OREGON TOUR WRITE UP

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After seeing temperatures in Oregon into the high nineties a week before departure I was getting a bit worried about the success of our trip. However, these worries turned out to be unfounded, temps turned out to be a bit below average and rather comfortable, except for the unexpected two inches of snow in the Cascades.

Once we broke loose from the traffic snarl of Portland and were heading to the coast we left the city and traffic behind us with nothing but beautiful, well except for one windy location on the coast and a touch of snow, days and plenty of birds ahead of us. When we arrived at the coast with its pounding surf, towering cliffs, cool temperatures, and beautiful scenery we started racking up the Oregon birds with Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemont, and Pelagic Cormorant being some of the easiest species. Common Murres would be seen in large numbers as they loafed in the water, searched for food, and set up on nests on the cliffs and nearby rocky outcrops. Having lead tours to California and Washington State I have decided that the Oregon coast is by far more scenic and more accessible offering up a great variety of birds. We also added Western and Glaucous-winged Gulls to our list, of which there were many, and eventually spotted Ring-billed, Franklin’s and California Gull as well. It was fun studying the wing pattern of the Franklin’s Gulls, comparing them in our minds to our more frequently seen Laughing Gulls. We spent two nights in the small town of Neskowin right along the coast allowing us opportunities to see Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Violet-green Swallow, and Steller’s Jay at our hotel and then beautiful looks at several Band-tailed Pigeons just down the road from our hotel. An evening stroll behind our hotel allowed us to enjoy the splendor of the Oregon coast along with deer and cat interactions, a Belted Kingfisher, and a just lovely walk along a sandy beach.

Our second day on the coast found us at Mo’s restaurant, an Oregon favorite, where we watched seven Black Oystercatchers flyby, land, and preen allowing us scope views of the west coast relative of our American Oystercatcher. The six Harlequin Ducks that floated into the lee of a rock outcrop added color to the coast as did the brightly colored gular pouches of the Brandt’s, Double-crested, and Pelagic Cormorants. Clam chowder at Mo’s added a little local flavor to our sit down lunch. As we left the coast and headed inland we crossed the Willamette Valley and worked our way into the rain shadow created by the Cascade Mountains. In the town of Sisters we spent two great nights at the Best Western Ponderosa Inn, among Ponderosa Pines and White-headed Woodpeckers, a species we would see several times at feeders and among the tall pines in the Sisters area. At our hotel feeders we watched Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Pinyon Jay, Red Crossbill, Cassin’s Finch, Pine Siskin and I am sure other species. A short walk among the pines behind the hotel held a Great Horned Owl, California Quail, stunningly colorful “Audubons” Yellow-rumped Warbler, and singing Dusky Flycatcher.

In the Sisters area we spent time looking for and finding woodpeckers. A burned out patch of aspen and pines was home to Hairy, Downy and American Three-toed Woodpecker. It was nice watching the three-toed poke his head out of the nest cavity as he came and went feeding the young. Searches for the supposed nesting Black-backed Woodpecker and Red-breasted Sapsucker proved futile, though later in the tour we would have great looks at Red-breasted Sapsucker and Lewis’s Woodpecker. All told we ended up with ten species of woodpecker. In addition to the woodpeckers of the Sisters area and hotel feeder birds we found Olive-sided and Hammond’s Flycatcher, Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, and Evening Grosbeak. After Sisters we headed off to Frenchglen, the small gateway town to the big Malheur NWR, where we spent three nights at the Drover’s Inn and dined each evening at the Frenchglen Hotel, what a joy, though a bit too much food.

The refuge is a sprawling expanse of marshes, waterways, fields, mountains, volcanic rock outcrops, lava flows both young and old I was told, and a few trees. The refuge and surrounding area held for us Virginia Rail, no Sora, young American Avocet, Wilson’s and Red-necked Phalarope, Gray Flycatcher, Rock and Canyon Wren, heard only Chukar, Willow Flycatcher, and an appreciation for the emptiness of Oregon, a state with only four million residents. Oregon seems to me to be an underappreciated and under birded state. Brandon and I hope to bring others to enjoy the birds and scenery of Oregon in the near future.

When we left Malheur NWR we made our way back to the Cascade Mountains to Timberline Lodge, an incredible facility built with government money during the great depression. However, before reaching the lodge we stopped and enjoyed watching young Golden Eagles on the nest with the adult soaring overhead and a cooperative, nearby Sagebrush Sparrow that allowed extended views. Timberline Lodge, like many other lodges in US national park system, was built mostly by hand by hard working men trying to eke out a living during the hard times of the 30’s. The huge wood beams were marvelous as was the cuisine and scenery. The two inches of snow in the morning kept the birds quiet and sent us to lower elevations where we cruised along the Columbia River in the Columbia River Gorge. What a scenic and wonderful route this was back to Portland, we even crossed over the Bridge of the Gods, the bridge brought into the public’s eye by the trials of Cheryl Strayed from the movie and book, *Wild.* Here we had nice looks at Western Scrub-Jay, Brown Creeper, Pacific Wren, Black-throated Gray and Hermit Warbler, and Spotted Towhee. The waterfalls along the route proved to be fantastic as did the walk up to Multnomah Falls. Eventually we found our back to Portland and flights home.