, open areas and along shorelines (and on ferries) one should expect the further cooling effect of a fair breeze. You will need to have enough different layers on hand to meet changing conditions, and so you can layer up and down easily as we get in and out of the van. Casual dress is fine for all dining and lodging.

The following should cover all likely conditions, including the coolest: warm long-sleeve shirts plus turtlenecks seem ideal; warm pants (light wool); a set of long underwear (medium polypropylene or silk is a good weight); a warm sweater or fleece jacket; wool gloves and cap or an equivalent; warm insulated boots and socks; and above all, a good windproof/water-resistant outer shell, such as a Goretex parka and pants. A down or similar vest can be really nice. Long ponchos are not recommended, nor are heavy-duty arctic parkas. The key to staying comfortable is mainly a matter of cutting the chilling effect of a cool, moist breeze so a good outer wind-protective layer is crucial. If you get cold easily, bring additional layers. Laundry facilities are available at Coast Tsawwassen Inn (guest laundry or same day laundry service) and Ship Harbor Inn (guest laundry) in Anacortes.

DOCUMENTS: Citizens of the United States are required to have a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date for international crossings between the United States and Canada. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You will need to bring an alarm clock and water bottle. Your leaders will have a spotting scope for group use, but you may wish to bring your own. This tour lends itself to a good bit of productive scope use, so having a few additional scopes along can be a real asset. You will, of course, need binoculars. There may be some good nature photo opportunities if you have a camera at the ready during our travels. Please note that the Best Western Olympic Lodge and Coast Tsawwassen Inn are non-smoking properties.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds - General Field Guides

Kaufman, Kenn and Nora Bowers. *Birds of North America*. Kaufman Focus Guides. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Dunn, John L. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Washington, D.C.: NGS, 2006. (5th Ed.)

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. National Audubon Society. New York: Knopf, 2000.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America...* New York: Knopf, 2003.

Birds - Specialized Field Guides and Regional Sources

Beadle, David and James D. Rising. *Sparrows of the United States and Canada: The Photographic Guide*. (AP Natural World Series) New York: Natural World/Academic Press, 2001.

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- Choate, Ernest A. and Raymond A. Paynter. *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*. Boston: Harvard Commons Press, 1985.
- Clark, William S. and Brian K. Wheeler. *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America. (Peterson Field Guide Series #25)*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Ehrlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye. *The Birder's Handbook. A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988.
- Gaston, Anthony J. and Ian L. Jones. *The Auks: Alcidae*. Bird Families of the World series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Howell, Steve N.G. and Jon Dunn. *Gulls of the Americas*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.
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- Zimmer, Kevin J. *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell U. Press, 2000.

Other Natural History

- Alden, Peter, Dennis Paulson, Amy Gregoret, Richard Keen, Daniel Mathews, Eric A. Oches, Robert Sundstrom, and Wendy B. Zomlefer. *National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Pacific Northwest*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Kruckeberg, Arthur R. *The Natural History of Puget Sound Country*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.
- Mathews, Daniel. *Cascade-Olympic Natural History: A Trailside Reference*. Portland, OR: Raven Editions 1988.
- Pojar, Jim and Andy MacKinnon. *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast: Washington, Oregon, British Columbia and Alaska*. Redmond, WA: Lone Pine Press, 1994.
- Schultz, Stewart T. *The Northwest Coast: A Natural History*. Portland, OR: Timber Press, 1998.
- Weston, Jim and David Stirling. *The Naturalist's Guide to the Victoria Region*. Victoria Natural History Society, 1986. Out of print: try www.abebooks.com.
- Whitney, Stephen. *A Sierra Club Naturalist's Guide to the Pacific Northwest*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1989.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect April 16, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets

and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.