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National Audubon Society
Pre-Convention Tour: Olympic National Park
Washington Birding and Natural History
July 8-11, 2013

Woody Wheeler guide, with eight participants: Ann and Frank, Mary and JJ, Barbara, Denise, Katherine, and Georgette

Monday, July 8 Portland, OR to Sequim, WA via Hood Canal



Our journey to one of the rainiest parts of the United States started and ended under clear, sunny skies. We loaded up the van and headed north to Washington State across the Columbia River. Clear views of Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens (photo to left) greeted us. Its summit at 8,363 is 1,314 feet lower than it was in 1980 when it erupted. At Olympia, we turned onto highway 101, which followed the cool green

waters of Hood Canal, a glacial-carved fjord that connects to Puget Sound and the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

At Potlatch State Park, we got out for a stretch break and some birding. At first, birding was slow, with Brown-headed Cowbirds, American Robins and Glaucous-winged Gulls predominant. Things picked up when we saw an American Crow give chase to a mature Bald Eagle. This was followed by the sight of two small brown birds flying low to the water and diving. Katherine, upon getting a good look through her binoculars, described them as mottled, brown and having a small bill – a fine description of a Marbled Murrelet. Indeed they were! Everyone appreciated seeing this federally Threatened Species.

In the evening we arrived in Sequim where we met with Tim Cullinan, author of the Important Bird Area book for the state of Washington and current wildlife biologist for a consortium of Tribes. He gave an excellent overview of Olympic Peninsula geography, its bird and wildlife populations, and answered questions about establishing and maintaining Important Bird Areas. Several in our group have had direct experience with IBAs in their respective states, so this was a productive discussion. Mary in particular, was currently engaged in this process in Texas.

Tuesday, July 9

Dungeness River Audubon Center, Hurricane Ridge, Elwha River Restoration

The Olympic rain shadow effect delivered another sunny day today. We set out first for the Dungeness River Audubon Center to walk over the Dungeness River on a former railroad bridge into the lush canopy of huge Black Cottonwoods and Big-leafed Maples. Just a few steps into our walk, a Black-headed Grosbeak flew by and perched at close range. Then a Pacific Slope Flycatcher called and foraged in the deciduous trees above us. Once on the bridge, Anne spotted a young American Dipper perched on a log in the fast flowing river.



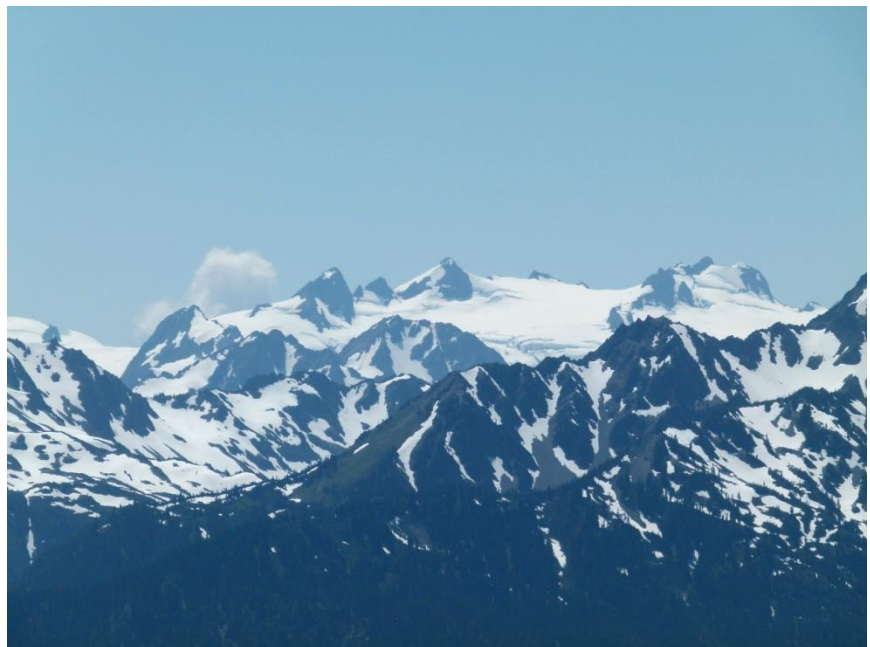
On the other side in the tree canopy, Western Wood Pewees, Olive-sided Flycatchers and Swainson's Thrushes sang. A Black-throated Gray Warbler came down



affording us a close look. A flock of Cedar Waxwings gorged themselves on wild cherries, along with American Robins and Spotted Towhees. Lest these birds become too complacent, a Cooper's Hawk soared by sending them into a state of heightened alarm. Both western Washington species of Hummingbirds: Anna's and Rufous, made appearances. Western Tanagers sang from the tall Douglas Firs and a flock of Bushtits came in close, moving through the shrubs. We combined our walk with a visit to the Audubon Center which features outstanding taxidermy replicas of most birds in the area. Powell Jones, the center

director, greeted us and showed us around this busy, exhibit-laden center.

