

Washington State Birding

Avian Surf & Turf: Shore birds to Sage birds

June 19-28, 2026



Tour Description:

Washington...the "Evergreen State". For many these words conjure images of craggy sea stacks, snow-capped volcanic peaks, the mighty Columbia River, and dense forests of towering conifers. While these features do blanket much of western Washington, our 250+ mile west to east tour route will introduce you to a host of habitats and geologic formations that will likely reshape the way you think about Washington and the Pacific Northwest.

From the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which connects Puget Sound, a massive tidal basin, to the Pacific Ocean, we'll go upslope into the temperate rain forests of Olympic National Park, and then cross the western face of the Cascades. After cresting the summit of Snoqualmie Pass, we'll transition into the rain shadow pine forests. Eventually, we'll leave trees behind altogether and explore the Columbia Plateau and the "channeled scablands" created by a series of catastrophic floods at the end of the last glacial maximum some 13,000 years ago. You'll learn about the scientist whose life work unraveled the mysteries of how this unique landscape was created.

Along the strait, Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros Auklet and Marbled Murrelet are found remarkably far inland from the open ocean and even shearwaters sometimes reach Puget Sound. What the American West lacks in wood warbler diversity we make up for with an abundance of woodpeckers (11 species possible) and flycatchers (12 species possible). Crowd favorites like White-headed Woodpecker and Olive-sided Flycatcher can be expected. We'll also traverse the ranges of western warblers like Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, and MacGillivray's and the newly split Western Warbling Vireo should be easily added to your life list. Out on the treeless plateau species like Sage Thrasher, Sagebrush Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow are locally common.

We should see a good mix of furry creatures as well, with American Pika almost certain to be the show stealer. Roosevelt elk are common out on the Olympic Peninsula and Black-tailed Deer are even more abundant inland. Chipmunks and squirrels of many species will happily appropriate unattended snacks.

Our region is famous for its libations (craft beer and wine), seafood, grass-fed beef, locally grown fruits, berries, and vegetables, and we boast an unrivaled array of food truck offerings. It will be a culinary adventure as we bird our way along. For much of the tour the Bavarian-themed town of Leavenworth will be our base. We hope to provide some discretionary time for you to go exploring and sample its charms. We look forward to having you join us on this unique tour across the scenic and varied landscapes of Washington.

Please see detailed trip itinerary below. We will travel in two vans for comfort, and be guided by the wonderful expert local bird guide team Dave Irons and Shawneen Finnega who live in the Portland, Oregon area and knows Washington and the southwest birds so well!

Tour Itinerary:

Day One: Friday, June 19, 2026

Arrive in Seattle at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA)

Take shuttle to Hotel

Meet for dinner, introductions, trip overview. 6:00pm

Day Two: Saturday, June 20, 2026

After breakfast at our Seattle lodging, we'll get on the road and head west to the Olympic Peninsula, with restroom stops and maybe a brief birding stop on our way to Port Townsend, about two hours drive time. Sometime after midday we'll be doing a boat tour to Protection Island to look Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot and other seabirds that come way up the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Orcas inhabit this stretch of the strait and hopefully there will be a pod in the area. We'll use whatever time we have before the boat trip to bird in and around the town of Port Townsend, where we stay the night. The Fort Worden State Park and the Point Wilson Lighthouse area is not only scenic but a great place to watch seabirds flying up and down the strait.

Dinner in Port Townsend

Hotel in Port Townsend

Day Three: Sunday, June 21, 2026

We'll depart Port Townsend and head farther west towards Port Angeles. Our first stop will be the Three Crabs Road area near the small community of Dungeness. This can be a great spot for spotting unusual seabirds and shorebirds. Mid-morning we'll head up into the foothills of Olympic National Park where we will look for a host of species commonly found in the temperate rain forests of the Olympic Peninsula. Expect to see Steller's Jay, Canada jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Varied Thrush and if we are fortunate the local Sooty Grouse will still be hooting. Their deep-pitched hoots can be challenging to hear, then you have to figure out where the sound is coming from if you hope to spot one, but we'll give it our best effort. After a picnic or quick grab and go lunch, we'll spend the remainder of the day birding Ediz Hook and other spots along the Port Angeles waterfront where we can expect to find Black Oystercatcher, numerous alcid species such as Marbled Murrelet, Common Murre and Rhinoceros Auklet and gulls aplenty. Heermann's and Short-billed Gulls are expected, along with the array Glaucous-winged Gull X Western Gull hybrids ("Olympic Gull").

