

# Tropical Birding Tours

## *Washington State: Photo Tour*

Tour Guide: Ben Knoot



\*All photos in this report were captured by the guide Ben Knoot unless otherwise stated.



## *Tour Itinerary*

May 24th.....	Arrivals/Afternoon in Seattle
May 25th.....	Seattle to Olympic Peninsula
May 26th.....	Olympic Peninsula
May 27th.....	Olympic Peninsula
May 28th.....	Olympic Peninsula to Cle Elum
May 29th.....	Cle Elum to Omak
May 30th.....	Omak
May 31st.....	Omak to Winthrop
June 1st.....	Winthrop
June 2nd.....	Winthrop
June 3rd.....	Winthrop
June 4th.....	Winthrop to Seattle
June 5th.....	Guests Depart at their Leisure

## *Tour Introduction*

Washington State is an incredibly beautiful and diverse part of the United States. We experience this in many ways during this tour but non more so than the incredible array of habitats and eco-zones. Then of course, there's the variety of sensational birds to boot! In general, Washington during May and June is a heaven on earth for me personally. The near constant cloud cover, misty conditions, and overall damp air is replaced by sunshine, clear skies and bird song and that is why this tour ranks as my all time favorite US tour.

We start off with a quick walk around a few local parks in Seattle targeting fun parkland birds like Wood Duck, Brown Creeper, Spotted Towhee and Wilson's Warbler. This afternoon isn't one that is full of photo targets but more for me to get an idea of the groups shooting style and to get a feel for what birds they might like to target when we really get going the next day.

Our first real official section of this tour is on the Olympic Peninsula. I love this place. Not only does it have a variety of great birds for us to shoot like Varied Thrush, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hermit Warbler, Pacific Wren and Western Tanager but it also has a section of Old Growth Rainforest that is just breathtaking. We are here for a few days enjoying huge stands of spruce, big-leaf maple, and Douglas fir trees seen against the stunning Olympic Mountains and their adjoining alpine meadows before moving east to more open habitats.

The transitional zone of Cle Elum and the surrounding areas are packed with Ponderosa Pine forests, western riparian woodland and scattered inland lakes. Here we aim to photograph some birds that like the drier country like Sage Thrasher, Mountain Bluebird, Lewis's and White-headed Woodpecker, just to name a few. We only have one night here but with a full afternoon and a full morning of shooting, we do cover the most important species quite thoroughly before continuing to "Eastern Washington".

It is difficult to define precisely where eastern Washington starts and western ends but I like to think it is essentially when you are completely out of the Cascade Mountain range and you get more grasslands and scattered Ponderosa Pine forests rather than big Douglas Fir trees. Our main areas of the east are Omak and Winthrop. Here, the peppered lakes, riparian woodlands, and Mixed Ponderosa Pine forests hold numerous targets for us as we spend the bulk of the trip in these regions. Waterbirds like Ruddy Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Common Loon and Cinnamon Teal entertained us on the water while the tiny Calliope Hummingbird, zipped around the meadows and swallows, bluebirds and wren were seen tending to nests. Overall an incredible variety of birds were photographed as you will see in the following report. I hope you enjoy going through the photos as much as my group and I enjoyed capturing them.

## *Eco-Zone/Sectional Summary*

Typically I write a day-to-day summary of events for my trip reports but for this report I want to try something different. I am going to break this tour down into eco-zones/regions, sort of like how I had it in the introduction. I am doing this for a few reasons. The first being that I want to highlight the diversity of the zones and what they offer and the second being that we visited the same areas day after day so continuing to mention those locations is going to be exceptionally repetitive and I don't want to bore you readers to quickly. Enjoy!

### *Eco-Zone 1: Urban Parks and Trails of Seattle*

The afternoon arrival as mentioned in the introduction is as much target shooting as it is me figuring out the group and what is going to be best for them going forward during this tour. The few parks we visit typically include some sort of body of water, large stands of Douglas fir trees, thick understories of Salmon & Black Berry bushes and the occasional absolutely stunning Big Leaf Maple. Overall the afternoon was a bit slow. The forests were dark and quiet but we ended up having a few nice shoots with a **Wilson's Warbler** and a very cute and cooperative **Brown Creeper**.



