

Canadian Rockies

Wildlife at Leisure

29th June to 8th July 2019

By Tony Greenfield

Day 1, 29th June

Weather: Sunny in Calgary

Tony, Dallas and Terry flew in from Vancouver after the Vancouver Island pre-tour extension and met Ruth and Peter at arrivals in the Calgary airport after their flight from Gatwick.

Calgary is a Prairie city, flat and devoid of trees, but even before we left the suburbs of the city on the Trans-Canada Highway, the Rocky Mountains loomed large on the western horizon and quickly manifested into the dramatic, world-famous scenery. Driving between Canmore and Banff we watched the great massifs slowly darken in the evening light. After stopping for dinner in Banff we arrived at our destination, Storm Mountain Lodge, at 945PM. Accommodations at the lodge are traditional rustic Canadian log cabins, each with their own cozy fireplace and an unlimited supply of spruce logs.

Day 2, 30th June

Weather: mixed sunny/cloudy periods.

After breakfast in the main lodge (a log building with fireplace, Canadiana mounted on the walls, and a very creaky floor) we departed for the nearby Bow Valley Parkway. This road is a park road that parallels the main Trans-Canada Highway and follows the Bow River. It is well-known for its wildlife sightings but of course, this is a hit and miss proposition and this morning we only observed a Mule Deer. Among the road verge wildflowers Ruth spotted the first of the many Western Wood Lillies, *Lilium philadelphicum*, that we were to see. We stopped at the Storm Mountain Lookout to observe the scenery, the wildflowers and a White-crowned Sparrow. Immediately below the viewing deck but above the Bow River, a Canadian Pacific freight train rumbled by and seemingly went on for ever and ever.

After departing the Bow Valley Parkway we drove westward on the Trans-Canada Highway from Lake Louise, Alberta across the continental divide to Field, British Columbia. The Highway passes by the world-famous Spiral Tunnels, an absolute must-stop/must-see for passing tourists. Canadian freight trains are notoriously long, up to 1.5 miles in length, and at the Spiral Tunnels, an engineering marvel where the train tracks loop in a spiral deep within the Rockies, it is possible to see the front end of a train crossing over and above the rear of the same train. It is truly an amazing sight, almost science fiction. While awaiting the train we heard Varied Thrush and Warbling Vireo singing.

After the Spiral Tunnels we drove the short distance to the Yoho Valley Road in Yoho National Park. At the end of this road is one of Canada's major waterfalls, Takakkaw Falls, a 254m behemoth falling from the Wapta Icefield high in the sky. While walking the short trail to the foot of the falls we observed a variety of wildflowers, a tiny frog, a Mourning Cloak butterfly (UK= Camberwell Beauty) and a Spotted Sandpiper. After visiting the falls we picnicked at the confluence of the Yoho and Kicking Horse rivers.

After lunch we visited Natural Bridge to view the Kicking Horse River powering beneath the bridge it has created, and exploration of the surrounding forest floor revealed Greenish-flowered Wintergreen, *Pyrola chlorantha*, Sparrow's-egg Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium passerinum*, and some moose droppings. Continuing up this road we reached Emerald Lake, another must-see destination that was busy with visitors, but among the throngs we managed to view Common Loons on the lake, Violet-green Swallows, and Yellow Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium parviflorum*, and Yellow Columbine, *Aquilegia flavescens*.

Back at the lodge the Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels were a cute and cheeky sight around the cabins.

Day 3, 1st July, Canada Day

Weather: sunny in AM, variable cloud later with rain at the Columbia Icefield Centre and snow on the high peaks (above 3000m, 10,000')

The day dawned sunny and clear so we drove as expeditiously as possible to the Icefields Parkway to take advantage of the weather before the predictable afternoon build-up of convective cloud. The Parkway has been called "the most beautiful highway in the world". While that is open to discussion, there is no doubting it is a truly spectacular highway with monumental mountains topped by snowfields and glaciers. Among the wonders of the Parkway Peyto Lake is perhaps the crowning glory, a large lake sitting in a bowl of high mountains with the Peyto Glacier to the south. The lake is famous for its unearthly shades of blue, the exact colour depending on the colour of the sky which varies with season, time of day, cloud conditions, etc. The Peyto Lake viewing platform throngs with humanity from all corners of the world but among the hubbub we managed to hear, see and photograph Clark's Nutcracker, a typical species of these high mountain forests.

