

Olympic Peninsula Spring Explorer Species List | May 11 – 18, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guide Stephen Grace. Our clients included Sue, Chris, Emily, Mary B, Mary vB, Des and Jeff.

Our Naturalist Journeys Olympic Peninsula tour recorded 115 species representing 39 families while exploring an impressive diversity of habitats across northwestern Washington. From urban wetlands and the sheltered waters of the Salish Sea to estuarine mudflats, glacial rivers, subalpine meadows, temperate rainforest, and the rugged outer Pacific coast, each ecosystem contributed its own distinctive bird community. The tour coincided with peak spring migration and the onset of the breeding season, producing a rich diversity of waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds, alclids, forest passerines, raptors, and montane specialists.

Pre-tour birding on 10 May at Angle Lake near SeaTac provided an excellent introduction to the breeding birds of lowland western Washington. A family of Golden-crowned Kinglets was observed feeding recently fledged young, while a group of three Bewick's Wrens eventually revealed themselves after a persistent search. Wood Ducks offered prolonged views along the vegetated shoreline, and despite heavy recreational use of the park, bird activity remained remarkably high throughout the afternoon.

On 11 May we crossed Puget Sound and entered the northeastern Olympic Peninsula. Kah Tai Lagoon provided productive wetland birding, with highlights including Marsh Wren, Hooded Merganser, and numerous Ruddy Ducks, many males already in striking breeding plumage.

Birding at Fort Worden and Point Hudson produced a diverse mix of seabirds, waterbirds, and coastal raptors, including Pacific Loon, Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pelagic Cormorant, Red-breasted Merganser, Glaucous-winged Gull, Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Purple Martin, and Belted Kingfisher. Pigeon Guillemots were especially conspicuous offshore, their bright red feet and bold white wing patches flashing in flight. Multiple Rhinoceros Auklets passed close to shore, providing excellent views of one of the Salish Sea's signature alclids. Purple Martins occupied active nesting structures installed through ongoing conservation efforts that have helped restore breeding populations around Puget Sound.

Passerine activity around Port Townsend remained strong throughout the day. Highlights included Black-headed Grosbeak, Wilson's Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, American Goldfinch, and both Anna's and Rufous Hummingbirds. The relatively late timing of this departure appeared advantageous for spring migration, with species such as Wilson's Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Rufous Hummingbird recently returned to breeding territories.

On 12 May we birded Ediz Hook near Port Angeles before embarking on a whale-watching excursion into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and later ascending to Hurricane Ridge. Ediz Hook produced Black Oystercatcher, Surf Scoter, Common Loon, Pelagic Cormorant, Common Goldeneye, and a pair of Marbled Murrelets offshore.

Several Common Loons were already in striking breeding plumage, while others retained nonbreeding plumage, illustrating the transitional nature of spring migration. The Marbled Murrelet observations were especially noteworthy given the species' conservation status and remarkable life history, nesting on moss-covered branches high in mature and old-growth conifer forests while foraging in marine waters.

The Strait of Juan de Fuca excursion yielded large numbers of Rhinoceros Auklets throughout the voyage, along with smaller numbers of Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, Glaucous-winged Gulls, and Pelagic Cormorants. Rhinoceros Auklets were particularly conspicuous, often passing close to the vessel and providing excellent views of their distinctive breeding-season facial ornamentation. An active Bald Eagle nest containing a single eaglet was observed during the return crossing, with an adult standing nearby.

Hurricane Ridge provided access to montane and subalpine habitats. Avian highlights included Canada Jay, Common Raven, Dark-eyed Junco, and a flock of Pine Siskins pursuing a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The day's most unexpected bird was the tour's only Sooty Grouse, which exploded from roadside vegetation after being flushed by an American Black Bear cub.

On 13 May we explored riparian and estuarine habitats around Sequim and Dungeness. Birding along the Dungeness River produced one of the major avian highlights of the trip: American Dippers, including recently fledged juveniles. Adults were observed foraging in swift current beneath the Railroad Bridge, repeatedly disappearing beneath the surface to walk along the streambed in search of aquatic invertebrates. Our group enjoyed exceptional views of the species' flashing white nictitating membranes and unique underwater feeding behavior.

Mature forest along the Dungeness River hosted a characteristic assemblage of Pacific Northwest woodland birds, including Black-throated Gray Warbler, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Brown Creeper, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Several active Bushtit nests were observed suspended from outer branches, their woven, sock-like structures among the most distinctive nests built by any North American songbird. Rufous Hummingbirds were abundant throughout the day, with males vigorously defending flowering shrubs and favored feeding territories.

Estuarine habitats at Dungeness Landing and Three Crabs supported an impressive diversity of shorebirds and waterfowl. Highlights included Hudsonian Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, White-winged Scoter, and Bufflehead. Particularly instructive were side-by-side comparisons of Western Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, and intermediate hybrid "Olympic Gull" phenotypes, illustrating the extensive hybridization that occurs where the ranges of the two parent species overlap. Bald Eagles repeatedly flushed mixed flocks of ducks and shorebirds from the estuary, briefly transforming the mudflats into swirling clouds of birds.

John Wayne Marina produced distant scope views of Common Murres, adding another alcid to the trip list and providing an opportunity to compare the species with the Rhinoceros Auklets and Pigeon Guillemots observed earlier in the tour.

On 14 May we moved westward along the north Olympic Peninsula toward the outer coast. The Elwha River restoration corridor supported Spotted Sandpiper, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Northern Flicker, and MacGillivray's Warbler, the latter eventually providing excellent views.

At Madison Falls, a Swainson's Thrush was observed quietly foraging before most individuals had begun sustained territorial singing. Continuing west toward Sol Duc brought a transition into mature temperate

rainforest dominated by Western Hemlock and Douglas-fir. Salmon Cascades produced one of the most memorable waterfowl observations of the trip: a pair of Harlequin Ducks actively utilizing turbulent whitewater habitat. Prolonged close views allowed careful study of plumage and behavior.

Rainforest birding along the Sol Duc Falls Trail produced Varied Thrush and another exceptional American Dipper observation. Adult dippers were observed carrying food through the spray of the falls to a concealed nest site behind the waterfall itself, a vivid demonstration of the species' adaptation to fast-flowing mountain streams.

Kalaloch Lodge served as our base for outer-coast exploration. Seabirds observed offshore included Brown Pelican, Pelagic Cormorant, Surf Scoter, and additional Harlequin Ducks in nearshore surf habitat below the lodge. Barn Swallows and Violet-green Swallows nested around lodge structures, and a territorial male Rufous Hummingbird maintained a consistent exposed perch near the lodge grounds.

On 15 May we explored the Hoh Rain Forest, one of the finest remaining examples of temperate rainforest in the United States. Avian diversity within the forest interior was lower than in edge and riparian habitats but included characteristic old-growth associates such as Varied Thrush, Pacific Wren, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Varied Thrush was especially memorable, with multiple prolonged observations in the dim understory. Throughout the day, the species' haunting, ventriloquial single-note song provided an unmistakable soundtrack to the rainforest. Although woodpeckers proved surprisingly elusive, their presence was evident throughout the forest. Extensive rows of sap wells excavated by Red-breasted Sapsuckers marked trunks and branches, while large rectangular excavations and fresh wood chips testified to the recent activity of Pileated Woodpeckers, the largest woodpecker regularly found in the Pacific Northwest.

The final two full days of the tour, 16–17 May, focused on the outer Pacific coast around Kalaloch and Ruby Beach. Black Oystercatchers were especially prominent, including a flock of fifteen birds along the rocky shoreline, with both adults and immatures represented. A flock of approximately twenty Hudsonian Whimbrels was observed near the Tree of Life at Kalaloch during northbound migration. A Red Crossbill feeding in coastal Sitka Spruce provided an intriguing observation. Given the habitat, the bird may have belonged to the locally adapted Sitka Spruce-associated call type, although vocalizations were insufficient for confident assignment.

Coastal birding at Ruby Beach produced Pelagic Cormorant, Glaucous-winged Gull, Song Sparrow, and Hairy Woodpecker. Black Oystercatchers remained conspicuous along the surf-battered shoreline, where their bright orange-red bills and piercing calls contrasted sharply with the dark sea stacks and pounding Pacific surf. The combination of productive tidepools, offshore seabirds, migrating shorebirds, and dramatic coastal scenery provided a fitting conclusion to a tour that showcased the extraordinary avian diversity of Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

Several species emerged as emblematic of the Olympic Peninsula's diverse ecosystems. Marbled Murrelet illustrated the intimate connection between marine waters and old-growth forests, spending most of its life at sea while nesting high in ancient conifer stands. American Dipper demonstrated the remarkable specialization required to exploit fast-flowing mountain streams, while Harlequin Ducks occupied turbulent waters ranging from rocky Pacific surf to swift mountain rivers. Black Oystercatchers embodied the rugged outer coast, and the haunting song of Varied Thrush served as the defining voice of the temperate rainforest.

The final tally of 115 species reflected the Olympic Peninsula's extraordinary ecological diversity and compressed environmental gradients. Within a single week, we observed marine alcid, migrating shorebirds, estuarine waterfowl, rainforest specialists, and subalpine breeders while moving repeatedly between the

sheltered waters of the Salish Sea and the storm-shaped outer Pacific coast. The timing of the tour coincided with peak spring migration, active seabird breeding, and continued shorebird movement through coastal estuaries, providing an excellent cross-section of the peninsula's avifauna.

