

WASHINGTON STATE, APRIL 2008

by Henry Cook

This trip come about because I had to do a weeks university work in the state of Washington, USA so I tagged a few days on beforehand to get some birding in on what was for me, a new continent and country.

I was limited by the fact I can't drive so arranged to meet up with a local birder for a few of the days who I got in contact with through the birdingpal.org website. Luckily she could drive and I couldn't wait for the trip to begin.



Mount St Helens (somewhere in the gloom!)

13th April – On flying to Seattle I had to transfer at Chicago and had my first lifer of the trip, an American Robin. I was really pleased to see this bird, only to find out later that it was one of the most common in America! No hitches with luggage at Seattle and headed into Seattle for the night. On the bus I picked up some fairly common birds but all lifers. Band-tailed Pigeon was unexpected so early in the trip and the peeps sat behind me most have been wondering what I was doing, my head moving all the time as I followed birds from the bus.



American Robin

14th April – 6am and I had met up with Rachel, the birdingpal, for a day driving north from the city, through the Skagit area, then down through Whidbey Island and back to the city again. We met up with a couple of her birding friends from around Seattle. Immediately it was good to have the local experience along as we headed north with a stop at a known Great Horned Owls nest. Three huge Chicks sat on the nest and minutes later an adult bird called and flew in with a squirrel. They were very impressive birds but we soon moved on to the Skagit Wildlife Area (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/r4skagit.htm>) where we would see a wide variety of species.

A road-side stop nearby at flat agricultural fields produced bundles of stuff. Hudsonian Whimbrel, Wilson's Snipe, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow and my first ever Bald Eagle. What a beast. The colossal bill and size made them instantly obvious out on this side of the cascade mountain range. At the refuge a walk in riparian woodland adjacent to marsh and mudflat produced Bewick's Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Savannah and Golden-crowned Sparrow, Rufous Hummer, Red-tailed Hawk and a very early Swainson's Thrush. Even though the time of year was a little early for peak migration, the numbers of some species were huge. Both forms of Yellow-rumped Warbler dominated with birds everywhere, in every patch of woodland.



Above: Yellow-rumped Warbler



Above: Bewick's Wren



Above: Bald Eagle

We stopped many times along the quiet roads once off the freeway to check out feeders in gardens and some more marshes and added Killdeer, Bufflehead, House Finch, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, American Wigeon, Greater Yellowlegs, and Great Blue Heron to our rapidly growing day list. The Killdeer was heard before seen as it screamed its own name out. We found it attempting to nest in an active lumber yard with lorries rumbling by all the time. Apparently they are famously known in the states for nesting in silly areas but good on em if they survive!

We crossed deception pass and were on Whidbey Island, the longest island in the USA. Steep cliffs descending into the blue-green sea-water held stunning Harlequin Ducks, Double-crested Cormorants, Pelagic Cormorant, Rhino Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Spotted Towhee and Dark-eyed Junco. The Harlequins were always distant but one of the highlights of the whole trip.

With the warm and sunny day progressing quickly we powered on south passing areas of lush second-growth conifers with many small glacial depressions filled with water and also birds. Mourning Dove, California Quail, Am Kestrel, Marsh Wren, Lincoln's Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Wood Duck were seen for the first time in these areas. There had been so many colourful birds in scenic settings. I'd had a brilliant day. At the ferry terminal where we crossed back over to the mainland, we found a large group of Barrow's Goldeneye, all sleeping but exquisite, a top end to the day.