Brown Creeper: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Wilson's Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



## *Eco-Zone 2: Nearctic Temperate Rainforest (Olympic Peninsula)*

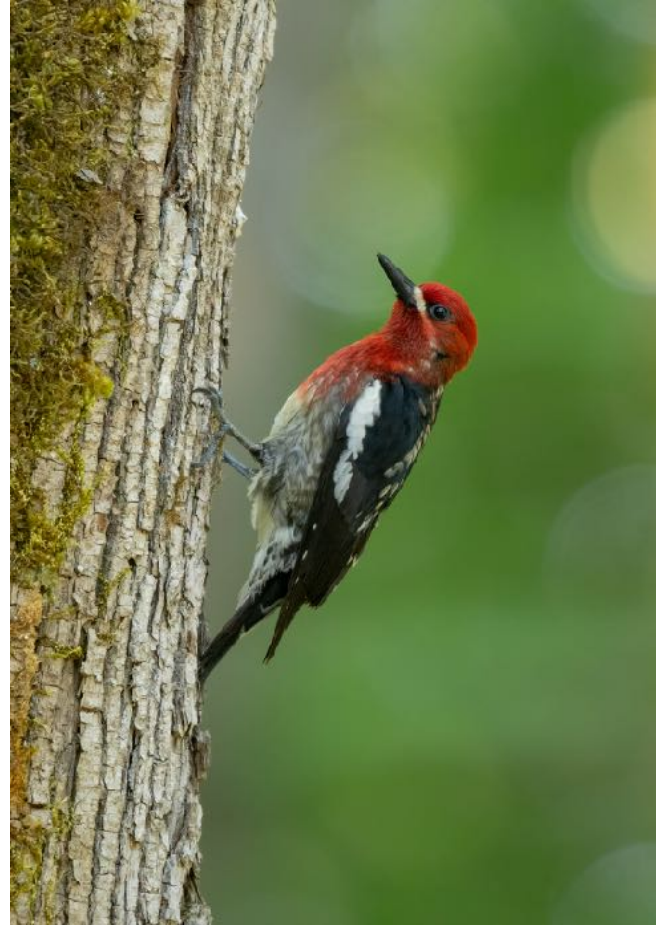
Most of the Olympic Peninsula is covered with Temperate Rainforest. The typical make-up of this habitat is Big Leaf Maple, Western Hemlock, Douglas fir, and an occasional species of spruce tree. There are also several areas of clear-cut, a few wonderful rivers, meadows and stands of aspens and birch trees but the majority of our targets are in the formerly described tree'd habitats. We did have one notable issue on the peninsula. One of the major targets here is the Sooty Grouse which is generally easy on one specific road up to a place called Hurricane Ridge in the National Park. Well, bad timing revealed that the lodge up near Hurricane Ridge had burned down about a week before our visit and caused a bit of a fire closing the road down during our stay. That would have revealed some high elevation meadows and spruce forests but it was not to be so we did go and try some of my back-up locations and while we were able to find the **Sooty Grouse** and see it very well, it was not all that great for photos. Over the course of our time on the Peninsula, highlight birds we photographed were; **Western Tanager, Cassin's Vireo, American Dipper, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Warbler, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, White-crowned Sparrow, Pacific Wren, Anna's Hummingbird, Townsend's Warbler, Hammond's Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and I think I can safely say, everyone's highlight for this section, a stunning **Varied Thrush**.