BIRDS: 115 species were recorded, of which 3 were heard only, none were endemic, 4 were introduced, 1 was Pre-tour Only, and 1 is listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The eBird link below details the 115 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Naturalist Journeys Olympic Peninsula Spring Explorer](#)

[10–17 May 2026 \(8 days\)](#)

Following is a list of the birds, mammals, and other species we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

H = Heard Only, I = Introduced, PT = Pre-tour Only, T = Threatened

DUCKS, GEESE, AND WATERFOWL: Anatidae (20)

Brant *Branta bernicla* — A compact Arctic-breeding goose that winters in the Salish Sea, where it feeds extensively on eelgrass and marine algae. During migration, thousands stage in Washington's coastal estuaries. Observed in flight at Point Hudson and Three Crabs; also seen perched on logs at Dungeness Landing.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* — Highly adaptable, nesting everywhere from Arctic tundra to city parks. Their familiar V-formations help conserve energy during migration, and their honking calls can be heard from remarkable distances. Seen several times during the tour.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* (PT) — One of North America's most spectacular ducks. A secondary cavity nester, it readily uses tree cavities and nest boxes. Ducklings leap from nest cavities shortly after hatching, sometimes dropping more than 50 feet unharmed. A male and female pair were observed pre-tour at Angle Lake Park.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* — Possesses one of the most specialized bills among waterfowl. Fine comb-like lamellae along the bill edges allow it to strain tiny aquatic invertebrates and seeds from the water. Observed at Dungeness Landing.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* — Often overlooked because of its subtle plumage, the male is beautifully patterned in intricate gray vermiculations. A consummate opportunist, it often waits for coots and diving ducks to bring submerged vegetation to the surface before rushing in to steal a share of the harvest. Seen at Kah Tai Lagoon, Dungeness Landing, and Three Crabs.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana* — Sometimes called the "baldpate" for the male's pale crown. A goose-like grazer of grasses and eelgrass, it frequently steals aquatic vegetation from coots and diving ducks. Observed at Dungeness Landing and Three Crabs, where distant flocks were flushed by Bald Eagles.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* — The world's most widespread duck and the primary ancestor of most domestic duck breeds. Highly adaptable, Mallards thrive in habitats ranging from remote wetlands to city parks. Common throughout the tour.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* — Elegant and long-necked, with the male's elongated central tail feathers giving the species its name. Among the fastest and most graceful of the dabbling ducks, its streamlined silhouette is unmistakable in flight. Observed dabbling and in flight at Three Crabs.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*—North America's smallest dabbling duck. Agile flocks twist and wheel in

remarkably synchronized flight, often producing a distinctive whistling sound with their wings. Seen exceptionally well at Three Crabs, where males and females foraged in the shallows close to shore.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* — Named for a subtle neck ring that is rarely visible in the field. More easily identified by the white ring near the bill tip and peaked rear crown. One individual was seen at Kah Tai Lagoon among Lesser Scaup.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* — A diving duck often found on freshwater lakes, ponds, and wetlands, though it also winters in sheltered bays and estuaries. Separation from Greater Scaup can be challenging; Lesser typically shows a peaked rear crown and, in flight, a white wing stripe largely restricted to the secondaries. Observed at Kah Tai Lagoon.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* — Named after the colorful costumes of Italian harlequin characters. Breeds along turbulent mountain streams and winters in wave-battered coastal waters. Seen roosting on booms at Ediz Hook; a male and female pair were observed exceptionally well on the Sol Duc River upstream from Salmon Cascades; many more were seen riding the surf at Kalaloch Beach.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* — The striking male's colorful bill and bold head pattern make it unmistakable. Specialized for feeding on mussels and other marine invertebrates, which it captures by diving in coastal waters. Seen in small numbers at Ediz Hook and Three Crabs and in tremendous rafts offshore at Kalaloch Beach.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi* — The largest North American scoter. Flashing white wing patches are conspicuous in flight. These powerful sea ducks dive for clams, mussels, snails, and other hard-shelled prey, which are swallowed whole and crushed by a muscular gizzard. Seen in distant scope views at Three Crabs and in flight at Ruby Beach.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* — One of North America's smallest diving ducks. Most nest in abandoned Northern Flicker cavities near lakes and ponds in the boreal forests and aspen parklands of Alaska and Canada, though small numbers also breed in northeastern Washington and other parts of the northern Rocky Mountain region. Seen at Kah Tai Lagoon and Dungeness Landing, with larger rafts observed at Three Crabs.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* — Named for its striking yellow eye. The wings produce a distinctive whistling sound in flight, earning the species the nickname "whistler." One immature bird was observed at Ediz Hook near a Black Oystercatcher.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus* — The male's dramatic black-and-white crest can be raised or lowered in courtship and display. Its eyes are specially adapted for underwater vision while pursuing fish and aquatic insects. A lone male was seen at Kah Tai Lagoon; another was observed from the van while entering the Hoh Rain Forest.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser* — A large fish-eating duck with narrow serrated bill edges that help grip slippery prey. Females frequently lead broods of dozens of ducklings, sometimes combining families into large crèches. A female was observed in flight at Railroad Bridge Park.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* — A sleek marine merganser recognized by its shaggy crest and slender red bill. Often considered the fastest-flying duck in the world; individuals have been clocked approaching 100 mph with favorable winds. This sleek fish-eating diver uses its narrow serrated bill to grip slippery prey underwater. Seen well at Point Wilson in Fort Worden and also recorded at Ediz Hook and Three Crabs.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* — A compact diving duck with a stiff tail often held cocked above the water. During the breeding season, males display brilliant blue bills and perform the species' famous bubbling display, rapidly drumming their bills against their inflated breast and neck to create froths of bubbles on the water. Numerous males in breeding plumage were seen at Kah Tai Lagoon.

PHEASANTS, GROUSE, AND ALLIES: Phasianidae (1)

Sooty Grouse *Dendragapus fuliginosus* — A characteristic bird of Pacific Northwest conifer forests. Males produce remarkably low-frequency hoots during the breeding season, among the deepest vocalizations of any

North American bird. After missing this target species while searching at Hurricane Ridge, we were delighted when one flushed from a subalpine meadow after being startled by an American Black Bear cub that attempted to pounce on it.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (4)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (1) — Native to Eurasia and North Africa, this species has been associated with humans for thousands of years. Domesticated more than 5,000 years ago, it served as a messenger bird in both world wars and possesses remarkable navigational abilities. Common in urban and developed areas throughout the tour, with many observed at Fort Worden.

Band-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas fasciata* — The closest living relative of the extinct Passenger Pigeon. A bird of western coniferous and mixed forests, it breeds throughout the Pacific Northwest and migrates southward in winter, with many birds reaching California and Mexico. Unusual among North American pigeons for its heavy reliance on acorns and other mast crops, it often travels long distances in search of seasonal food sources. Seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary and at Railroad Bridge Park.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (1) — One of the most successful avian colonists of modern times. After naturally expanding across Europe during the twentieth century, it appeared in the Bahamas in the 1970s and spread rapidly across North America. Recorded at Railroad Bridge Park.

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* — Named for its soft, mournful cooing voice. One of North America's most abundant birds, capable of sustained flights exceeding 50 mph during migration. Its wings produce a distinctive whistling sound when taking flight. Seen at Railroad Bridge Park.

HUMMINGBIRDS: Trochilidae (2)

Anna's Hummingbird *Calypte anna* — The only hummingbird that regularly remains on the Olympic Peninsula year-round. During courtship displays, males perform spectacular dives at speeds approaching 60 mph, producing a sharp explosive sound with their tail feathers. Their iridescent gorgets and crowns flash brilliant rose-magenta when illuminated by the sun. Seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary; a male was also observed well at feeders at Railroad Bridge Park.

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* — Despite weighing only slightly more than a penny, this fiery hummingbird undertakes one of the longest migrations of any bird relative to its body size, traveling between Mexico and Alaska. Notoriously aggressive, males fiercely defend feeding territories and often dominate feeders despite their tiny size. Seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary and at Railroad Bridge Park. A particularly cooperative male, nicknamed "Halo" by Kalaloch Lodge staff, perched prominently on a bare branch overlooking the Pacific Ocean behind the lodge.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae (1)

Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani* — A striking rocky-shore specialist that uses its powerful bill to pry mussels, limpets, chitons, and other intertidal invertebrates from wave-washed rocks. Its dependence on healthy intertidal habitat makes it an important indicator of rocky-shore ecosystem health. One was seen in flight at Point Wilson, and another was observed foraging among mussel beds at Ediz Hook; photographs suggested a male, based on absent dark eye flecking. In Black Oystercatchers, full eye flecks are associated with females, while males typically show slight or no flecking. Also seen foraging alongshore from our whale watch vessel. We enjoyed especially memorable views at Kalaloch, where birds probed among rocky outcrops in the surf and at least 15 gathered along the shoreline, including immature birds identifiable by dark remaining on the red bill.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae (2)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* — North America's largest plover. In breeding plumage, the striking

black face, throat, and belly contrast sharply with silver-flecked upperparts. During migration it often gathers in estuaries and coastal mudflats, where its clear, plaintive whistled call is a characteristic sound. Seen in breeding plumage at Dungeness Landing.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* — Named for its loud, ringing “kill-deer” call. Famous for its broken-wing display, in which an adult feigns injury to lure predators away from eggs or chicks. Seen at Fort Worden, where one bird appeared to be incubating. Although we gave the birds a wide berth, one nevertheless performed a convincing broken-wing display.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (6)

Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus* — Recognized by its long down-curved bill and bold striped crown. This long-distance migrant breeds on Arctic tundra and winters along the coasts of North and South America. Seen at Dungeness Landing and Three Crabs. Near Kalaloch campground, a large flock foraged along the shoreline before taking flight and joining another group, creating an impressive gathering of more than twenty birds.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa* — One of North America’s largest shorebirds, distinguished by its cinnamon-colored underwings and long, slightly upturned bill. Most breed in the Prairie Pothole Region and winter along Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf coasts. Seen at Dungeness Landing.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* — Often described as a “sewing machine” of the mudflats because of its rapid, piston-like probing action while feeding. A pair in breeding plumage was observed at Three Crabs.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* — Instantly recognizable by its constant tail-bobbing behavior. Unusual among North American birds, females are often more brightly colored than males and may mate with multiple males, each of which incubates and raises its own brood. A migratory species that breeds widely across Washington and winters from the southern United States through much of South America. Seen in breeding plumage at Three Crabs—the first of the year for Gary—and also observed along the Elwha River.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* — Breeding adults acquire a distinctive black belly patch that contrasts dramatically with rusty upperparts. Large flocks often perform synchronized aerial maneuvers that flash from dark to silver as they wheel over tidal flats. Seen in breeding plumage at Dungeness Landing.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* — A tiny shorebird that undertakes an extraordinary migration between Arctic Alaska and wintering grounds extending to Central and South America. Hundreds of thousands pass through Pacific Coast estuaries each spring, making them among the most abundant shorebirds on the West Coast. One was observed along the Elwha River; surprisingly, none were encountered on the beaches of the Salish Sea or the outer Pacific coast during the tour.