Above: Barrow's Goldeneye

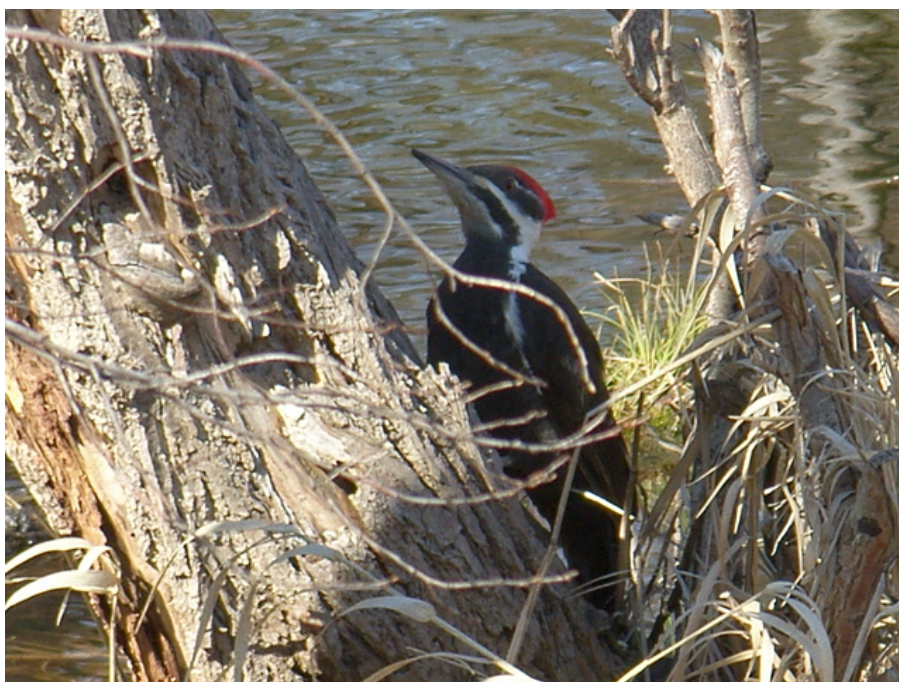


Above: Rhinoceros Auklet



Above: Killdeer

15th April – After yesterdays completely crazy non-stop birding day I was up at 5am and hopped on the bus for a relaxing saunter around the 530acre Discovery Park to the north of the city. It was an opportunity to be more deferential to the birds and spend a little time getting to know the sights and sounds of the more common species. First up in the mixed forest was an awesome bird, prehistoric even! A huge Pileated Woodpecker flew past calling and my heart nearly stopped when it landed on a tree close-by. What a woodpecker! I had only just stepped into the park but I watched this bird demolish an old snag for over half an hour and it was captivating. Onwards I trod full of expectation. A female Varied Thrush caught my eye sat low down in a red cedar tree, too low light for a photo but even the female was a colourful thrush and one I'd really hoped to see on this trip. Circular path through the wild feeling park take you through mature forest, meadows, cliffs, sand and rocky beach and coastal areas. Such a mix produced many species but new ones for the trip included Belted Kingfisher, Golden-crowned Kinglet (rather like a cross between a Goldcrest and a Firecrest) and Brandt's Cormorant offshore. Leaving in the afternoon allowed for a chance to take in some of the city, lots of birds in the tree-lined streets of the city but none new for the list plus my mind had switched to more cultural activities (only briefly!). An early night was in order before meeting up early again with Rachel for 2 days heading out east.



Above: Pileated Woodpecker



Above: Spotted Towhee



Above: Golden-crowned Sparrow

16th April – First stop of the day after driving well out of Seattle and into the cascade mountain range was at the Stampede Pass. American Dipper was found quickly on the river here and put on a great show, feeding just as our dipper does. Varied Thrushes were present here in large numbers with some showing very well and allowing photos. The winter's snow was still present and limited routes up into the hills. We decided not to spend too much time here sadly resulting in missing several high altitude species but allowed us to press on to find others. Further along the Interstate we called in at Cle Elum where Turkey Vulture, Stellar's Jay and eventually Evening Grosbeak were all seen and all great to see.



Above: Varied Thrush



Above: Turkey Vulture

Carrying on east the landscape changed to rolling hills and the vegetation switched to dry sage bushes. We birded an area from Ellensburg to Umptanum falls and Wenas creek. In the desert like landscape we saw loads of Mountain and Western Bluebird, Western Meadowlark, Brewers and Vesper Sparrow, Mountain Chickadee, Cassin's Finch and Townsend's Solitaire. High quality stop or what. The bluebirds were doing well thanks to hundreds of boxes along what should be renamed bluebird boulevard. The day finished with more fine sun and quite a lot of heat but still the birds kept coming. Four American White Pelicans cruised along a river canyon and a few minutes later a Canyon Wren sang it's lyrical descending song but remained unseen as the sun set. An road-side motel provided the best accommodation of the trip so far and had us well placed to head out further east the following day.