Western Tanager: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Pacific Wren: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Red-breasted Sapsucker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Cassin's Vireo: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Golden-crowned Kinglet: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Chestnut-backed Chickadee: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Townsend's Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Hermit Warbler (Hybrid w/Townsend's) : Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Black-throated Gray Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Wilson's Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



American Dipper: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Red-breasted Nuthatch: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot





Varied Thrush: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Anna's Hummingbird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



### *Eco-Zone 3: Transitional Zone (Cle Elum Area)*

The Cle Elum area has a lot of great species and that is because of where it lies. It contains both habitats that are typically concentrated on either the east and the west. Several mountain trails where you can find some remnant Douglas fir and Spruce Trees but then vast expanses of Sage Brush-land and open grassland make Cle Elum a must visit for photography. And while this may seem odd to say, we also visit this area because it is typically very prone to fires which is great for a few target species we have. Fire is a big part of the ecosystem regime in the east and we definitely benefited from last and this years fires. Highlights from Cle Elum and this transitional zone included: **White-headed, Black-backed, Lewis's and Hairy Woodpecker, Western and Mountain Bluebird, Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Blackbird, Brewer's and Vesper Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting and Western Wood-Pewee**. Most of these we could see again but it was great to get two of the big target woodpeckers so well that we didn't need to chase them while properly in the east. We would still decide to get some better Black-backed Woodpeckers near Winthrop. More on that later.



Sage Thrasher: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



White-headed Woodpecker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Lewis's Woodpecker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot

### *Eco-Zone 4: Mixed Ponderosa Pine (Omak & Winthrop Area)*

This is arguably the most photo-rich target area on the entire tour which is why when you combine these two locations they account for more than half of the tour. The Mixed Ponderosa Pine forests are accompanied by scattered lakes with breeding waterfowl and songbirds at nearly every turn. There are also rolling hills of wildflowers and riparian woodlands pumping with birdlife all encased in a stunning landscape. In Omak we focus primarily on waterfowl like; **Red-necked Grebe, Common Loon, Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Common Merganser** and this year we even ran into a fun surprise, an **Eared Grebe!** We also hit some of the prairies for birds like **Lark Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Horned Lark, Brewer's and Vesper Sparrow**. The lake edges and forested areas of Omak hold nesting **Western and Mountain Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbird, Say's Phoebe, Western Kingbird, Calliope Hummingbird, Bobolink, Pygmy Nuthatch, Bullock's Oriole, Black-billed Magpie, Cedar Waxwings, Osprey, California Quail** and the strikingly proud **Bald Eagle**. Omak is a real gem! A really cool bonus of the hilly piney area of Omak is the possibility of finding **Common Poorwill**. Very cool little nocturnal creature!



Blue-winged Teal: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Western Bluebird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Cedar Waxwing: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Common Merganser: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Western Meadowlark: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Horned Lark: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Common Loon: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Red-naped Sapsucker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Bald Eagle: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Common Poorwill: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Tree Swallow: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



California Quail: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Bullock's Oriole: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Western Bluebird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Bobolink: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Yellow-headed Blackbird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot





Hairy Woodpecker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Williamson's Sapsucker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Chipping Sparrow: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot





Red-necked Grebe: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot

Winthrop is the last big location for this trip. It is comprised of many of the same habitats as Omak but has a few more and slightly better quality western riparian woodland areas which means it focuses a bit more on passerines though ducks are definitely still on the menu. Winthrop also contains large open meadows and open spaces that allows us to photograph the very charismatic **Dusky Grouse**. Lots of aspen, birch and alder groves provide amazing nesting habitats for a variety of woodpeckers, bluebirds, swallows, wren, chickadees and really anything that utilizes cavity nesting. There is also the addition of stunning cliff faces which allow us (if you're up for a little walk) the chance to photograph **Prairie Falcon** and **White-throated Swift**. The town of Winthrop itself is an absolute treat. A small, country western style town that is filled with friendly people and stunning scenic views of rivers, mountains, meadows and rolling hillsides topped off by beautiful trees and a sense of general warmth and comfort. We even played a little bit of mini-golf during one of our typical afternoon breaks after a nice treat of ice cream. This place really is a fantastic spot to just hang out for a bit! In Winthrop we added; **Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)**, **Pygmy Nuthatch**, **Mountain Chickadee**, **Black-backed Woodpecker**, **Northern Flicker**, **Cinnamon Teal**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Gray Catbird**, **MacGillivray's Warbler**, **Western Bluebird**, **Calliope Hummingbird**, **Western Wood Pewee**, **House Wren**, **Spotted Towhee**, **Canyon and Rock Wren**, **Dusky Grouse**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Vesper Sparrow**, **Lazuli Bunting** and **Violet-green Swallow**.