AUKS, MURRES, AND PUFFINS: Alcidae (4)

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata* — The signature alcid of the Salish Sea. Despite its name, this species is more closely related to puffins than to typical auklets, and some birders have informally refer to it as the “Rhinoceros Puffin” or “Unicorn Puffin.” During the breeding season, adults develop a distinctive upright horn on the bill, which is shed after nesting. Like other alcids, it uses its wings to “fly” underwater in pursuit of fish. Observed many times, including at Fort Worden, Point Hudson, and during our Strait of Juan de Fuca whale watch.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus* (T) — One of North America’s most remarkable seabirds. Unlike most alcids, it nests singly on large moss-covered branches in old-growth conifer forests, sometimes many miles inland from the ocean. In winter, adults wear a black-and-white plumage with strong countershading that helps conceal them at sea. During the breeding season they molt into a cryptic mottled brown plumage that provides camouflage among mosses, lichens, and bark at nest sites high in ancient forests. A pair was observed through the scope at Ediz Hook in breeding plumage.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba* — Easily recognized in breeding season by dark plumage, conspicuous white

wing patches, and brilliant red feet, which flash vividly in flight. Nests in rock crevices and occasionally human-made structures. The most frequently encountered alcid close to shore in the Salish Sea. Seen several times, including excellent views from the pier at Fort Worden.

Common Murre *Uria aalge* — The most abundant breeding alcid in the Northern Hemisphere. Its pear-shaped egg is adapted to crowded cliff ledges, tending to roll in a tight arc rather than straight off the cliff. Shortly before fledging, the downy chick leaps from the nesting ledge and follows its father to sea while still flightless. The male then provides all parental care for several weeks offshore until the young bird becomes independent. Observed at Fort Worden, during the Strait of Juan de Fuca whale watch, and through spotting scopes at John Wayne Marina.

GULLS, TERNS, AND SKIMMERS: Laridae (5)

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* — North America's smallest regularly occurring gull. Graceful and buoyant in flight, it often appears more tern-like than other gulls, with quick, fluttering wingbeats and agile movements over the water. Unlike most gulls, it commonly nests in conifer trees within the boreal forest. Seen in huge numbers from Point Wilson, including at least one adult in breeding plumage showing the distinctive dark hood.

Short-billed Gull *Larus brachyrhynchus* — Formerly considered part of the Mew Gull complex before being recognized as a separate species. Smaller and more delicate than Glaucous-winged Gulls, it is often found inland during migration and winter. A few were observed during the tour at Fort Worden and Ediz Hook.

Western Gull *Larus occidentalis* — A characteristic gull of the Pacific Coast, breeding from Washington south to Baja California. Its dark slate-gray mantle, black wingtips, and bold white wingtip spots create a striking contrast with the paler Glaucous-winged Gulls often nearby. One was seen well at Dungeness Landing, allowing direct comparison with surrounding Glaucous-winged Gulls.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens* — The dominant large gull of the Salish Sea and Washington's outer coast. Unlike most gulls, it has pale gray wingtips rather than black ones. It hybridizes extensively with Western Gull, producing the familiar "Olympic Gull" complex that is common along Washington's coast and in the Salish Sea. Very common throughout the tour.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* — The world's largest tern, recognizable by its massive red bill and powerful flight. Its harsh, grating calls are often compared to the sound of a cat rather than the piercing cries of most terns. Several were seen and heard at Dungeness Landing and Three Crabs, where they plunged dramatically from the sky to capture fish.

GREBES: Podicipedidae (2)

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* — In breeding plumage, this striking grebe sports a black head adorned with brilliant golden feather tufts that sweep backward from the eye like horns. An accomplished diver, it pursues fish and aquatic invertebrates underwater using its lobed toes for propulsion. Seen in breeding plumage from Point Wilson.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* — The handsome breeding adult displays a rich chestnut neck, crisp black cap, and pale gray face. During courtship, pairs perform elaborate synchronized displays that include rushing across the water side by side and presenting aquatic vegetation to one another. Seen at Point Hudson.

LOONS: Gaviidae (2)

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* — One of the most elegant loons in breeding plumage, with a silvery-gray head, velvety black throat, and bold black-and-white vertical striping along the neck. Breeds on Arctic tundra lakes and spends the nonbreeding season along the Pacific Coast. Seen well from Point Wilson.

Common Loon *Gavia immer* — Famous for its haunting yodels, wails, and tremolos that echo across northern lakes. A powerful diver capable of pursuing fish to depths exceeding 200 feet. Breeding adults are among North

America's most striking birds, with checkered black-and-white plumage and a glossy black head and neck. One breeding-plumaged bird and one winter-plumaged bird were observed at Ediz Hook, while others in breeding plumage were seen riding low in the waters of the Salish Sea.

CORMORANTS AND SHAGS: Phalacrocoracidae (3)

Brandt's Cormorant *Urile penicillatus* — A large Pacific Coast cormorant recognized by its hefty bill and relatively short tail. Breeding adults develop striking cobalt-blue gular skin bordered by buffy-white filoplumes. Compared with Double-crested Cormorants, Brandt's shows far less orange-yellow facial skin and typically forages farther offshore. Compared with the slimmer Pelagic Cormorant, it is bulkier, heavier-billed, and lacks the latter's slender neck and long tail. Many were seen from Point Wilson and elsewhere along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Pelagic Cormorant *Urile pelagicus* — The smallest and most slender Pacific Northwest cormorant, with a thin bill, long tail, and graceful neck. Its glossy black plumage often shimmers with iridescent green and purple in favorable light. Breeding adults show distinctive white flank patches and fine white filoplumes on the head and neck. Observed many times, including close flybys at Ediz Hook and a colony flushing from nesting cliffs at Ruby Beach.

Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auritum* — A widespread and adaptable species that has expanded inland across much of North America. Adults show bright orange-yellow gular skin at the base of the bill, and breeding birds develop small white crests on either side of the head, giving the species its name. Frequently observed perched with wings spread in the classic "Count Dracula" pose, allowing their partially wettable feathers to dry after diving. This reduced waterproofing decreases buoyancy, making cormorants more efficient underwater hunters.

HERONS, EGRETS, AND BITTERNs: Ardeidae (1)

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* — The largest heron in North America, capable of swallowing surprisingly large fish, amphibians, and even small mammals. Its slow, deliberate wingbeats and tucked neck create a distinctive silhouette in flight. Seen stalking the wetlands at Three Crabs.

PELICANS: Pelecanidae (1)

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* — Famous for spectacular plunge-dives, folding its wings and dropping headfirst into the ocean from heights of up to 60 feet. Once endangered by DDT-related eggshell thinning, it has made a remarkable recovery along the Pacific Coast. Seen at Kalaloch in squadrons flying low above the waves of the outer coast.

NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae (1)

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* — Possesses one of the most highly developed senses of smell among birds, allowing it to locate carrion hidden beneath forest canopies. Often soars with wings held in a shallow V-shaped dihedral, rocking gently from side to side. Seen several times soaring on thermals. At Fort Worden, we watched a migrating kettle crossing between Port Townsend and Whidbey Island.

OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* — The world's most widespread fish-eating raptor, found on every continent except Antarctica. Equipped with reversible outer toes, spiny foot pads, and sharply curved talons, it is superbly adapted for catching slippery fish. Ospreys often plunge feet-first into the water and can carry fish long distances, typically orienting their prey headfirst in flight to reduce drag. Once severely affected by DDT-induced eggshell thinning, the species has rebounded dramatically across North America. Seen soaring over Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary and hunting over Kah Tai Lagoon.

HAWKS, EAGLES, AND KITES: Accipitridae (4)

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* — North America's smallest bird-hunting hawk, built for quick acceleration and maneuverability through trees. Although Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper's Hawk look famously similar in the field, current taxonomy no longer places them in the same genus: Sharp-shinned Hawk remains in *Accipiter*, while Cooper's Hawk is now *Astur cooperii*. The change follows molecular evidence showing that the old broad *Accipiter* was not a single natural lineage; the resemblance between Sharp-shinned and Cooper's reflects convergence in bird-hunting raptors more than close relationship. One was observed flying over Hurricane Ridge with Pine Siskins in hot pursuit, vigorously mobbing the predator.

Cooper's Hawk *Astur cooperii* — A woodland specialist built for speed and agility, capable of pursuing prey through dense vegetation at high speed. Frequently hunts songbirds around feeders and suburban neighborhoods. One flew overhead at Railroad Bridge in pursuit of a Bald Eagle.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* — Distinguished by its owl-like facial disk and buoyant, low flight over open country. Often hunts by sound as well as sight while coursing over fields and marshes. One was observed flying over Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* — One of North America's greatest conservation success stories, recovering dramatically after DDT restrictions and habitat protections. Both immature and adult birds were seen perched and in flight throughout the tour. Several flushed large flocks of American Wigeon and other waterbirds at Dungeness Landing and Three Crabs. An active nest containing an eaglet and attending adult was visible from our whale-watch vessel.

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae (1)

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* — One of the few North American birds in which the female is more colorful than the male, sporting an additional rusty breast band beneath the blue-gray chest band. A skilled fisher that often hovers briefly before plunging headfirst into the water after prey. Its loud, rattling call is a familiar sound along rivers, shorelines, and wetlands. Heard several times during the tour and seen well at Kah Tai Lagoon and Dungeness Landing.

