

Washington Winter Birding

with Naturalist Journeys

January 22 – 28, 2023

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook & Instagram at

Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Northwest Washington supports an amazing variety of birds, especially in winter. The region's maritime influence brings moderate conditions, and birds from the arctic find it quite acceptable to winter in weather comparable to that of their summer breeding grounds. In addition, the lushness of the onshore habitats and the richness of the open waters offer bountiful winter feeding. From the Skagit Valley and Puget Sound to coastal areas near Port Townsend (a fun small town to stay in as well!), excellent birding awaits. While there, pamper yourself with some of North America's finest wines and seafood, and you will remember this week-long adventure for years to come.

What will you see? Countless Bald Eagles and abundant raptors with Snowy Owl and Gyrfalcon reported annually in the region. Large flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans join up to 20,000 Snow Geese in the area's productive agricultural lands. Open waters host still more waterfowl, including thousands of "Gray-bellied" Brant, hundreds of Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, and all three scoter species. Up to five different loons and three cormorant species can be observed, as well as up to six different alcids. Shorelines display abundant Glaucous-winged and Mew gulls, with Herring, Iceland (the form formally known as "Thayer's Gull"), and Glaucous Gulls scattered about. And though raptors and waterbirds appear dominant, they are not alone. Winter songbirds in the Pacific Northwest include an abundance of Pacific Wrens and "Sooty" Fox Sparrows, with Varied Thrush possible throughout the region. Golden-crowned Kinglet, Spotted Towhee, Steller's Jay, and both Chestnut-backed and Black-capped Chickadees can be quite common, and we usually run across Northern Shrike and Hutton's Vireo. The region also hosts its share of winter rarities.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy three nights in the Skagit River Valley, at the quaint port-town of La Conner, then three in picturesque Port Townsend
- Explore the Skagit and Samish flats; Samish, Padilla, and Skagit Bays; Fidalgo Island; and the Stillaguamish River delta, near Stanwood.
- Scan ocean waters across Puget Sound, Admiralty Inlet, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca
- Cross via Deception Pass onto Whidbey Island, birding island highlights before catching the Keystone ferry, bound for scenic Port Townsend.
- Get excellent looks at Marbled Murrelet, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, and Rhinoceros Auklet, with good chances for Ancient Murrelet, Cassin's Auklet, Iceland Gull, and possible Black-legged Kittiwake—all on the ferry ride on which good weather days bring a stunning view of the Olympic Mountains.
- On the Sequim Peninsula, scan the Dungeness River delta and Dungeness Bay for Yellow-billed Loons among wintering waterfowl.
- Bird the narrow Quimper Peninsula, Fort Worden, Oak Bay and Marrowstone Island in search of still more loons, alcids and rafts of sea ducks.
- Gain skills, have fun, and explore winter Washington with an expert!

Tour Summary

7-Day / 6-Night Washington Birding Tour

\$2990, from Seattle

Airport is Seattle-Tacoma International (SEA)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sun., Jan. 22 – Tues., Jan. 24 Skagit Valley Winter Birding

Welcome to Washington! Discover some of the best winter birding imaginable during our three days of exploring the Skagit River Valley. Pamper yourself with lovely lodgings on the local waterfront in the quaint port-town of La Conner. From here, we will explore the Skagit and Samish flats; Samish, Padilla, and Skagit Bays; Fidalgo Island; and the Stillaguamish River delta, near Stanwood. During a Snowy Owl flight year, we may find Snowies right along the shoreline. Glaucous Gull often feeds among the flocks of Glaucous-winged and Mew gulls, and songbirds may include Northern Shrike, Hutton's Vireo, and Varied Thrush. Open waters off Fidalgo Island may provide us with excellent looks at Rhinoceros Auklet and Pacific Loon (sometimes feeding alongside pods of harbor porpoise!), while flocks of "Sitka" Red Crossbills and the chatty little Pacific Wren call from the coastal forests.

Accommodations all three days at La Conner Channel Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Jan. 25 Deception Pass | Whidbey Island | Port Townsend

Today after breakfast we leave the Skagit Valley, and skirt the southern edge of Fidalgo Island, crossing Deception Pass onto Whidbey Island. A few miles south, we board the Keystone ferry, bound for scenic Port Townsend. The ferry ride offers stunning views of the Olympic Mountains (weather permitting!) along with many alcids and other waterbirds riding the tides back and forth in the rich waters of Admiralty Inlet. We should get excellent looks at Marbled Murrelet, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, and Rhinoceros Auklet, with good chances for Ancient Murrelet, Cassin's Auklet, Iceland Gull, and possible Black-legged Kittiwake.

From our base for the next three nights, again on the picturesque waterfront lodge in Port Townsend, we bird hotspots of the Olympic Peninsula beginning with a scenic drive to Port Angeles, where we scour the waters off Ediz Hook for seabirds, with excellent looks at loons and Marbled Murrelet, and nearly annual Thick-billed Murre.

Accommodations in Port Townsend (B,L,D)

Thurs., Jan. 26 Sequim Peninsula | Dungeness

After a hearty breakfast we explore the Sequim Peninsula, including the Dungeness River delta and Dungeness Bay. Here, Yellow-billed Loons are often counted in high numbers on the local Christmas Bird Count, and the fringes of the peninsula can attract rare songbirds—in the past these have included out of range Tropical Kingbird and Harris's Sparrow. Following a lunch break, we then add to our sightings as we make various stops along Sequim Bay before heading back to our lodgings in historic Port Townsend.

Accommodations in Port Townsend (B,L,D)

Fri., Jan. 27 Port Townsend Birding Hotspots

During our second full day from Port Townsend, we explore any parts west that we were not able to visit the day before, as well as the narrow Quimper Peninsula and Fort Worden nearby. In the afternoon we visit Oak Bay and Marrowstone Island in search of still more loons and alcids and rafts of sea ducks, with impressive

concentrations of Long-tailed Duck near the mouth of Port Townsend Bay. Goose flocks could easily include a rare wintering Emperor Goose.

Accommodations in Port Townsend (B,L,D)

Sat., Jan. 28 Hood Canal | Kitsap Peninsula | Afternoon Departures

On our final morning, we enjoy a light early breakfast in Port Townsend before heading south and east across the Hood Canal on the world's longest saltwater floating bridge. A turn to the north takes us to the northern limits of the Kitsap Peninsula, with birding stops at Foulweather Bluff and Point No Point. This will be our final chance to see wintering seabirds, such as alcids, loons, Red-necked Grebe, and Red-breasted Merganser. After a classic northwestern brunch in scenic Port Gamble, we hop the Kingston ferry to Edmonds, followed by the quick drive south to the Sea-Tac airport, where our flock disperses after a great week of birding. *(B)*

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is \$2990 DBL / \$3560 SGL. The tour price includes 6 nights' accommodations, all meals from dinner day 1 through breakfast Day 7, professional guide services, park entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to SEATAC, Washington or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at SEATAC Airport no later than 1:00 PM on January 22. Please plan departures after 3:00 PM on January 28. If you choose to stay on an explore on your own, we are happy to drop you off at an airport hotel.

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