Dinner in Port Angeles

Hotel in Port Angeles

Day Four: Monday, June 22, 2026

This will be our longest travel day, with a 250-mile drive from Port Angeles to Leavenworth, but we will break it up with plenty of birding stops once we get around the south end of Puget Sound. Depending on how it goes getting through the Seattle-Tacoma traffic we'll have time to make a stop or two before our lakeside **picnic lunch** and mountain forest birding at Lake Easton State Park. In June we should see and hear singing Townsend's and MacGillivray's Warblers, the recently split Western Warbling Vireo, Hammond's and Western Flycatchers, Western Wood-Pewee, plus Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak. Our lunch stop is barely over an hour from Leavenworth, leaving plenty of time to make additional stops in various forest types as we descend the back side of the Cascades.

Dinner in Leavenworth

Hotel in Leavenworth

Day Five: Tuesday, June 23, 2026

We will start the morning close to our hotel, visiting Enchantment Park, Blackbird Island and Waterfront Park right along the Wenatchee River right in downtown Leavenworth. Black Swifts are often seen flying right over town first thing in the morning and then again in evening. The dense riverside forests will be like a little taste of home for eastern birders with Red-eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird, and Veery all nesting in these parks. But don't despair we'll show you plenty of western birds as well, with Western Wood-Pewee, Bullock's Oriole, Vaux's Swift and Pygmy Nuthatch all being expected in these parks. We'll also poke around some of the ponderosa pine filled neighborhoods right in Leavenworth, where White-headed Woodpeckers are often found. After lunch in Leavenworth, we'll head south into the pine forests with visits to the Blewett Pass trailhead and Camas Meadows and other incidental stops in between as we focus on finding several species of woodpeckers and

some typical montane breeding songbirds of the west. If we are lucky, we'll toot up a Northern Pygmy-Owl.

Dinner in Leavenworth

Hotel in Leavenworth

Day Six: Wednesday, June 24, 2026

We'll spend the morning birding Swakane Canyon, which starts out as an arid dry-slope canyon with only creekside riparia for vegetation and gradually climbs into some open stands of pine and broader patches of riparian habitat. The diverse mix of birds that occur here includes Lewis's Woodpecker, Bullock's Oriole, Lazuli Bunting, Chukar, Ruffed Grouse, White-throated Swift, Golden Eagle, Yellow-breasted Chat, Rock Wren and so much more. It is easy to spend 4-5 hours here. We'll drive back into Wenatchee for lunch and then bird Horan Wildlife Area along the Wenatchee River right in town. Since this day is mostly going to be in sunny and potentially hotter unshaded areas, we'll call it a birding day by early afternoon and let folks relax back in Leavenworth. This Bavarian themed village has a unique charm that many of you will surely want to walk around and explore.

Dinner in Leavenworth

Hotel in Leavenworth

Day Seven: Thursday, June 25, 2026

This day will be left somewhat open so that we can target and make special efforts for species that we may have missed up to this point. We will be monitoring eBird reports from the Leavenworth area in the days leading up to our time there looking for reports of hard to find species that we may have struggled to find. Expect this to be another day of conifer forest birding. Examples of species that we'll hope to track down on this day include Dusky Grouse, Northern Pygmy-Owl, American Three-toed Woodpecker. If we can get good recent information about nesting Great Gray Owls, that would be another possibility. We can also discuss the possibility of taking this afternoon off, catching a siesta, and going out after dinner for Common Poorwill and Flammulated Owl, both which are regularly found at Camas Meadows only 20 minutes or so from Leavenworth.