WOODPECKERS: Picidae (4)

Red-breasted Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus ruber* — Perhaps the most challenging of the Olympic Peninsula's five regularly occurring woodpecker species to find. Rather than excavating deeply for insects, sapsuckers drill neat rows of sap wells and feed on the sap itself as well as the insects it attracts. These wells become an important food resource for many other species, including hummingbirds, chickadees, kinglets, warblers, and mammals. One sapsucker was encountered at Railroad Bridge Park, where it landed briefly on the trestle above us before flying to a nearby tree.

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* — North America's smallest woodpecker. Its diminutive size allows it to forage on slender branches, weed stems, and plant galls that larger woodpeckers cannot exploit. Seen at the feeders at Railroad Bridge Park.

Hairy Woodpecker *Dryobates villosus* — A powerful excavator with a long, chisel-like bill nearly equal in length to its head, distinguishing it from the superficially similar Downy Woodpecker. An important predator of wood-boring beetle larvae and other forest insects. Seen well in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary, and an adult accompanied by a recently fledged juvenile was observed at Ruby Beach.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* — Unusual among North American woodpeckers in spending much of its time foraging on the ground, where ants can comprise much of its diet. Its long, barbed tongue is specially adapted for extracting ants from soil and decaying wood. Olympic Peninsula birds belong to the western Red-shafted Flicker form, showing salmon-red wing and tail linings visible in flight. Seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary, a male was observed well perched along the Elwha River, and others were heard at several locations throughout the tour.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (2)

Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus* — A long-distance migrant that winters in South America and returns each spring to western forests. Named for its clear, whistled “pee-a-wee” song, which is a characteristic sound of summer woodlands. Seen pre-tour perched high in a treetop at Angle Lake Park, though it remained silent. Hard at Railroad Bridge Park.

Western Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis* — Part of the notoriously challenging *Empidonax* flycatcher complex, best identified by voice, habitat, and subtle structural features. Common in moist forests, where its emphatic “che-bek” song often rings through the understory. Seen in a treetop at Railroad Bridge Park and heard frequently in forests throughout the tour.

VIREOS: Vireonidae (1)

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus* (H) — A small, inconspicuous canopy-dweller whose rich, flowing song has been likened to a cheerful, uninterrupted warble. A long-distance migrant that winters in Mexico and Central America. Heard only during the tour.

CROWS, JAYS, AND MAGPIES: Corvidae (4)

Canada Jay *Perisoreus canadensis* — Stores thousands of food items each summer and autumn by gluing them beneath bark and among conifer needles with sticky saliva. These caches sustain the species through harsh northern winters and even support nesting during late winter when snow still blankets the landscape. One of these resourceful corvids was seen atop Hurricane Ridge.

Steller’s Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri* — Instantly recognizable by its dramatic crest and deep blue plumage. A bold and intelligent forest bird whose harsh calls often alert other species to predators, earning it a reputation as a watchman of the woods. Observed at close range in Steve and Amy’s backyard bird sanctuary and heard frequently in forested habitats.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos* — Renowned for its intelligence, memory, and social complexity. Family groups often cooperate to defend territories and help raise young from previous broods. Common throughout the tour. Heard and seen often.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* — Among the most intelligent birds in the world, capable of sophisticated problem-solving, tool use, play behavior, and vocal mimicry. Pairs often maintain lifelong bonds and defend territories year-round. We enjoyed watching these impressive corvids at Hurricane Ridge, where they hopped across alpine meadow and soared on mountain updrafts.

TITS, CHICKADEES, AND TITMICE: Paridae (2)

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus* — A remarkable survivor of northern winters. It can lower its body temperature at night to conserve energy and possesses extraordinary spatial memory for recovering thousands of cached seeds. Research has shown seasonal changes in the hippocampus, the region of the brain involved in memory and navigation. Common throughout the tour.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Poecile rufescens* — A characteristic bird of Pacific coastal forests, with a largely disjunct inland population in the northern Rocky Mountains. Its warm chestnut flanks and energetic behavior make it a favorite among birders of the Pacific Northwest. Seen well in Steve and Amy’s backyard bird sanctuary, and a pair was observed flying from a nesting cavity at Railroad Bridge Park. Heard and seen repeatedly during forest walks throughout the tour.

SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae (6)

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* — A glossy blue-green swallow with clean white underparts. Unlike the deeply forked-tailed Barn Swallow, it lacks a long tail streamers and shows a compact silhouette in flight. Tree Swallows readily nest in cavities and nest boxes and are among the earliest swallows to return north each spring. Seen at

the Elwha River.

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina* — One of the most beautiful North American swallows. In bright sunlight, its plumage flashes iridescent green, violet, and blue, while extensive white wrapping onto the sides of the rump helps distinguish it from Tree Swallow. Seen many times during the tour, from Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary to Kalaloch Lodge.

Purple Martin *Progne subis* — North America's largest swallow. In eastern North America it now nests almost entirely in human-provided housing, whereas western populations continue to use natural cavities and woodpecker holes as well as nest boxes. Males and females were seen at close range around nesting boxes on the pier at Fort Worden.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* — A subtly patterned brown swallow often identified by its plain appearance and habit of flying low over rivers and ponds. The species derives its name from tiny hooks on the outer wing feathers, detectable only in the hand. Seen flying over the Dungeness River at Railroad Bridge Park.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* — One of the world's most widespread birds, breeding on every continent except Antarctica. Readily identified by its deeply forked tail with long streamers, glossy blue upperparts, cinnamon underparts, and agile flight. Common at Fort Worden, the Elwha River, and Kalaloch.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* — Famous for building gourd-shaped mud nests in dense colonies beneath cliffs, bridges, and buildings. Distinguished from Barn Swallow by its square-ended tail, pale buff rump, pale forehead patch, and more fluttering flight. Seen at Kalaloch among numerous Barn Swallows. The contrast between the Barn Swallow's deeply forked tail and the Cliff Swallow's square-ended tail often provides the quickest field mark.

LONG-TAILED TITS: Aegithalidae (1)

Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus* — One of North America's smallest songbirds and among its most social, traveling in busy flocks that maintain constant contact through soft calls. Bushtits construct remarkable hanging nests woven from moss, lichens, plant fibers, and spider silk, creating an elastic pouch that can stretch as nestlings grow. Adult females have pale yellow eyes, while males have dark brown eyes. At Railroad Bridge Park, an active flock flitted among Ocean Spray shrubs, and we found two active nests suspended from branches.

KINGLETS: Regulidae (1)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa* — Weighing barely a quarter of an ounce, this tiny bird survives northern winters through an exceptionally high metabolic rate and dense insulating plumage. Despite its diminutive size, it regularly endures subfreezing temperatures. Seen pre-tour at Angle Lake Park, where adults were feeding recently fledged juveniles. Also heard in forests during the tour.

NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (1)

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* — Famous for its ability to climb headfirst down tree trunks, allowing it to inspect bark surfaces inaccessible to most other birds. Its nasal "yank-yank" calls are characteristic sounds of Pacific Northwest conifer forests. Seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary, at Railroad Bridge Park, and on Hurricane Ridge.

TREECREEPERS: Certhiidae (1)

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana* — Exquisitely camouflaged against tree bark, this species spirals upward along trunks while probing crevices with its decurved bill for insects and spiders. Nests are often tucked behind loose slabs of peeling bark, where they are exceptionally difficult to detect. One was observed creeping up a Bigleaf Maple at Railroad Bridge Park near an active nest concealed behind a flap of peeling bark.

WRENS: Troglodytidae (4)

Northern House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* (H) — A feisty cavity nester whose bubbly, energetic song seems far too powerful for such a small bird. Males often construct several incomplete “dummy nests,” allowing females to choose among potential nesting sites. Heard at the Elwha River.

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus* (H) — Despite weighing little more than a quarter ounce, this tiny forest bird delivers one of the most astonishing songs in North America: a long, cascading torrent of trills, whistles, and musical phrases that seems impossibly powerful for such a small creature. A single male may possess a repertoire of dozens of song variations. Heard in the Hoh Rain Forest and elsewhere during the tour, though unfortunately this elusive forest sprite never revealed itself.

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris* — A restless inhabitant of cattail marshes known for its bubbly songs and remarkable habit of constructing multiple nests, only some of which are used for breeding. Males may build numerous “dummy nests” within their territories, perhaps to attract mates or confuse predators. Seen well at Kah Tai Lagoon.

Bewick’s Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* — Recognizable by its long white eyebrow, cocked tail, and rich, varied song. Once widespread across much of eastern North America, it disappeared from most of its eastern range during the twentieth century, likely due to competition from House Wrens and habitat changes. Three individuals finally revealed themselves pre-tour at Angle Lake Park after a persistent search. Also heard and seen at Railroad Bridge Park.

DIPPERS: Cinclidae (1)

American Dipper *Cinclus mexicanus* — North America’s only truly aquatic songbird. Equipped with dense waterproof plumage, an enlarged preen gland, extra oxygen-carrying capacity in its blood, and protective nictitating membranes, it can walk and swim underwater in swift currents while searching for aquatic insects, fish eggs, and other prey. Dippers also feed on salmon eggs, linking these remarkable birds directly to the salmon cycle of Pacific Northwest rivers. Among the highlights of the tour were watching adults feed begging juveniles along the Dungeness River, where the flashing white nictitating membranes were clearly visible, and observing several birds foraging among the rushing waters near Sol Duc Falls.

STARLINGS: Sturnidae (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (I) — Introduced to New York City's Central Park in 1890, it has since become one of the continent's most abundant and successful birds. In breeding plumage, adults show iridescent green and purple gloss highlighted by bright yellow bills. Common at Angle Lake Park, Fort Worden, Point Hudson, and Kalaloch.

THRUSHES AND ALLIES: Turdidae (3)

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius* — Sometimes called the “forest robin” of the Pacific Northwest, it is closely associated with dense conifer forests. Its haunting, single-pitched whistle is one of the signature sounds of coastal rainforests. Neighboring males often sing at different pitches, creating the ethereal, bell-like effect that echoes through Pacific Northwest forests. A few participants spotted one along the trail to Sol Duc Falls; everyone enjoyed excellent views and heard one singing in the Hoh Rain Forest.