After Peyto Lake we backtracked a few kilometres to Bow Lake and explored the botany of the marshy lakeshore. Among the riparian willows a Northern Waterthrush was singing loudly and photos were obtained of this notorious skulker.

We picnicked at the Coleman picnic site then ascended the switchbacks to the Nigel Creek viewpoint. The Columbia Icefield Centre was our furthest destination of the day. This is a major tourist destination at the foot of the Columbia Glacier and after watching a documentary movie and coffee we drove to near the foot of the glacier passing numerous time posts that detail the retreat of the glacier over the last 100 years. By this time it was raining at the foot of the glacier and snowing on the surrounding 10,000' peaks.

Drove back to Storm Mountain lodge.

Day 4, 2nd July

Weather: Rain overnight, drizzle and cloud/fog early, clearing mid-AM. Sunny PM in the Columbia Valley.

After breakfast we birded around the lodge property and encountered (heard) the common birds of the Rocky Mountains forest: Yellow-rumped Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, Chipping Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pine Siskin, American Robin and Swainson's Thrush.

On the drive south through Kootenay National Park we stooped at the Verdant Creek area and birded and botanized on the berm alongside the river where we found Pink Wintergreen, Sparrows-egg Lady's Slipper, Tall Bog Orchid, False Asphodel, Cut-leaved Anemone and many others. Birds identified included Spotted Sandpiper, Warbling Vireo, Wilson's Warbler and Hammond's Flycatcher.

At Radium Hot springs we picnicked at the Visitors Information Centre. Our first afternoon stop was in the Columbia River Wetlands Important Bird Area. The lake and marsh here on the Horsethief Forest Road produced a long list of birds including Wood Duck, Eastern Kingbird, Western Wood Peewee, Marsh Wren, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, and Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Further along the Horsethief Road we walked along secluded forest roads and glades and identified Red-breasted Nuthatch, Western Tanager, Chipping Sparrow, Red-naped Sapsucker and Northern Flicker. In the warm sunshine butterflies were on the wing and we saw Melissa Blue(?), a sulphur sp, and Dreamy Duskywing.

After missing a poorly marked turn on the logging road and driving a long way up Horsethief Creek we found our way back to civilization.....

On the drive back to the lodge we stopped at a location just north of Radium (previously scoped on a Greentours tour) for Mountain Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium montanum*, and soon located some specimens. Beyond here a Red Fox was padding along the side of the highway with a mouthful of prey.

At 10PM the sunset on Storm Mountain, east of the lodge, produced a colourful scene.

Day 5, 3rd July

Weather: Overcast

We drove eastwards to the Banff townsite and visited Bow Falls where we ate our picnic beside the river and falls with the famous old Banff Springs Hotel towering above us.

In the afternoon we continued eastwards to Canmore and thence south on the Spray Lakes Road which leads into the wilderness on the Alberta side of the Rockies. At the top of the first incline we

came upon an impressive Bighorn Sheep ram beside the road. At Buller Lake we scanned the lake and marsh for birds and walked along a winter ski trail looking and listening. CALYPSO ORCHID, *Calypso bulbosa*, was a high priority on this tour and on the previous Rockies tour (3 weeks earlier) we had found exactly TWO calypsos blooming in this same general area. The orchid grows on the floor of undisturbed coniferous forest with a mossy, duffy substrate. After some wandering around off-trail within the forest, two blooming calypsos were located, viewed and photographed.

Our new accommodations were at Engadine Lodge. Engadine is a lovely lodge situated on a high bank above the flood plain of the Spray River and with a sensational view of Shark Mountain from all the windows and decks.