Calliope Hummingbird Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Black-backed Woodpecker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Black-headed Grosbeak: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Pygmy Nuthatch: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Lazuli Bunting: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Ruddy Duck: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Mountain Chickadee: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Mountain Bluebird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Cinnamon Teal: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Lark Sparrow: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Spotted Towhee: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Yellow-rumped Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





House Wren: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



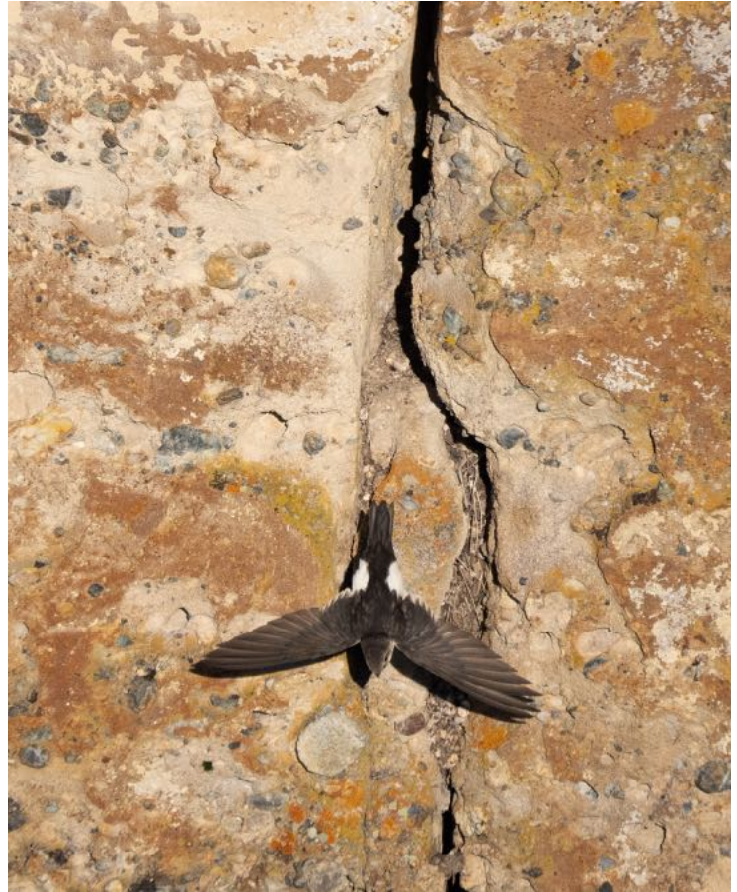
Northern Flicker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



MacGillivray's Warbler: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Gray Catbird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



White-throated Swift: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Lesser Scaup: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





White-throated Swift: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Dusky Grouse: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot





Prairie Falcon: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Vesper Sparrow: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Rock Wren: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Canyon Wren: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot





Black-backed Woodpecker: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Calliope Hummingbird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knot



Our last day is a travel day from Winthrop to Seattle. There are two routes we can take but since we had done so well in the southern region, we decided to go north and test our luck with the hardest woodpecker on our roster. The **American Three-toed Woodpecker** isn't one that is readily available every year even though I have some very good spots for this bird, it can still be very tricky which is why I typically leave it until everything else is photographed well. I am delighted to say that we NAILED IT. A fantastic woodpecker finale to what the guests were calling "A Woodpecker Tour".



American Three-toed Woodpecker (male left, female right) Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot

As we approached Seattle, the sun was shining incredibly bright and hot but we spent some time photographing **Purple Martin** and **Rufous Hummingbirds**. Nothing overly fantastic here on account of the intense sun and light but what an amazing trip with some great friends! A big thanks to the group for being amazing. Check out some of their favorite photos below!



Rufous Hummingbird: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot



Purple Martin: Photo by Guide - Ben Knoot

\*A gallery of ALL of the photos taken by Ben on this tour can be seen by copy and pasting this link into your browser:

<https://flickr.com/photos/197504580@N07/albums>



*Favorite Images by Guests*