Swainson’s Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* — A long-distance migrant that winters primarily in Central and South America. Its ethereal upward-spiraling song is among the most beautiful sounds of North American forests, though our bird near Madison Falls remained silent and had not yet begun singing.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* — One of North America's most familiar birds, often regarded as a harbinger of spring. Although commonly associated with lawns and suburban neighborhoods, robins thrive in an astonishing variety of habitats, from beaches and riparian woodlands to old-growth forests and mountain meadows. Seen frequently throughout the tour in habitats ranging from backyard feeders to coastal shorelines,

demonstrating the remarkable adaptability that has made this species one of the continent's most successful songbirds.

WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae (1)

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* — Famous for passing berries or flower petals from bird to bird before one individual finally consumes the item. Because they often feed heavily on fruit, waxwings occasionally become intoxicated from fermented berries. The waxy red tips on the wing feathers that give the species its name are actually modified feather structures. Spotted atop trees along the Dungeness River Dike Trail.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae (1)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (1) — Introduced to North America in the 1850s from Europe, this species has become one of the world's most successful human associates. Genetic and archaeological evidence suggests House Sparrows have been linked to humans since the beginnings of agriculture roughly 10,000 years ago, evolving alongside farming settlements and exploiting grain crops and human-built structures. Observed at Railroad Bridge Park, downtown Port Angeles, and SeaTac.

FINCHES, EUPHONIAS, AND ALLIES: Fringillidae (5)

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* — Originally native to western North America, including California and the Southwest. Birds released on Long Island, New York, in the 1940s after being sold illegally as “Hollywood Finches” founded the eastern population, which subsequently spread across much of eastern North America. At the same time, urbanization, ornamental plantings, and bird feeders helped the species expand northward and become increasingly common across many parts of its native western range. Now widespread and abundant throughout the Pacific Northwest, including the Olympic Peninsula. Males acquire their red plumage from carotenoid pigments in their diet, and brighter individuals are often thought to signal superior foraging ability and overall condition. Seen at Angle Lake Park, Fort Worden, Railroad Bridge Park, and Kalaloch, where exceptionally bright red males were observed.

Purple Finch *Haemorhous purpureus* — Often described as a bird that looks as though it was “dipped in raspberry juice,” the male's rich rosy coloration washes across much of the body rather than being confined to the head and breast as in House Finch. Its rich warbling song is a characteristic sound of Pacific Northwest forests. Heard frequently during the tour and seen in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary, at Railroad Bridge Park, and at Kalaloch.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* — Possesses one of the most specialized bills in the bird world, with crossed mandibles uniquely adapted for extracting seeds from conifer cones. Multiple call types occur across North America, each associated with particular conifer species. The Olympic Peninsula is best known for the Sitka Spruce-associated Type 10 crossbill, which has a larger bill adapted for opening the thick scales of Sitka Spruce cones. One was observed in a low Sitka Spruce at Kalaloch.

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus* — A highly nomadic finch whose movements are tied to fluctuating conifer seed crops. In years of poor cone production, large numbers may irrupt far beyond their normal range. Seen at Hurricane Ridge, where a flock was vigorously mobbing a Sharp-shinned Hawk in flight.

American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis* — Washington's state bird. Unlike most North American songbirds, it delays nesting until midsummer, timing reproduction to coincide with the abundance of thistle and other composite seeds used to feed its young. Males in breeding plumage are among the most brilliantly colored birds of North America. Seen well in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary and at Railroad Bridge Park.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (5)

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* — Often nicknamed the “snowbird” because large numbers appear in many parts of North America during winter, though many populations breed in the Pacific Northwest. The Oregon

form predominates on the Olympic Peninsula. Their dark hoods, flashing white outer tail feathers, and distinctive alarm call—resembling two pebbles clicking together—make them easy to recognize. Common throughout the tour, often feeding in flocks.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* — Young birds learn their songs from neighboring adults, producing distinct regional dialects that can differ markedly across western North America. Seen frequently and heard almost constantly throughout the tour.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* — A widespread sparrow of grasslands, meadows, shorelines, and other open habitats, named after Savannah, Georgia, where the type specimen was collected. Its song ends with a distinctive insect-like buzz, often the quickest clue to its identity. Curiously, the scientific name *sandwichensis* derives not from a sandwich but from Sandwich Sound, the former name for Alaska's Cook Inlet, where an Alaskan specimen used in early taxonomic work was collected. That odd combination of a Georgia common name and an Alaskan scientific name makes Savannah Sparrow one of the more curiously named birds in North America. Seen well perched and singing at Fort Worden.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* — One of North America's most geographically variable songbirds, with 25 currently recognized subspecies differing in size, plumage, and song across the continent. Pacific Northwest birds are among the darkest forms, heavily streaked and richly colored compared with the pale desert populations of the Southwest. Seen repeatedly and heard singing at numerous locations throughout the tour.

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus* — Famous for its vigorous two-footed scratching behavior, often called the "Towhee two-step," used to uncover seeds and insects beneath leaf litter. Its buzzy song and catlike "mew" call were heard frequently, and a few birds were seen well at Railroad Bridge Park, showing their striking red eyes.

TROUPIALS AND ALLIES: Icteridae (3)

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* — One of North America's most abundant and familiar birds. Males fiercely defend marsh territories, flashing their scarlet-and-yellow shoulder patches while delivering their liquid "conk-la-ree" song. Numerous males and a few females were observed at Kah Tai Lagoon and along the Dungeness River Dike Trail.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* — An obligate brood parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of more than 200 other bird species. Historically associated with the vast bison herds of the Great Plains, cowbirds followed grazing mammals to feed on insects flushed by their movements. Because frequent movement made nesting difficult, they evolved their remarkable reproductive strategy of leaving parental duties to other birds. Seen at the Elwha River and Railroad Bridge Park.

Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus* — Common in open country and human-altered landscapes throughout western North America. In good light, males display spectacular iridescent purple, green, and blue plumage despite appearing black at a distance. Seen in open habitats around Sequim while traveling between birding locations.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (5)

Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata* — Despite its name, the orange crown patch is rarely visible in the field. A common breeding warbler of shrubby habitats whose sweet, accelerating song was heard frequently. Seen and heard many times during the tour.

MacGillivray's Warbler *Geothlypis tolmiei* — Typically a secretive bird of dense undergrowth, often heard far more frequently than seen. We were fortunate to enjoy good views of this normally elusive species in the open at the Elwha River while also hearing its distinctive song.

Northern Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia* — A brilliant splash of yellow in riparian woodlands and wetlands. Males sing the familiar "sweet-sweet-sweet, I'm-so-sweet" song and frequently build nests in willows and other waterside shrubs. Seen along the Dungeness River Dike Trail.

Black-throated Gray Warbler *Setophaga nigrescens* — One of the most striking western warblers, with a bold

black-and-white facial pattern. Heard frequently during the tour but difficult to observe; one was glimpsed low in vegetation at Barnes Point near Lake Crescent.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla* — A bright yellow warbler distinguished by its small black cap and energetic foraging behavior. Breeds in shrubby wetlands and streamside thickets throughout the Pacific Northwest. Heard and seen several times during the tour, from Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary to Ruby Beach.

CARDINALS AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae (2)

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* — One of the most dazzling songbirds of western forests. A male was seen glowing like a flame atop a cottonwood against a brilliant blue sky at Railroad Bridge Park on the final full day of the tour. The intensity of a male's yellow and orange plumage depends largely on carotenoid pigments obtained from its diet, and older males are often brighter than younger birds. During the breeding season, Western Tanagers feed heavily on insects, including beetles, ants, caterpillars, bees, and wasps. They are known to remove the stingers from bees and wasps before consuming them.

Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus* — Possessing one of the richest and most beautiful songs in western North America, often compared to that of an American Robin but sweeter, more fluid, and more musical. Despite its massive seed-crushing bill, it consumes large numbers of insects during the breeding season, including monarch butterfly caterpillars and adults that many other birds avoid because of their toxins. Seen well in Steve and Amy's backyard bird sanctuary and also observed at Railroad Bridge Park, where its wonderful song drifted through the cottonwoods.

MAMMALS — (14)

RODENTS: Rodentia

Townsend's Chipmunk *Neotamias townsendii* — Encountered in forested habitats. This energetic chipmunk stores seeds, berries, fungi, and other foods in underground caches and is often active along woodland trails. It also plays an important role in dispersing the spores of mycorrhizal fungi that help sustain forest ecosystems. One was seen near our picnic area at Kalaloch Campground.

Douglas Squirrel *Tamiasciurus douglasii* — This tiny but feisty squirrel, often called a "chickaree," was seen in Steve and Amy's backyard and heard scolding us from conifer forests throughout the tour. Individuals may harvest and cache thousands of conifer cones each year, creating large cone piles known as middens that can persist for decades and sometimes be used by successive generations of squirrels.

Olympic Marmot *Marmota olympus* (E) — Endemic to the Olympic Peninsula and found nowhere else on Earth. One was spotted distantly through a scope, while another scurried through a trail culvert at close range. These charismatic members of the squirrel family hibernate for up to eight months each year and are considered a flagship species of Olympic National Park.

North American Beaver *Castor canadensis* — Glimpsed at the Dungeness River Dike Trail, where we enjoyed excellent views of North America's largest rodent. Beavers are ecosystem engineers whose dams slow water, reduce downstream flooding, trap sediment, recharge groundwater, and create wetlands that support fish, amphibians, birds, and countless other species. Their orange incisors contain iron-rich enamel, allowing them to gnaw through surprisingly large trees.

CARNIVORES: Carnivora

American Black Bear *Ursus americanus* — One of the highlights of the tour. We observed six bears atop Hurricane Ridge, including a mother with two cubs feeding at close range on grasses, sedges, and wildflowers. Despite their reputation as predators, black bears are largely herbivorous for much of the year.

and take advantage of the nutrient-rich flush of subalpine vegetation after snowmelt.