17th April – Driving along the old Vantage Highway towards, erm, Vantage, we stopped at some well known spots for some sage species not yet seen on the trip. We quickly saw the two species which define this habitat; Sage Thrasher and Sage Sparrow. The thrasher wasn't a typical thrasher, looking more like a thrush but perfectly coloured to blend in with the landscape, the best way of finding it to listen to its lovely varied song. Even out here, hundreds of Yellow-rumped Warblers were clinging to the wind-blown shrubs before moving on north, this was really strange seeing them so far out of their natural habitat. At Vantage the sun was heating the air up quickly and we birded frantically before the quiet mid-day lull. The canyon here leading down to the Columbia River held Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Nashville Warbler and Red-naped Sapsucker.

Any area of wetland in this arid area was great for birds and new birds kept being seen. The beautiful canyon of Frenchman's Coulee held Cliff Swallow, White-throated Swift and loads of tropical looking Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Another roadside stop after I shouted out the name of a rare bird in Washington and we were watching a lone Long-billed Curlew. Somehow, the bill is even longer than on our Eurasian relative! A little further along the road and another hop out of the car provided interest and adrenaline of another kind when a shaking noise filled the air. I had been clambering over rocks in the mid-day sun but immediately I knew what was making the noise; Rattlesnake, and it's just a foot in front of me. It must have been irritated because it didn't stop making its chilling noise for ages. Rachel found this extremely funny for some reason even though I'd nearly just died!



Above: Say's Phoebe



Above: Yellow-headed Blackbird



Above: As close as I dared get to a Rattlesnake!

Close-by we had a special spot with the latest gen for Burrowing Owl. At the edge of the road we quickly picked up one and then a second bird which appeared from under a concrete drainage culvert where they were nesting. This species is increasingly rare in Washington and I was so pleased to see this bird in the mid-day sun and so close-by.

Onwards though, and likely looking wetlands near Othello and the Potholes wildlife area towards the end of the day produced Redhead, Canvasback, Cinnamon Teal, Am Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Great Egret, Caspian Tern and a late Tundra Swan. Ten Sandhill Cranes were first heard cronking then appeared as they flew over the road, late migrants but such elegant birds.



Above: Burrowing Owl



Above: Another Burrowing Owl joins the party



Above: Sandhill Cranes



Above: Cinnamon Teals

19th April – A day off yesterday to recover and check some more city spots out. I headed out early on my last day to Discovery Park before joining up with university mates. Many similar species were seen again but still great fun to take my time and id them alone as a challenge. New birds included Bonaparte's Gull, Townsend's Warbler and Western Sandpiper. All here with the passage of time and increasing migration in the area.

From now my chances of seeing new birds was limited but I carried the bins and became something of a David Attenborough for my university mates as the university fieldtrip began.



Above: Bufflehead



Above: Western Grebe



Above: Glaucous-winged Gulls were the most abundant gull

20th – 26th April – Just a two new birds seen which were Black Oystercatcher on a rocky shoreline and Western Gull near the mouth of the Columbia River at the Oregon border. All the while birds such as Caspian Tern were seen well, fishing the numerous marshes and coastal wetlands. Bald Eagles were seen daily along with plenty of hummers; thrilling, charismatic birds to get non-birders interested.

I left Washington with 152 species on the trip list and 110 of which I'd never seen before. With much of these seen in a short time period there were obviously a few species which I didn't see and other which hadn't quite arrived so far north yet. The trip was a couple of weeks early for prime migration with the most species present but this didn't stop there being a great mix of some early summer birds and some late winter birds present plus all the resident species. As a result I didn't see any Kingbirds, Vireos or Flycatchers but quite glad as these would seem to be a bit of a nightmare to identify!

The scenery throughout the trip was far beyond what I'd imagined in size and extremes. Just 3 hours driving from Seattle eastwards presented chances to bird in deciduous and coniferous forests, along snow lined mountain streams and in the semi-arid areas of sage brush and ponderosa pine country, providing a large range of species in a fairly small area. The city of Seattle was great for a base and a really pleasant city all-round.