Day 6, 4th July

Weather: heavy rain all day long.

We dutifully drove the roads but even the big mammals decided to stay home today.

Day 7, 5th July

Weather: Continuing heavy rain till noon, then cleared and sunny.

In light of the persistent rain in the mountains a decision was made to head for lower ground with the hope of better weather. We drove north to Canmore and thence to Bow River Provincial Park which straddles the Bow River as it exits the mountains and flows eastwards to Calgary and the flatlands of the Prairies. We arrived at the riverbank just in time to observe a Bald Eagle harassing an Osprey which was forced to drop the prey it was carrying. A Common Loon (UK= Great Northern Diver) was swimming on the river here.

After a picnic in the vehicle the weather rapidly brightened and we visited an extremely flowery meadow with a great diversity of species and colours (Larkspur, Death Camas, Paintbrush, and orchids. With the sun out and the air warming the butterflies soon appeared. We located the nest cavity of a Northern Flicker with the young cheeping in the nest and observed a Savannah Sparrow. After exploring this meadow we visited Middle Lake where we found Striped Coralroot, *Corallorhiza striata*, beside the trail and another location with 3 sp of orchids. Cedar Waxwing posed on a treetop.

We stopped for coffee in Canmore before returning to Engadine Lodge.

Day 8, 6th July

Weather: sunny

We began our day by visiting Buller Lake, just north of the Engadine Lodge, in hopes of finding some birds or perhaps a Moose. However, a sortie into the forest produced more Calypsos and about 10 were then located over a fairly large area.

We then drove south into Peter Lougheed Provincial Park which is known for its sightings of big mammals and sure enough, a moose pond beside the road had a cow Moose grazing. We had leisurely, close up views of this large and endearing bovid. Not far beyond the first sighting we came across a second animal. With Moose well and truly ticked for the tour we headed off to Highwood Pass, the highest paved road in Canada at 2200m, 7230'asl. At the summit we went for a short walk among the anenomes and buttercups that were just emerging from beneath the winter's snow. However, the rumble of thunder in the surrounding peaks and a few drops of rain encouraged an early return to the vehicle.

Driving a little south of the pass we encountered a Hoary Marmot in the roadway and after turning the vehicle around we located the animal sitting atop its chosen rock and seemingly posing for us. A brief but heavy thundershower ensued. We drove back across the pass and stopped at the roadside Rock Glacier where a short walk on the trail yielded a variety of wildflowers including Moss Campion, *Silene acaulis*. We spent some time observing and photographing an unusually confiding denizen of these rocky areas, the Pika or Rock Rabbit.

We stopped at the Little Highwood Pass roadside area for botanizing but some of the trail was closed because of a known "bear in the area".

Day 9, 7th July

Weather: sunny

The main outstanding item of business today was to observe a Grizzly Bear which had surprisingly eluded us on this tour to date.

We stopped at the Sawmill day use area one more time and a Pileated Woodpecker made a flight over the area. Then it was back to Peter Lougheed Park in the hope of finding a Grizzly, one of the more predictable locations to find the species. Once again we drew a blank on the bear but found yet another Moose which crossed the road in front of our vehicle. We returned again to Highwood Pass where we picnicked but there was still no bear to be found.

It was now the last afternoon of the tour and we had to be at the Calgary airport in about 2 hours, and still we had not seen a Grizzly. The tour guide (me) was reduced to desperately saying "It's not over till it's over" and fondly dreaming of football analogies where the winning goal is scored with the last kick of the game. The tour was 99.9% over, we were on our way to Calgary airport, and then at virtually the last possible location for a Grizzly, suddenly a huge momma bear and 2 teddy bear cubs were feeding on the grassy verge beside the highway.

Well that was a relief. Now we can put the participants on a plane back to England!