North American River Otter *Lontra canadensis* — Two sleek otters were observed swimming in a lagoon at Ediz Hook. Unlike the more rotund Sea Otter, River Otters divide their time between fresh and salt water and are agile hunters capable of chasing fish underwater with remarkable speed.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* — Seen twice in Pacific surf, once from Kalaloch Lodge and once near the Tree of Life. Possessing the densest fur in the animal kingdom—up to a million hairs per square inch—Sea Otters were nearly exterminated by the fur trade. Their recovery is one of North America's great conservation success stories and helps maintain healthy kelp forests by controlling sea urchin populations.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina* — Frequently encountered throughout the tour, including exceptionally close views at John Wayne Marina. In European folklore, this species inspired stories of selkies—seals that shed their skins and become human.

California Sea Lion *Zalophus californianus* — Large pinnipeds observed loafing on docks in Port Townsend and heard barking at Kalaloch Beach. Larger than Harbor Seals but smaller and darker than Steller Sea Lions, males develop a prominent forehead crest and can weigh more than 800 pounds.

CETACEANS: Cetacea

Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* — A shy cetacean glimpsed in the Strait of Juan de Fuca during our whale watch. Unlike dolphins, porpoises lack a beak and have triangular dorsal fins. Their brief, low-profile surfacings make them surprisingly difficult to spot despite being common.

Orca (Killer Whale) *Orcinus orca* — One of the tour's most memorable wildlife encounters came during our whale watch in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, when we observed the T49A pod led by the matriarch "Nan." A young calf traveled close beside its older brother, a "sprouter"—a juvenile male whose dorsal fin has begun the dramatic growth that will eventually produce the towering fin of an adult bull.

The world's largest dolphin, the Orca is an apex predator whose Pacific Northwest populations possess distinct cultures, dialects, diets, and hunting traditions passed from generation to generation. Among the Bigg's (transient) Orcas we observed, calves remain closely bonded to their mothers for life, learning specialized hunting techniques and social behaviors from their family pod.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* — A whale known to researchers as "Scuttle" was observed near San Juan Island. Humpbacks are identified by unique markings on the underside of their tail flukes. Their enormous pectoral fins—the longest of any whale, reaching nearly one-third of body length—give them remarkable agility. They are famous for cooperative bubble-net feeding, in which groups create curtains of bubbles to corral fish before lunging upward with mouths agape.

EVEN-TOED UNGULATES: Artiodactyla

Columbian Black-tailed Deer *Odocoileus hemionus columbianus* — This coastal subspecies of Mule Deer is adapted to dense forests and differs genetically and ecologically from interior populations. Seen at close range in Port Townsend, atop Hurricane Ridge, and in the Hoh Rain Forest.

Roosevelt Elk *Cervus canadensis roosevelti* — The largest elk in North America, with mature bulls sometimes exceeding 1,000 pounds. Numerous cows, calves, and a young bull were seen along the road into the Hoh Rain Forest. Their protection was one of the principal motivations behind the creation of Olympic National Park, and autumn bugles remain one of the Pacific Northwest's great wildlife sounds.

OTHER SPECIES (Some species that intrigued our group—not a comprehensive list)

RAY-FINNED FISHES: Actinopterygii

Tidepool Sculpin *Oligocottus maculosus* — Observed among the tidepools at Ruby Beach. These small but hardy fish can tolerate dramatic swings in temperature, salinity, and oxygen levels as tides rise and fall. Their mottled coloration can darken or lighten to match surrounding rocks and algae, helping them avoid predators.

AMPHIBIANS: Amphibia

Western Toad *Anaxyrus boreas* — Seen in Steve's backyard. Unlike many frogs, toads spend much of their lives on land and rely on toxic skin secretions for defense. During spring breeding season, thousands may gather at ponds and wetlands, where their long strings of eggs can stretch for many feet through shallow water.

ECHINODERMS: Echinodermata

Ochre Sea Star *Pisaster ochraceus* — A keystone predator of Pacific Northwest rocky shores. At Ruby Beach we found individuals ranging from deep purple to brilliant orange. By prying open and consuming mussels, these sea stars prevent a single species from monopolizing the shoreline, helping maintain the extraordinary diversity of tidepool communities.

Six-rayed Sea Star *Leptasterias hexactis* — A small sea star discovered in a tidepool at Ruby Beach. Unlike many sea stars that release eggs and sperm into the water and produce free-swimming larvae, females brood their developing young beneath their bodies. The juveniles emerge as tiny sea stars, bypassing the planktonic larval stage altogether.

Sand Dollar *Dendraster excentricus* — We found the white tests scattered along Kalaloch Beach. Living sand dollars are covered with tiny purple-brown spines that transport food toward the mouth. Their intricate feeding apparatus, known as Aristotle's lantern, contains five teeth used to process food particles. Buried beneath the sand, thousands often occur together in vast underwater beds. To help resist waves and currents, they selectively concentrate dense mineral grains—including magnetite—in their bodies, while their flattened shape aids both stability and burrowing in shifting sands.

ARTHROPODS: Arthropoda

CRUSTACEANS: Crustacea

Acorn Barnacles (*Subclass Cirripedia*) — These seemingly motionless animals are highly specialized crustaceans that feed by sweeping feathery appendages called cirri through the water. Charles Darwin spent eight years studying barnacles, whose remarkable reproductive biology—including widespread hermaphroditism—helped refine his ideas about variation, adaptation, and evolution.

Gooseneck Barnacle *Pollicipes polymerus* — Clinging to wave-battered rocks, these stalked crustaceans seem otherworldly. During the Middle Ages, some Europeans believed that Barnacle Geese emerged from gooseneck barnacles because the birds nested in the Arctic, far beyond the knowledge of most observers, and seemed to appear each winter without explanation. Common on exposed rocky shores throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Pelagic Gooseneck Barnacle *Lepas* spp. — Found attached to floating debris collected from the ocean. Once submerged, they revived and extended feathery feeding appendages called cirri into the water. Unlike their rocky-shore relatives, these barnacles spend their entire lives drifting across the oceans attached to logs, buoys, seaweed, pumice, and other floating objects.

Thatched Barnacle *Semibalanus cariosus* — Larger than most acorn barnacles and easily recognized by their

thick, ridged shells resembling miniature thatched roofs. They dominate exposed rocky coastlines where powerful waves exclude many competitors.

Dungeness Crab *Metacarcinus magister* — Shells and molts found along the shore provided an opportunity to distinguish dead crabs from shed exoskeletons. The species takes its common name from Dungeness, Washington, where the first commercial fishery for the crab developed in the mid-1800s. The community itself was named “New Dungeness” by Captain George Vancouver in 1792 because the long sand spit reminded him of the Dungeness headland on the coast of Kent, England. Today, this species supports one of the Pacific Coast’s most valuable commercial fisheries.

Purple Shore Crab *Hemigrapsus nudus* — Common among rocky tidepools and easily recognized by its mottled purple coloration. These agile scavengers retreat beneath rocks at low tide and emerge to feed as the tide returns.

Sea Slater (Marine Isopod) (Order Isopoda) — A large marine isopod found among the rocks at Ruby Beach demonstrated that pillbugs have impressive ocean-going relatives. These flattened crustaceans graze algae and decaying organic matter, helping recycle nutrients along the shoreline. They thrive in the harsh intertidal zone, where waves, drying winds, and rapidly changing temperatures create challenging conditions for life.

MOLLUSKS: Mollusca

Black Katy Chiton *Katharina tunicata* — One of the most conspicuous chitons at Ruby Beach. These ancient mollusks possess eight overlapping shell plates that allow them to flex and conform tightly to irregular rock surfaces while withstanding pounding surf. Black Katy Chitons graze algae from rocks using a rasping tongue-like structure called a radula.

Hairy Chiton *Mopalia ciliata* — Easily identified by the dense fringe of bristles surrounding its shell plates. These armored grazers use a ribbon-like radula covered with magnetite-hardened teeth to scrape algae from rocks.

Lined Chiton *Tonicella lineata* — A beautifully patterned species whose shell plates display intricate red and green markings. Like other chitons, it belongs to an ancient molluscan lineage that has inhabited Earth's oceans for hundreds of millions of years, long before the appearance of dinosaurs.

Limpets (Order *Patellogastropoda*) — Cone-shaped shells conceal surprisingly mobile grazers. Limpets often return to the same resting spot after feeding excursions, gradually grinding a perfectly fitted “home scar” into the rock. They are a favorite prey of the Black Oystercatcher, whose powerful bill is adapted for removing them from exposed shorelines.

Whelks (Superfamily *Buccinoidea*) — Predatory snails observed in a remarkable range of colors, from ivory white to vivid orange. Whelks drill into or pry apart other mollusks and are among the dominant predators of many rocky shore communities.

California Mussel *Mytilus californianus* — Forming dense beds on wave-battered rocks, this large bivalve is one of the foundation species of Pacific Northwest rocky shores. Mussels anchor themselves with remarkably strong byssal threads, whose adhesive properties have inspired biomedical research. They are a favorite food of Black Oystercatchers, Sea Stars, and many other coastal predators.

Blue Mussel *Mytilus* spp. — Smaller and typically smoother-shelled than California Mussels, blue mussels often occur in protected bays, estuaries, and sheltered rocky habitats. Complex hybridization between native and introduced species makes identification challenging in some areas of the Pacific Northwest.

Piddocks (Family *Pholadidae*) — The sandstone boulders at Kalaloch Beach were perforated by countless piddock burrows, creating a striking Swiss-cheese texture. These specialized clams excavate soft rock using rasp-like ridges on their shells, then spend their lives protected within the burrows they create, extending siphons to the surface to filter-feed. Their handiwork is a vivid example of animals reshaping the very geology of the shoreline.