After this rewarding stop, we gathered our sack lunches and headed uphill to Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park. The views were stunning in all directions, especially looking toward the myriad glacial-carved peaks of the Olympic Mountains, and over the Straits of Juan de Fuca toward Mt. Baker and north to Victoria and Vancouver Island. Once on top, we stopped at the visitor center, and took in the



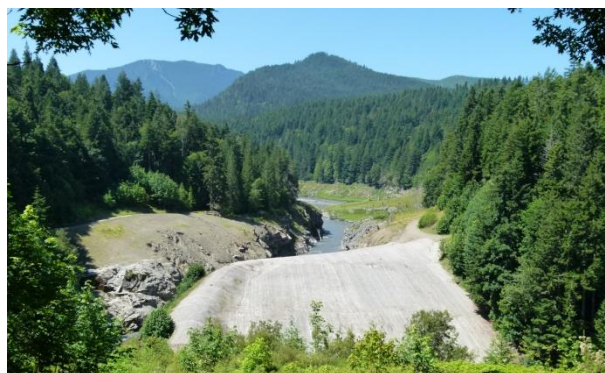
excellent view with interpretive signs of the many glacial-carved peaks in the high Olympics.



Departing from the visitor center, we strolled along Klahane Ridge, taking in the numerous wildflowers in bloom and searching for birds and mammals. American Pipits, Dark-eyed Juncos, Common Ravens and Pine Siskins were all active. Black-tailed Deer were abundant and frisky, with their young in tow.



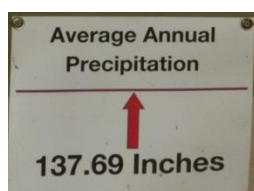
Eventually we tore ourselves away from this magnificent alpine setting, and drove down the hill to make one more stop at the end of the day – at the Elwha Dam removal viewpoint. On this pleasant short woods walk, we saw where the lower dam on the Elwha River had been removed just a year ago. It was remarkable to bear witness to this historic project. Tens of thousands of native salmon stand to benefit from the re-opening of a free-flowing Elwha River after being dammed for 100 years. At the viewpoint, a Wilson's Warbler sang and perched in the brilliant sun as if to celebrate the return of a free-flowing Elwha.



We then headed to Lake Crescent Lodge where people were swimming in the lake which was surprising given that this glacially-carved lake is 600-feet deep and known for its cold waters. A fine dinner and relaxing evening at this picturesque lodge followed.

Wednesday, July 10 Lake Crescent, Hoh River Rainforest, Ruby Beach, Lake Quinault

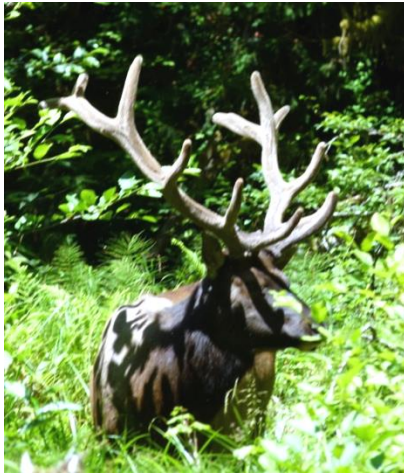
On the way to breakfast, several of us heard and then chased a Western Tanager. We found a female a short distance from the lodge perched in a Red Alder tree. As we headed for breakfast a second time, we heard the male singing. We followed him around the perimeter of a large field with tall conifers around until he finally perched atop a Western Red Cedar enabling us to see him clearly in the spotting scope.



From Lake Crescent we headed west and south through the logging and Twilight nostalgia town of Forks. We then turned east, up the Hoh River to explore its world-famous temperate rainforest.

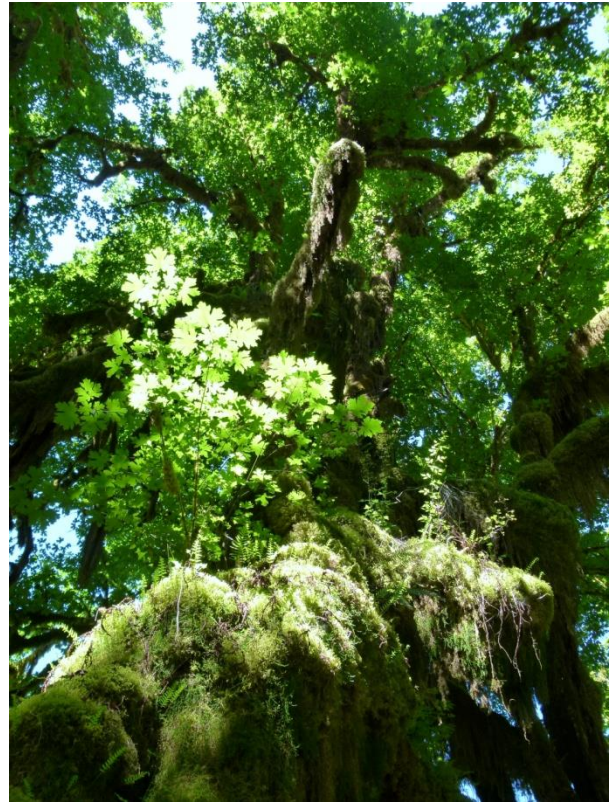


Along the way we stopped to visit the “big Sitka Spruce tree.” It was large, but so were other Sitka Spruce, Douglas Firs and Western Red Cedars behind it. Near the Hoh River, Barbara spotted a Pacific Flycatcher flying in and out of its nest with its beak-full of bugs for its nestlings.