The Report on the Vancouver Island Pre-Tour follows at the end of the lists –
there are no lists for the latter report

Species List - Birds

Taxonomy & nomenclature follows the AOU Checklist to the 59th supplement, June 2018

Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Sedentary birds
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	
American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Urban areas
Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferous</i>	Heard only
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	Daily
Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	
Franklin's Gull	<i>Larus pipixcan</i>	Calgary area
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	
Red-naped Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Common, wooded areas. Heard frequently.
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	Sawmill picnic site
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	
Western Wood-Pee-wee	<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>	
Hammond's Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax hammondii</i>	Heard only
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	Heard only
Canada Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>	
Clark's Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>	
American Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	Common
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Daily, abundant.
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	
Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	
Cliff Swallow	<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Daily
Mountain Chickadee	<i>Poecile gambeli</i>	Daily, but hard to see
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	Most days
Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	Columbia River wetland
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>	Coniferous forest, abundant
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>	Coniferous forest, abundant
Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	Abundant in forest, hard to see
Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>	Hard to see
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Daily

Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>	Common but hard to see
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	Columbia River riparian
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Calgary area
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Urban areas
Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	Most days
Pine Siskin	<i>Carduelis pinus</i>	Daily, abundant
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerine</i>	Common
Clay-coloured Sparrow	<i>Spizella pallida</i>	Heard only
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	
Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>	Heard only
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	Common in wet habitats
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>	Fairly common, wetlands & riparian
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	Most days
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	Daily, common
Yellow-headed Blackbird	<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	Columbia River wetlands
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	Columbia River wetlands
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	
Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	Last bird of the tour, parking lot
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Seiurus noveboracensis</i>	Bow Lake riparian
Tennessee Warbler	<i>Vermivora peregrine</i>	Heard only
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>	
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	Wetlands
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	Daily
Townsend's Warbler	<i>Dendroica townsendi</i>	Common but hard to see
Wilson's Warbler	<i>Wilsonia pusilla</i>	Heard only
Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	

Species List – Mammals

Pika	<i>Ochotona princeps</i>	Rockies	
Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americana</i>	Rockies	
Least Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias minimus</i>	Rockies	
Hoary Marmot	<i>Marmota caligata</i>	Rockies	
Columbian Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus columbianus</i>	Rockies	Abundant
Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus lateralis</i>	Rockies	Abundant, esp
Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	Rockies	Common
(Beaver)	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	Rockies	Observed beaver lodge
vole sp	<i>Meadow Vole??</i>	Rockies	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Rockies	Road to Radium
Black Bear	<i>Ursus americana</i>	Rockies	5 animals on 3 days
Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	Rockies	sow/2 cubs
Elk	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Rockies	
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Rockies	Daily
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Rockies	one
Moose	<i>Alces alces</i>	Rockies	3 animals on 2 days
Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>	Rockies/Okanagan	common on roads in Rockies

Vancouver Island Pre-Tour

A Greentours Tour Report

23rd – 29th June 2019

Led by Tony Greenfield

Day 1, 23rd June

Weather: thin overcast

Those coming from the Canadian Rockies trip flew in with Tony, the tour leader, whilst others arrived in Vancouver from London and all met at arrivals. We then drove across Vancouver to the Horseshoe Bay ferry terminal & caught the 430PM ferry for the two hour crossing to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. As we were departing Horseshoe Bay there was some excitement as we observed 4 “skimmer” planes dumping water on a forest fire that was burning just north of the ferry terminal.

After a 30 minute drive we arrived at our hotel, the Qualicum Beach Inn. Despite some jet lag from a long flight a sumptuous, largely seafood dinner, was enjoyed in the waterfront restaurant overlooking the Salish Sea.

Day 2, 24th June

Weather: thin overcast, sunny

After the short drive to Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park we hiked the circle trail that traverses both sides of the pretty canyon and its various waterfalls. The park is in the rain shadow of the mountains that form the spine of Vancouver Island & the dry forest here is mainly Douglas fir & arbutus. Along the way we identified many species of trees, shrubs, ferns & flowers. Birds were scarce but we did see the gaudy Western Tanager.