Banana Slug *Ariolimax columbianus* — Encountered in the Hoh Rain Forest and along the Big Cedar Trail. These iconic Pacific Northwest slugs produce copious mucus that aids movement, prevents dehydration, and discourages predators. They also play an important ecological role by recycling nutrients and dispersing fungal spores. Sadly, only Steve agreed to participate in the traditional Pacific Northwest rite of passage: kissing a Banana Slug.

CNIDARIANS: Cnidaria

Aggregating Anemone *Anthopleura elegantissima* — Forming colorful carpets across rocky tidepools at Ruby Beach, these animals often consist of thousands of genetically identical clones. Neighboring colonies wage “clone wars” using specialized stinging structures, creating the bare-rock no-man’s-land boundaries we observed between rival colonies.

Giant Green Anemone *Anthopleura xanthogrammica* — Bright green tentacles give this predator the appearance of an underwater flower, but each tentacle is armed with stinging cells used to capture small invertebrates and other prey. Much of the brilliant green coloration comes from symbiotic algae living within its tissues.

Crystal Jelly *Aequorea victoria* — Observed pulsing beneath the pier at Fort Worden. This delicate jelly helped revolutionize modern biology through the discovery of Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP), a glowing molecule now widely used in medical and genetic research.

By-the-Wind Sailor *Velella velella* — Sun-bleached, desiccated remains of these remarkable colonial hydrozoans were scattered across Kalaloch Beach. Despite their jellyfish-like appearance, each "sailor" is actually a floating colony of specialized polyps. A transparent sail catches the wind and propels the colony across the ocean surface, where it feeds on plankton with stinging tentacles. Strong onshore winds periodically drive vast numbers ashore, sometimes carpeting Pacific beaches in blue.

PLANTS: Plantae

BRYOPHYTES: Bryophyta

Mosses (Bryophyta) — Draping the branches of Bigleaf Maples in the Hoh Rain Forest, these luxuriant mats help create the cathedral-like appearance of Olympic Peninsula rainforests. Common species included **Oregon Beaked Moss** (*Kindbergia oregana*), **Cat-tail Moss** (*Isoetecium myosuroides*), and **Menzies' Tree Moss** (*Antitrichia curtipendula*), which cloak trunks and limbs in thick green curtains. Unlike parasites, these mosses obtain water and nutrients directly from rain, fog, and airborne dust rather than from the trees themselves. The resulting hanging gardens provide habitat for countless invertebrates, retain moisture, and support ferns, liverworts, lichens, and Oregon Spikemoss high above the forest floor. On the forest floor, **Step Moss** (*Hylocomium splendens*) formed lush carpets whose layered annual growth resembles a miniature staircase.

VASCULAR PLANTS: Tracheophyta

LYCOPHYTES: Lycopodiophyta

SPIKEMOSSES: Selaginellaceae

Oregon Spikemoss *Selaginella oregana* — Despite its moss-like appearance, this epiphytic lycophyte is an ancient vascular plant, not a true moss. Its bright green, feathery sprays often drape from moss-

covered branches of Bigleaf Maples, contributing to the hanging gardens that make the Hoh Rain Forest so distinctive. Numerous plants were observed along the Hall of Mosses Trail.

FERNS AND HORSETAILS: Polypodiopsida

HORSETAILS: Equisetaceae

Horsetail (Scouring Rush) *Equisetum hyemale* — A living representative of an ancient vascular plant lineage that once included tree-sized relatives in the coal-swamp forests of the Paleozoic Era. Rich in silica, the stems were traditionally used for polishing wood, bone, and metal.

CHAIN FERNS: Blechnaceae

Deer Fern *Blechnum spicant* — Easily recognized by its two distinct frond types: broad sterile fronds that spread outward and narrow fertile fronds that stand upright, releasing spores into the forest air.

WOOD FERNS: Dryopteridaceae

Sword Fern *Polystichum munitum* — One of the signature plants of Pacific Northwest forests. Dense evergreen fronds blanket the understory and were traditionally used for bedding, food storage, and ceremonial purposes.

LADY FERNS: Athyriaceae

Lady Fern *Athyrium filix-femina* — One of the most graceful and delicate ferns of Pacific Northwest forests. Its finely divided, lacy fronds often form elegant arching clumps along moist trails, streambanks, and forest openings. Unlike evergreen Sword Fern, Lady Fern typically dies back each winter and re-emerges from underground rhizomes in spring. We encountered several thriving in the cool, damp understory of the Hoh Rain Forest, where their soft texture contrasted beautifully with the bolder fronds of Sword Fern and Deer Fern.

POLYPODY FERNS: Polypodiaceae

Licorice Fern *Polypodium glycyrrhiza* — A familiar fern of Pacific Northwest rainforests, often growing as an epiphyte on moss-covered Bigleaf Maples and other trees. Its creeping rhizomes contain a sweet compound that gives the plant its common name and distinctive licorice-like flavor. During dry summer months the fronds often shrivel and appear dead, only to rehydrate and become lush green again with the return of autumn and winter rains. We observed this species growing among the moss-draped branches and trunks of the Hoh Rain Forest.

GYMNOSPERMS: Pinophyta

PINES, SPRUCES, FIRS, AND HEMLOCKS: Pinaceae

Douglas-fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* — Despite its name, not a true fir. Its cones bear distinctive three-pointed bracts often likened to the tails and hind legs of mice hiding beneath the scales. One of North America's most important timber and wildlife trees.

Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis* — The world's largest spruce and a defining tree of the Pacific coast. Its exceptionally strong yet lightweight wood was prized for aircraft construction and remains highly valued for musical instruments. The flaky bark often resembles potato chips.

Western Hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla* — Washington's state tree and the dominant conifer of many mature coastal forests. Its drooping leader, delicate branch tips, and furrowed “bacon-strip” bark are among its most recognizable features.

CYPRESSES AND CEDARS: Cupressaceae

Western Redcedar *Thuja plicata* — Revered by many Indigenous peoples as the “Tree of Life.” Its wood, bark, roots, and branches provided materials for canoes, baskets, clothing, longhouses, and ceremonial objects. Some individuals live for more than a millennium.

ANGIOSPERMS: Magnoliophyta

MONOCOTS

LILY FAMILY: Liliaceae

Glacier Lily *Erythronium grandiflorum* — One of the first wildflowers to emerge after snowmelt in the subalpine meadows of Hurricane Ridge. Its nodding yellow flowers often carpet hillsides shortly after winter's retreat, providing an important early nectar source for pollinating insects. Olympic Marmots readily consume the leaves and flowers; we watched one marmot feeding on Glacier Lilies amid the blooming meadows of Hurricane Ridge.

Western Trillium *Trillium ovatum* — We encountered this elegant woodland wildflower along the Sol Duc Falls trail. Fresh flowers open pure white but gradually age through shades of pink and lavender as they are pollinated, making older blooms appear strikingly different from newly opened ones. The color change likely serves as a signal to pollinators that a flower has already been visited and is becoming less rewarding. Like many forest spring ephemerals, trilliums take years to reach flowering age and can live for decades in undisturbed forests.

ASPARAGUS FAMILY: Asparagaceae

Common Camas (Blue Camas) *Camassia quamash* — One of the most culturally important wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest. Vast camas prairies once covered parts of the Salish Sea region, and Indigenous peoples carefully tended and harvested the nutritious bulbs for thousands of years. One was in full bloom in Steve and Amy's front yard.

ARUM FAMILY: Araceae

Western Skunk Cabbage *Lysichiton americanus* — One of the first wildflowers of spring. Its brilliant yellow spathe brightens wetlands and rainforest seeps, surrounding a flower-bearing spike that emits a pungent odor attractive to flies and beetles. The plant thrives in saturated soils and is a characteristic species of Pacific Northwest wetlands and rainforests.

EUDICOTS

MAPLES: Sapindaceae

Bigleaf Maple *Acer macrophyllum* — Possessing the largest leaves of any maple in North America, this iconic tree helps define the character of Olympic Peninsula rainforests. In the Hoh Rain Forest its broad limbs become draped with luxuriant mosses, liverworts, Oregon Spikemoss, and Licorice Fern, transforming entire trees into hanging gardens that capture moisture from the region's abundant rainfall and fog.

Vine Maple *Acer circinatum* — More often a sprawling shrub than a tree, Vine Maple arches gracefully across forest openings and stream corridors. Its flexible stems may root where they touch the ground, forming elegant leafy tunnels. Brilliant autumn colors make it one of the Pacific Northwest's most beloved native plants. Curiously, we encountered one near Lake Crescent Lodge already ablaze with crimson foliage while the surrounding forest remained thoroughly springlike.

BIRCH FAMILY: Betulaceae

Red Alder *Alnus rubra* — The Pacific Northwest's most important nitrogen-fixing tree. Symbiotic *Frankia* bacteria in root nodules enrich soils and accelerate forest recovery after disturbance. Unlike most deciduous trees, alder leaves often fall while still green, returning nitrogen-rich material directly to the soil.

CARROT FAMILY: Apiaceae

Cow Parsnip *Heracleum maximum* — A giant member of the carrot family with broad leaves and umbrella-like flower clusters. Indigenous peoples harvested the young stems as food, though the sap can cause skin irritation when exposed to sunlight.

GINSENG FAMILY: Araliaceae

Devil's Club *Oplopanax horridus* — One of the iconic shrubs of Pacific Northwest rainforests. Armed with formidable spines, it was widely used medicinally by Indigenous peoples and produces berries eagerly consumed by bears.

PEA FAMILY: Fabaceae

Lupine *Lupinus* spp. — Brilliant spikes of blue, violet, and purple flowers were beginning to brighten the roadsides and subalpine meadows atop Hurricane Ridge. Like many members of the pea family, lupines harbor nitrogen-fixing bacteria within root nodules, enriching mountain soils and helping prepare disturbed ground for other plant species. Their nectar-rich blossoms attract a variety of native pollinators, especially bumblebees, whose weight depresses the flower's keel petals and triggers the release of pollen onto their bodies as they forage for nectar.