I highly recommend the birding pal website (<http://www.birdingpal.org>) for meeting birders local to the area you are travelling. It is taking a hefty risk but it payed off big-style for me. The Sibley field-guide was light-weight and easy to use so I'd recommend it for a trip to the area.

If anyone is planning to head out that way and would like more info. Just private message me on the Manchester Birding forum or send me an e-mail.



Rufous Hummingbird

Henry Cook, May 2008

www.manchesterbirding.com

TRIP LIST

1)	Starling	Chicago	13/04/2008
2)	American Robin	Chicago	13/04/2008
3)	American Crow	Seattle	13/04/2008
4)	Band-tailed Pigeon	Seattle	13/04/2008
5)	Glaucous-winged Gull	Seattle	13/04/2008
6)	House Sparrow	Seattle	13/04/2008
7)	Feral Pigeon	Seattle	13/04/2008
8)	Song Sparrow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
9)	Red-winged Blackbird	Skagit area	14/04/2008
10)	Wilson's Snipe	Skagit area	14/04/2008
11)	Dunlin	Skagit area	14/04/2008
12)	Grey Plover	Skagit area	14/04/2008
13)	Hudsonian Whimbrel	Skagit area	14/04/2008
14)	Tree Swallow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
15)	Violet-green Swallow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
16)	Bald Eagle	Skagit area	14/04/2008
17)	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Skagit area	14/04/2008
	a. Audubon's		
	b. Myrtle		
18)	Barn Swallow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
19)	Bewick's Wren	Skagit area	14/04/2008
20)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Skagit area	14/04/2008
21)	Savannah Sparrow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
22)	Purple Finch	Skagit area	14/04/2008
23)	Mew Gull	Skagit area	14/04/2008
24)	Ring-billed Gull	Skagit area	14/04/2008
25)	Downy Woodpecker	Skagit area	14/04/2008
26)	Black-capped Chickadee	Skagit area	14/04/2008

27)	Golden-crowned Sparrow	Skagit area	14/04/2008
28)	Brewers Blackbird	Skagit area	14/04/2008
29)	Rufous Hummingbird	Skagit area	14/04/2008
30)	Swainson's Thrush	Skagit area	14/04/2008
31)	Mallard	Skagit area	14/04/2008
32)	Gadwall	Skagit area	14/04/2008
33)	House Finch	Skagit area	14/04/2008
34)	Canada Goose	Skagit area	14/04/2008
35)	Great Horned Owl	Mount Vernon	14/04/2008
36)	White-crowned Sparrow	Mount Vernon	14/04/2008
37)	American Wigeon	Mount Vernon	14/04/2008
38)	Greater Yellowlegs	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
39)	Great Blue Heron	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
40)	Green-winged Teal	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
41)	Common Loon	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
42)	Northern Pintail	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
43)	Greater Scaup	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
44)	Common Goldeneye	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
45)	Bufflehead	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
46)	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
47)	Double-crested Cormorant	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
48)	Pelagic Cormorant	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
49)	American Goldfinch	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
50)	Raven	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
51)	Harlequin Duck	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
52)	Pigeon Guillemot	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
53)	Northern Flicker	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
54)	Surf Scoter	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
55)	Spotted Towhee	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008

56)	Dark-eyed Junco	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
57)	Red-breasted Merganser	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
58)	Rhinoceros Auklet	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
59)	American Coot	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
60)	Horned Grebe	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
61)	Northern Harrier	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
62)	Orange-crowned Warbler	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
63)	Hooded Merganser	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
64)	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
65)	White-winged Scoter	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
66)	Western Grebe	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
67)	Black Turnstone	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
68)	Surfbird	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
69)	Red-throated Loon	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
70)	Red-necked Grebe	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
71)	Lesser Scaup	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
72)	Least Sandpiper	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
73)	Short-billed Dowitcher	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
74)	Pine Siskin	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
75)	Mourning Dove	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
76)	American Kestrel	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
77)	California Quail	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
78)	Marsh Wren	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
79)	Shoveler	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
80)	Lincoln's Sparrow	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
81)	Common Yellowthroat	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
82)	Wood Duck	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
83)	Brown Creeper	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
84)	Anna's Hummingbird	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008

