

# Photography

*When you visit the forest, take it all in and enjoy what you see,  
but when go home - please leave it behind, let it all be.*

An Annual Newsletter

www.stevewphotography.ca

Issue No. 5 - Winter 2015

## 2014 A Whale of a Year!

*2014 saw me complete many thousands of miles by air, sea & road - but the things that I learned and the things that I saw made it all well worth it.*

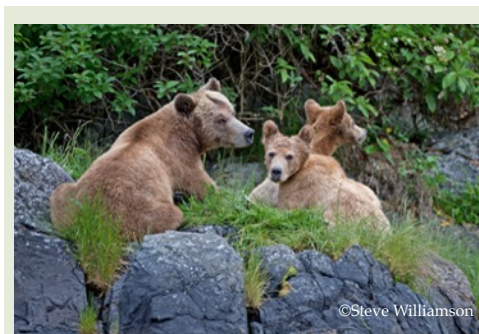
With regards to being out in the field with my camera, the year got off to a bit of a slow start but soon picked up fast. February saw my wife and I head off to [Maui](#) and eight days spent photographing the humpback whales and many birds of this Hawaiian paradise.



Maui is a prime wintering ground for the humpback whale and I spent many hours out on the water each day with these spectacular leviathans. But this was only the start of a pretty special year with humpback whales and more will be revealed later.

March through to May saw me invited to give several presentations of my work, including the inaugural Campbell River Whale & Wildlife Festival.

A pretty special event, which was well attended and was established to help raise funds for the [Whale Interpretive Centre](#) at Telegraph Cove, here on Vancouver Island.



**Bruin Movie Stars!**

June saw a return to Knight Inlet with two sold out photo tours. We had two great days with lots of sightings. It was nice to see that the two cubs that were filmed in 2013 by Disney for part of their film 'Bears' had made it through the winter and were back, looking stronger than ever.

Likewise, it was also pretty special to see the two female yearling cubs from the previous year that had been abandoned by their mother for a short period of time. By the time we saw

them, they had recently been weaned by mum for real this time and were just hanging out together enjoying the late spring good weather. They too looked fit & strong and when this year's photo tour returns in June, hopefully one or both will be back again after their first winter alone.



In between the photo tours, I went off to explore part of the northwest corner of Vancouver Island known as [San Josef Bay](#). This really was a spectacular spot, with golden sand beaches, sea caves and centuries old 'sea-stacks'.

After Knight Inlet I headed off back to the [Khutzeymateen](#) in northern BC., with a couple of friends. As always the place did not disappoint. We saw 18 different bears whilst we were in there, most at least twice, including two orphaned yearling cubs - sadly their mother had recently been killed protecting them from a large male bear that wandered on to the point they were feeding on.



The [two cubs](#) seemed to be doing ok on their own and my last update of them came in August and they were still hanging out and feeding together. I shall be returning to the 'Khutz' again early this summer and will be keeping a good eye out for them.

July saw me leave the Khutzeymateen and a friend and I headed north to Juneau in Alaska. We went there for two very special reasons; to check out a new bear location, Pack Creek on Admiralty Island and to try to see some humpback whales - we were not disappointed, in fact we were amazed.

Pack Creek, located on the NE side of Admiralty Island, about a 20 minute float plane flight SW from Juneau. A protected zoological area of approximately 66,000 acres with tightly controlled permitted access for only 12 people a day.

Like the Khutzeymateen, Pack Creek is one of the few places left where bears are left to be bears - granting us the privilege to observe 'them'.

The main viewing area is adjacent to a former homestead site of Stan Price & his wife Edna and dates back to the 1930's.

The day we visited we had an encounter with a beautiful [lion looking](#) female bear and her two cubs. She was spooked by another bear coming out on to the creek - this bear

was actually her daughter from the last generation.

She ran from the creek with her young cubs, right up towards us, stopping only 10 - 15 feet in front of me. She assessed the situation then went around us into a lagoon area behind & I just kept clicking! She was one of several bears, adults & cubs, that we saw that day and that was without the late starting salmon run to attract them.

After seeing the humpback whales in Maui on their wintering grounds I also wanted to see them in Alaska on their summer feeding grounds and if possible I hoped to see a group bubble net feeding.