Dinner in Leavenworth

Hotel in Leavenworth

Day Eight: Friday, June 26, 2026

A very modest travel day from Leavenworth to Yakima, Washington. The focus on this day will be dry open country habitats and the Columbia Plateau. We'll start the morning by driving down the iconic Columbia River on our way to near Vantage then bird up a nearby canyon along "Old Vantage Hwy." This canyon features desert species like Sagebrush Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, and Sage Thrasher. From there we'll hit Getty's Cove, which has hosted a Lesser Nighthawk for the last two summers. If it's back for a third straight summer, we'll have to look through lots of Common Nighthawks or hope it calls in order to find it. We'll also visit Wanapum State Park. The steep canyon walls along this stretch of the Columbia River are good for both Rock and Canyon Wrens, Chukars and perhaps White-throated Swifts. Time permitting, we'll dip down to Toppenish NWR before checking into our hotel.

Dinner in Yakima

Hotel in Yakima

Day Nine: Saturday, June 27, 2026

If we did not get there the afternoon before, we'll start at Toppenish NWR, which features the best marsh habitats we will visit during the tour. Otherwise west up Hwy 12 towards White Pass. After departing the Yakima Valley we'll work our way west along Hwy 12 to White Pass. There are some fantastic birding spots and beautiful scenario along this road, which skirts the southern end of Mt. Rainier National Park. We will make stops Gifford Pinchot House Creek Campground, Bethel Ridge Road, which is great for woodpeckers of several species, Clear Creek Falls, mostly for its scenic appeal and a **picnic lunch**. Our last birding stop will be Leech Lake right at White Pass. American Pika, one of the cutest critters you'll ever see, resides on the rocky scree slope above Leech Lake

and American Three-toed Woodpeckers are sometimes found here. This will be our last birding stop of the tour, as it is about two-hour and 45-minute trip from White Pass into Seattle, and that is if traffic isn't bad, which it shouldn't be on a Saturday afternoon.

Dinner in Seattle

Hotel in Seattle

Day Ten: Sunday, June 28, 2026

Travel home from Seattle–Tacoma International Airport (SEA)

Breakfast at Hotel on your own

Take Hotel Shuttle to airport

Trip Logistics and Info:

Trip Fee:

Single - \$3,750.00

Double - \$3,450.00

Max Participants: 12

Travel: two 12 passenger vans

Arriving and Departing Airport: Seattle–Tacoma International Airport (SEA)

Included in Fee:

- Local bird guides
- Hotel rooms
- Hotel breakfasts & a few sack lunches
- Vans & fuel during trip
- Drivers for vans
- Entry fees & parking fees to sites
- Water in vans
- Some snacks in vans
- Insect spray in vans

Does Not Include:

- Flights to and from destination
- Meals (other than hotel breakfast and sack lunches)
- Tips for guide, boat crew, meals, etc
- Drinks & snacks (other than listed above)
- Alcoholic drinks
- Personal items



OUR GUIDES:

Dave Irons started birding at age six and became fully hooked by age 17, when he connected with other young birders. His curiosity about vagrancy, biogeography, and the finer points of field ID, along with finding opportunities to pass forward what he has learned, sustain his passion fifty-plus years later. Dave is a past member of Oregon's Bird Records Committee (OBRC) and served as the Oregon/Washington regional editor for *North American Birds* for more than a decade. He authored the *ABA Field Guide to the Birds of Oregon*, published in 2018. Over the past two decades Dave has led field trips and taught birding classes for Lane Community College, Pacific Northwest College of Art, the Siskiyou Field Institute, the Winter Wings Festival, Western Field Ornithologists, American Birding Association, Oregon Birding Association, Oregon Pelagic Tours, Lane County Audubon Society, the Audubon Society of Portland and the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival.

Shawneen Finnegan, after growing up in California's Bay Area found her tribe and calling when she discovered birding in her early 20s. Already a talented artist, she began drawing and painting birds. Her illustrations have adorned bird festival t-shirts and her art, photos and writing have been featured in numerous identification articles, field guides and state and regional monographs. Driven to be recognized as a "top birder," Shawneen's ascent into birding's upper echelon was rapid. She led and later managed tours for WINGS, was *Birding* magazine's photo editor for several years, and has served on four state bird records committees. In addition to birding around the globe, Shawneen has lived in birding meccas, with long stints in Cape May and Tucson. In 2007 she moved to Portland, Oregon to be with her mom, who passed in 2012. She and husband Dave Irons are the statewide eBird Review Coordinators for Oregon, making their home in Beaverton.