Scotch Broom *Cytisus scoparius* — The brilliant yellow flowers were impossible to miss along roadsides and disturbed habitats throughout the Olympic Peninsula. Introduced from Europe, this invasive shrub spreads aggressively, shades out native vegetation, alters soil chemistry through nitrogen fixation, and can inhibit the recovery of native plant communities. Despite its beauty, it is one of the Pacific Northwest's most problematic invasive species.

HEATH FAMILY: Ericaceae

Pacific Madrone *Arbutus menziesii* — Instantly recognizable by its smooth reddish bark, which peels away in thin sheets to reveal fresh pistachio-green bark beneath. Its berries provide important winter food for thrushes, waxwings, and other birds.

Pacific Rhododendron *Rhododendron macrophyllum* — Washington's state flower was in spectacular bloom during our tour, painting roadsides and forest edges with large clusters of pink blossoms. A member of the heath family, it thrives in acidic soils and can live for many decades.

Salal *Gaultheria shallon* — Produces edible dark berries and leathery evergreen leaves. Its foliage remains economically important today because it is widely harvested for the floral industry.

Evergreen Huckleberry *Vaccinium ovatum* — Glossy evergreen leaves and sweet dark berries make this one of the Northwest's most beloved shrubs. The fruits feed wildlife and remain popular in pies, jams, and desserts.

Red Huckleberry *Vaccinium parvifolium* — Frequently rooted atop rotting stumps and fallen logs, creating the illusion of shrubs growing from trees. Its translucent red berries are relished by birds, bears, and people alike.

HONEYSUCKLE FAMILY: Caprifoliaceae

Twinberry Honeysuckle *Lonicera involucrata* — A common shrub of moist forests and stream

corridors, recognized by its paired black berries framed by striking red bracts. The tubular yellow flowers are especially attractive to hummingbirds and native bees. Several grow in Steve and Amy's backyard, where they are frequent destinations for foraging pollinators.

BROOMRAPE FAMILY: Orobanchaceae

Paintbrush *Castilleja* spp. — Among the most colorful wildflowers of Hurricane Ridge, paintbrushes illuminated the roadsides with vivid scarlet floral bracts. Although often mistaken for petals, the colorful structures are modified leaves surrounding the inconspicuous flowers. Paintbrushes are hemiparasites, obtaining some water and nutrients from neighboring plants through specialized root connections while also producing their own food through photosynthesis.

ROSE FAMILY: Rosaceae

Oceanspray *Holodiscus discolor* — A common shrub with frothy clusters of cream-colored flowers. Its exceptionally hard wood was traditionally used for arrows, digging sticks, and other tools. Bushtits frequently glean insects from its flowers and foliage.

Baldhip Rose *Rosa gymnocarpa* — Named for its distinctive rose hips, which lack the persistent sepals found on most roses. The fruits persist into autumn and provide food for birds and mammals.

Nootka Rose *Rosa nutkana* — Produces large pink flowers followed by bright red hips rich in vitamin C. It thrives along shorelines, forest edges, and open meadows throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Salmonberry *Rubus spectabilis* — One of the first berries to ripen each year. Its orange-to-red fruits provide an important seasonal food source for birds, bears, and other wildlife emerging from winter. We admired its fuchsia flowers, and Steve sampled an early berry that was not yet fully ripe.

MORNING GLORY FAMILY: Convolvulaceae

Pacific Dodder *Cuscuta pacifica* — Seen as bright orange strands draped over coastal vegetation. This remarkable parasitic plant contains little chlorophyll and taps directly into host plants using specialized structures called haustoria, obtaining water and nutrients from its hosts rather than producing all its own. Seen covering portions of the salt marsh at Three Crabs.

FOUR O'CLOCK FAMILY: Nyctaginaceae

Yellow Sand Verbena *Abronia latifolia* — We admired this sprawling coastal wildflower in bloom near Point Wilson at Fort Worden. Its clusters of bright yellow flowers attract a variety of native pollinators, while its thick leaves help it withstand salt spray and shifting sands. Much effort by local native plant enthusiasts and conservation groups has helped protect and restore this species in its native dune habitat.

CACTUS FAMILY: Cactaceae

Brittle Pricklypear *Opuntia fragilis* — One of the most surprising native plants of the Olympic Peninsula. We saw this small cactus at Steve and Amy's house before driving through a rainshadow forest near Port Townsend, where annual precipitation is low enough to support species more commonly associated with the interior West. Its flattened stem segments break off readily—hence the name “brittle”—and can root wherever they land, allowing the plant to spread

vegetatively. The presence of a native cactus less than an hour's drive from moss-draped rainforest illustrates the extraordinary ecological diversity of the Olympic Peninsula.

THRIFT FAMILY: Plumbaginaceae

Sea Thrift *Armeria maritima* — Cushions of narrow leaves topped with globe-shaped clusters of pink flowers brightened the Three Crabs shoreline during our visit. This salt-tolerant species thrives where ocean winds and salt spray exclude most other flowering plants.

AMARANTH FAMILY: Amaranthaceae

Pickleweed *Salicornia* spp. — A succulent specialist of salt marshes, sometimes called “sea asparagus.” It stores water within its stems and tolerates salt concentrations that would kill most other plants. We admired it at Three Crabs, and several participants sampled its pleasantly salty stems.

ALGAE

BROWN ALGAE: Phaeophyceae

Bull Kelp *Nereocystis luetkeana* — A giant brown alga capable of growing more than a foot per day, making it one of the fastest-growing organisms on Earth. Its underwater forests provide shelter, nursery habitat, and feeding grounds for fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. Sea Otter mothers sometimes wrap pups in kelp fronds to keep them from drifting away while they forage. The hollow stipe can even be fashioned into a horn-like musical instrument—an essential skill for any “no-talent” contest aboard a ship sailing the Salish Sea.

Giant Bladder Kelp *Macrocystis pyrifera* — The largest seaweed on Earth, capable of reaching lengths greater than 150 feet. Floating gas bladders lift the blades toward sunlight, creating complex underwater forests among the most productive ecosystems on the planet.

MICROALGAE (PHYTOPLANKTON)

Diatoms and Other Phytoplankton — Invisible individually but visible collectively as green water, brown blooms, or golden foam along shorelines. Dominated in Pacific Northwest waters by diatoms, these microscopic algae form the foundation of marine food webs and contribute substantially to global oxygen production. Under a microscope, each diatom reveals an exquisitely patterned silica shell, or frustule, resembling a tiny work of art.

FUNGI

Brown Cubical Rot Fungi (Order Polyporales) — These decomposers break down cellulose in wood while leaving much of the lignin behind, causing logs to fracture into distinctive cube-shaped blocks. The process recycles nutrients and helps create the rich soils that sustain temperate rainforests.

Conks (Bracket Fungi) (various species) — Woody shelf-like fungi growing from trunks and fallen logs. Some live for many years, adding a new growth layer annually. Their presence often signals hidden decay within a tree while simultaneously providing habitat for insects and other organisms.

Bird's Nest Fungi (Family Nidulariaceae) — Among the rainforest's smallest wonders, these tiny fungi resemble miniature bird nests complete with eggs. The “eggs” are spore packets. Raindrops striking the cup-shaped fruiting body splash the spores outward, dispersing them to new locations. We encountered these remarkable fungi growing on decaying wood in the Hoh Rain Forest.

False Morel *Gyromitra esculenta* — Found in the Hoh Rain Forest, this wrinkled fungus resembles a brain rather than the honeycomb cap of a true morel. Despite its scientific name, *esculenta* (“edible”), it contains gyromitrin, a toxin that is metabolized into monomethylhydrazine, a highly toxic compound used as a rocket fuel. Consumption can cause severe illness, liver damage, neurological symptoms, or death, making False Morels among the Pacific Northwest’s most notorious poisonous mushrooms.

Oyster Mushroom *Pleurotus ostreatus* — A choice edible mushroom found in the enchanted forest behind Kalaloch Lodge, where we observed a Banana Slug feeding upon one. Oyster Mushrooms are among the few fungi capable of capturing and digesting microscopic nematodes to supplement their nitrogen intake, making them one of the world's few carnivorous mushrooms.

LICHENS

Fairy Vomit Lichen *Icmadophila ericetorum* — Found at Hoh Rainforest, this unforgettable species forms bright green mats dotted with pink fruiting bodies. Despite its whimsical name, it plays an important role in decomposition and nutrient cycling.

Lungwort *Lobaria pulmonaria* — Resembling lung tissue, this large leafy lichen was once believed to cure respiratory ailments under the "Doctrine of Signatures." It fixes atmospheric nitrogen and serves as an indicator of exceptionally clean air. Banana Slugs frequently feed upon it.

Methuselah's Beard *Usnea longissima* — One of the world's longest lichens, hanging from branches in strands that may reach several feet in length. It contains antibacterial compounds and flourishes in cool, humid old-growth forests with pristine air quality.

Witch's Hair *Alectoria sarmentosa* — Draping conifer branches in pale green streamers, this lichen provides nesting material for birds and an important winter food source for flying squirrels and other forest mammals.

ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Temperate Rainforest — The Hoh Rainforest demonstrated why the Olympic Peninsula contains one of the largest expanses of temperate rain forest in North America. Massive conifers, abundant rainfall, nurse logs, epiphytes, fungi, mosses, and ferns create a multi-layered ecosystem sustained by moisture from the Pacific Ocean.

Subalpine Meadows — Hurricane Ridge showcased one of the peninsula's most spectacular summer habitats. Snowmelt nourishes lush meadows filled with grasses, sedges, and wildflowers that support Olympic Marmots, American Black Bears, pollinating insects, and countless other species.

Rocky Intertidal Zone — Ruby Beach revealed one of the most biologically diverse habitats on Earth. Twice daily, its inhabitants endure dramatic changes in temperature, salinity, moisture, and wave action, producing a remarkable community of sea stars, anemones, barnacles, chitons, limpets, and algae.

Kelp Forest— Beneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean, forests of Bull Kelp and Giant Bladder Kelp create underwater habitat for fish, invertebrates, seabirds, and marine mammals. These highly productive ecosystems rival tropical rain forests in biological richness and ecological importance.