After the hike we picnicked in the park & then proceeded to Port Alberni where we stopped for coffee & ice cream. The road between Port Alberni & the west coast of Vancouver Island crosses the mountainous spine of the island & this road has always been a narrow, twisting “goat track” of a road, a precarious route in notches cut into the vertical cliffs. Pacific Rim National Park now attracts huge numbers of visitors and the road is being improved and we had the opportunity to view the enormous engineering challenge & cost of building a modern road in this near-vertical terrain. At one point we were held up while the road-builders blasted some rock & then cleared the debris off the road & during the wait we heard various forest birds including Pileated Woodpecker, Swainson’s Thrush, Olive-sided Flycatcher & Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

After reaching the Pacific Ocean & Pacific Rim National Park we visited Long Beach where we walked along the beach to a rocky, wave-washed headland where we found a variety of salt-loving plants. We walked back along a forest trail beneath the Sitka spruce trees & observed & heard

Swainson's Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco & Fox Sparrow.

It was then a short drive to our luxurious hotel at the Black Rock Waterfront Resort & a memorable dinner beside the open Pacific Ocean.

Day 3, 25th June

Weather: sunny & warm

The day began with a visit to Amphitrite Point & Lighthouse by walking along the scenic coastal trail among the wind-blasted & twisted spruce & cedar trees with views out to the Broken Islands.

Then we drove north along the 30kms coast road to Tofino & prepared for the boat tour from Jamie's Whaling Station. This 4 hour tour travels into Clayquot Sound, a long, convoluted saltwater inlet east of Tofino, looking for the Black Bears that come down onto the rocky beaches to feed. The bears are very focused on their mission, which is to overturn the substantial-sized rocks on the beach & consume whatever morsels they find beneath. The tour is very reliable for bear sightings (I have been out about 6 times & always seen bears). However, today the bears were uncooperative & the skipper had to work hard to find even a single bear, which we eventually did.

After the boat tour we visited the Roy Henry Vickers gallery on the main street in Tofino & enjoyed the uniquely First Nations sensibility of this well-known & acclaimed artist. Then we strolled down to the wharf at the foot of the main street & watched the marine activity including the coming & goings of the floatplanes which are a standard mode of travel in these parts. On the water just offshore a Marbled Murrelet performed for us.

We ate an early dinner at Shelter, one of Tofino's acclaimed restaurants. On the way home from Tofino to Ucluelet we stopped at Long Beach, specifically at Incinerator Rock, where we walked on the beach as the sun was setting & the last surfers were calling it a day. At the water's edge we watched a small flock of Sanderlings & a Killdeer dodging the waves.

Day 4, 26th June

Weather: sunny & warm.

Our first stop of the day was at Kwisnits, the Parks Canada Interpretive Centre at Long Beach.

We then returned to Jamie's Whaling Station in Tofino for the Whale tour. This tour ventures out onto the open Pacific in a zodiac-type boat & necessitates dressing in flotation suits for safety & warmth. Amid great hilarity & with references to Dunlop Man & the Pillsbury Dough Boy we waddled down to the wharf for the 3 hour trip.

Our skipper/guide was extremely knowledgeable (originally from Barnsley!!) with an intimate acquaintance with the behavior of the whales. We observed 3 Gray Whales (identified as Big White,

Orange Crush & Lasso) & a couple of Humpbacks. Off Cleland Island we had excellent close looks at a bevy of alcids: Common Murres (UK=Guillemot), Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets & the highlight.....5 Tufted Puffins in breeding plumage. A bonus species was a few Sooty Shearwaters that are only infrequently seen so close inshore. Around offshore rocks, amid kelp forests, we saw Sea Otters & also visited a colony of Steller's Sealions. Harbour Seals were fairly common & as we approached the dock at the end of the tour, Wally, a well-known & habituated California Sealion put on a show by diving beneath the zodiac & generally hamming it up. Much to the delight of the participants!

On the way home we stopped for a beach walk at Combers Beach.

Dinner was in the Fetch restaurant at Black Rock followed by checklist ticking by the fireplace.