85)	Barrow's Goldeneye	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
86)	Black Brant	Whidbey Island	14/04/2008
87)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
88)	Varied Thrush	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
89)	Winter Wren	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
90)	Belted Kingfisher	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
91)	Pileated Woodpecker	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
92)	Brandt's Cormorant	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
93)	Killdeer	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
94)	Bushtit	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
95)	Sanderling	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
96)	Brown-headed Cowbird	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
97)	American Pipit	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
98)	Hairy Woodpecker	Discovery Park, Seattle	15/04/2008
99)	American Dipper	Stampede Pass	16/04/2008
100)	Common Crossbill	Stampede Pass	16/04/2008
101)	Osprey	Stampede Pass	16/04/2008
102)	Turkey Vulture	Stampede Pass	16/04/2008
103)	Stellar's Jay	Cle Elum	16/04/2008
104)	Evening Grosbeak	Cle Elum	16/04/2008
105)	Ring-necked Duck	Cle Elum	16/04/2008
106)	Black-billed Magpie	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
107)	Cooper's Hawk	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
108)	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
109)	Mountain Bluebird	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
110)	Western Bluebird	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
111)	Western Meadowlark	Ellensburg area	16/04/2008
112)	Brewers Sparrow	Umptanum	16/04/2008
113)	Vesper Sparrow	Umptanum	16/04/2008

114)	Mountain Chickadee	Umptanum	16/04/2008
115)	Cassin's Finch	Umptanum	16/04/2008
116)	Hermit Thrush	Umptanum	16/04/2008
117)	Townsend's Solitaire	Umptanum	16/04/2008
118)	Goosander	Umptanum	16/04/2008
119)	American White Pelican	Umptanum	16/04/2008
120)	Canyon Wren	Umptanum	16/04/2008
121)	Sage Thrasher	Vantage Highway	17/04/2008
122)	Sage Sparrow	Vantage Highway	17/04/2008
123)	Rock Wren	Vantage	17/04/2008
124)	Say's Pheobe	Vantage	17/04/2008
125)	Red-naped Sapsucker	Vantage	17/04/2008
126)	Nashville Warbler	Vantage	17/04/2008
127)	Calliope Hummingbird	Vantage	17/04/2008
128)	Redhead	Frenchman's Coulee	17/04/2008
129)	White-throated Swift	Frenchman's Coulee	17/04/2008
130)	Yellow-headed Blackbird	Frenchman's Coulee	17/04/2008
131)	Long-billed Curlew	Othello area	17/04/2008
132)	Horned Lark	Othello area	17/04/2008
133)	Cackling Goose	Othello area	17/04/2008
134)	American Avocet	Othello area	17/04/2008
135)	Black-necked Stilt	Othello area	17/04/2008
136)	Cinnamon Teal	Othello area	17/04/2008
137)	Burrowing Owl	Othello area	17/04/2008
138)	Caspian Tern	Othello area	17/04/2008
139)	American Great Egret	Othello area	17/04/2008
140)	Greater White-fronted Goose	Othello area	17/04/2008
141)	Ruddy Duck	Othello area	17/04/2008
142)	California Gull	Potholes area	17/04/2008

143)	Sandhill Crane	Potholes area	17/04/2008
144)	Tundra Swan	Potholes area	17/04/2008
145)	Canvasback	Potholes area	17/04/2008
146)	Ring-necked Pheasant	Potholes area	17/04/2008
147)	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Discovery Park, Seattle	18/04/2008
148)	Townsend's Warbler	Discovery Park, Seattle	18/04/2008
149)	Bonaparte's Gull	Discovery Park, Seattle	18/04/2008
150)	Western Sandpiper	Discovery Park, Seattle	18/04/2008
151)	Black Oystercatcher	Whidbey Island	21/04/2008
152)	Western Gull	Long Beach	24/04/2008