We continued on to the entrance to Hoh River visitor center, where we walked the Hall of Mosses loop trail. This was a spectacular display of a temperate rainforest, including all of its component parts: Huge, ancient trees; multiple standing

snags; nurse logs, multi-layered canopy and openings. In addition to the sheer majesty of the place and its moss encased Big Leafed Maples, we had a close look at a Bull Roosevelt Elk with a full rack.



While eating a picnic lunch, a Douglas Tree Squirrel perched in a nearby tree and ate its seed while watching us eat our food. It seemed like he was being social.



On the way west toward the Pacific Coast, we stopped to look at several duck species with their young families in a pond, including: Mallards, Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers. There were about 30 individual ducks in this pond from these three species.

Following a drive to the coast, we descended the short trail to Ruby Beach, a spectacular wild beach with prominent sea stacks. Here we immediately saw a flock of Brown Pelicans flying by, along with nesting Pelagic Cormorants and Glaucous-winged, Glaucous-winged/Western Hybrid, and Western Gulls with a few Heerman’s Gulls mixed in. Two Peregrine Falcons flew over the headland on the shore, calling noisily. Several Bald Eagles soared by, and flocks of Pigeon Guillemot and Rhinoceros Auklets flew and swam in the rough



surf. Several Harbor Seals surfaced; two Sea Otters fed in their customary fashion, floating on their backs. We then drove to Lake Quinault Lodge and checked into our lakeside rooms and enjoyed a fine meal in the hotel where FDR once visited when he established Olympic National Park in 1939.

Thursday, July 11

Lake Quinault, Ridgefield NWR, Skamania Lodge

We had to take at least one more walk in the lovely surroundings of Lake Quinault lodge. Barbara and Georgette had a close encounter there with a young Hairy Woodpecker as it fed on Red Elderberries. JJ found a male Pileated Woodpecker high on a snag that several of us enjoyed seeing in the spotting scope. At least seven Band-tailed Pigeons flew by, and we saw Common Mergansers and our first (believe it or not) Canada Geese of the trip in Lake Quinault. It was difficult to pry ourselves away from this setting, but with a long road trip ahead and a convention to attend, we eventually did.



Osprey, several Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures entertained us along the drive to Ridgefield. Nina alertly found a Spotted Sandpiper along the Columbia River. Our first Great Egret (left) of the trip was also visible on the Oregon side of the river. We stopped to photograph what remains of Mt. St. Helens after its eruption in 1980 that removed 2,000 feet of its former conical shape. Nearby we stopped for lunch at Paradise Point State Park, where a Great Blue Heron hunted along the Lewis River, and a mature Bald Eagle soared overhead.

After lunch we entered Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, an Audubon Important Bird Area and a stop along Audubon Washington's Birding Trail. As soon as we got out of the van, we were rewarded with good looks at Western Scrub Jays. Once we crossed over a pedestrian railroad bridge into the Carty Unit of the refuge, we came to a restored Native American plank house. Just below it, we set out on the Oaks to Wetlands trail over-arched by huge Oregon White Oaks. In these oaks, we saw a Western Wood Pewee. Barbara once again found the nest that this adult was delivering food to. Woody trained the scope on the nest, and we saw three babies in it.

Continuing down the trail Denise found our first Red-winged Blackbird of the trip. We also saw our first Common Yellowthroats and Purple Finches. In a mixed woodland and shrub area, Frank and Ann spotted a Lazuli Bunting (photo to the right) as it gathered blackberries to take to its young in a nearby nest. Everyone had good looks at this beautiful bird, which outside of Ridgefield Refuge is difficult to find in Western Washington. Soon afterward, JJ spotted a Lewis' Woodpecker in an Oregon White Oak – another bird of central and eastern Washington that finds its way into Ridgefield Refuge via the Columbia River Gorge.



On our final stretch along the beautiful Columbia Gorge, we enjoyed views of 600-foot high Multnomah Falls; Beacon Rock on the Washington side where Lewis and Clark surveyed their journey ahead, and the immense basalt cliffs that line this gorge. Our journey came to a spectacular end as we drove across the aptly named Bridge of the Gods across the Columbia River from Cascade Locks to Stevenson, Washington. This bridge is also the point where hikers cross the Columbia River on the Pacific Crest Trail. We arrived at Skamania Lodge in time for all to partake in the Audubon Convention.