Day 5, 27th June

Weather: AM rain to Port Alberni, PM overcast

We drove back across Vancouver Island, stopping for coffee in Port Alberni, before reaching Cathedral Grove. This provincial park preserves a famous grove of monumental trees, mainly Douglas firs, some hundreds of years old & almost touching the sky. It is truly a green cathedral.

It is hard to over-estimate the significance of the forest & the trees that blanket most of British Columbia. The resource has been the economic base of BC ever since Capt Cook first visited in 1778 and realized the value of the big timber as masts for the Royal Navy. Trees dominate the landscape wherever you are in the province but Cathedral Grove is a small remnant of the giant old-growth timber that prevailed in this temperate rainforest before the onset of commercial logging. Even the park status of Cathedral Grove cannot protect the trees from other potential hazards & eventually all trees succumb to old age, disease, blow-down or fire, & a damaging windstorm a few years ago has left some fallen giants splayed across the forest floor. Of course, blow-down simply means regeneration to the forest as the open, sunlit spaces start a new cycle of growth.

Apart from admiring the giant trees & their enormous vertical trunks we also identified the shrubs & plants of the forest floor. One of the most notable of these is Devil's Club, *Oplodanax horridus*, an understory shrub with vicious barbed spines that cannot be easily extricated from skin & soon become infected. On the plus side Devil's Club is said to make the world's finest artist's charcoal!

After driving on a short distance we had lunch in Coombs & then drove southwards on the main Vancouver Island Highway to the Moonwater Lodge on the outskirts of Victoria. The lodge sits on a high cliff looking out over the waters of Saanich Inlet, a very scenic landscape to view from your room.

We did some late afternoon birding around the lodge & quickly observed a range of species including Steller's Jay, Anna's Hummingbird, House Wren, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak & Purple Finch. Dinner was in the adjoining restaurant.

Day 6, 28th June

Weather: sunny & warm

After an early 715AM start from the lodge we drove into Victoria & found the wharf from where our boat trip departed. We then had time for coffee & pastries in a sunny wharfside coffee shop.

The four hour boat trip with Eaglewing Tours took us westwards into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the body of water separating the USA / Canada, & the state of Washington from the province of British Columbia. The weather was really gorgeous: blue, sunny & warm, & the boat extremely roomy & comfortable. The onboard guides were very knowledgeable about all things "whale".

The main objective on this tour was to see Orcas, or Killer Whales, & it is extremely rare that orcas are not found as the pod consistently forages daily in the same general area. Additionally, the various whale-watching companies collaborate in sharing information on locations. After a fairly long run on the boat the Orca pod was sighted & we spent perhaps an hour tracking the pod from a respectful distance. After that we spent time with a couple of Humpbacks. The skipper then showed us a Sea Otter lounging in a kelp forest. At Race Rocks close inspection yielded a Northern Elephant Seal hiding in a bay. Harbour Seals were common. Birds were few with Rhinoceros Auklets being the most commonly observed species.

After the tour we had seafood lunches in the warm sunshine & bustling ambience of the Fisherman's Wharf.

The afternoon was unscripted until Dallas suggested a visit to the Butchart Gardens which are on the outskirts of Victoria. These gardens are in the upper echelon of world gardens & are visited by over a million people each year. The Sunken Garden, the Rose Garden & the Japanese Garden were all highlights but the flowering *Abutilon pictum* in the Japanese Garden was an absolute showstopper.

After the Gardens we drove into Victoria for dinner but it proved difficult to find a seafood restaurant with a vacancy on a very busy Friday night.

Day 7, 29th June

Weather: sun/cloud

After an early 615AM start we drove for an hour to the Duke Point ferry terminal & caught the 745 AM ferry to Tsawwassen on the mainland on the southern edge of the Vancouver urban area. After the 2 hour crossing, a 45 minute drive brought us to the Vancouver airport by 1030AM. After saying our goodbyes 3 guests waited for their flight to London & 2 others & myself flew to Calgary to begin the Rocky Mountains tour.