Humpbacks are normally solitary animals and occasionally you will see a mum with a young calf, sometimes with a young male escort just hanging out, but rarely will you see a group of large full grown males together. But in one or two places along the Pacific seaboard between BC & Alaska certain individuals form groups of about eight or nine whales that come together to feed as a team.





Bubble Net Feeding Humpbacks



Blue Ice

Now I've seen humpbacks lunge feeding in BC waters and that was impressive, but bubble netting is a whole different event to witness and even hear.

We fell lucky. We saw a breaching whale shortly after leaving harbour and headed over in its direction. Suddenly the water to the side of our boat started to bubble and erupt and several whales launched themselves out of the water, right beside us. We were in awe and couldn't believe what we had just witnessed. We stayed with these whales for a while, watching as they circled round, dove down and came lunging back up to feed, it was a special and rare treat.

Now I also said it was a special event to hear - not just the sounds of the whales as they broke the surface or trumpeted like elephants to each other, but hearing them under the water. With the aid of a hydrophone, we could hear them singing and blowing bubbles to confuse the fish as they circled them and forced them to the surface and then just before they hit the surface, they would go quiet and this was the time to get your camera ready! (See the blog [Bubble Netters](#) to hear them).

We had two days out on the water with the humpbacks and filled our remaining time with visits to a couple of glaciers - Mendenhall Glacier & Sawyer Glacier.

For the latter we had a fairly long, but worthwhile boat trip via Tracy Arm, passing blue icebergs that had calved off the glacier along our way. I was amazed to learn how the blue was caused by colour spectrum absorption through the ice, giving off the brilliant turquoise effect. See [Blue Ice](#)

Back in BC my year on the water and with the whales continued as I took two groups out on Marine Photo Tours and as with previous years we had a couple of splendid days with orca, humpbacks, eagles, sea-lions and dolphins. I also spent a day out doing some work for [Discovery Marine Safaris](#) including more encounters with orca and humpbacks.

After a few of my usual summer shows including Market Day in Courtenay and Nautical Days in Comox I was back out on the road again - this time to Victoria to hopefully see the Southern Resident Orcas in Juan De Fuca Strait and then across to the mainland for a 7,000km road trip.

The '[Southern Residents](#)' are fish eating orca and their population only numbers around 78 individuals at this time. As an independent sub-species of orca they are listed as endangered. I was pleased to be able to spend a couple of hours out on the water with them and a very playful humpback that slapped the surface of the water with its fluke for about 20 minutes.

Over on the mainland I met up with a friend of mine in southern Alberta and we headed off to northern BC via a stop with some friends at Salmon Arm and a chance to photograph some [osprey](#). Not only did this year's road trip come to a sudden and unexpected end, but it was a little quieter than previous years for wildlife too.

All that said, it was not without its firsts which include a black wolf, several bird species and was highlighted by watching some grizzlies catching red [sockeye salmon](#) on a creek in northern BC.



Welcome to Alaska!



Caught The Red



Sea Stacks



Sold Out!

The trip to northern BC also included a few brief sightings of wolves, but nothing as good as in recent years.

Also for the first time in several years 2014 was 'spirit bear' free - due in part to the authorities moving a number of known 'roadside' bears to less accessible areas for protection.

Having observed the bears in northern BC for a while, we headed off over to Alberta and Jasper NP to try and get some more elk and moose images. We did see some young elk and had a couple of great encounters with rocky mountain sheep. We also got some good leads on a regular male moose sighting.

We camped close to the trail head the night before we were going to hike in to try and spot the moose. Our research the day before was very positive and we were quite excited by the possibility of getting some good shots of a bull moose in his favourite breakfast pond.

But when we woke up early the next morning we were covered in snow and it was coming down quite hard. We were not kitted out for bad winter conditions and decided to miss the moose for a day and come down off the mountain before it got any worse - hoping it would be better in Jasper itself... it was worse!

The forecast for the next few days was for it to continue to get worse before it got better so with that news I headed back to BC.

I certainly had not expected snow to be the cause for the end of this year's road trip, not in early September at least!

Back home (in a heatwave) I began editing the thousands of pictures I had taken throughout the course of the year (& I still am), getting ready for the forthcoming Christmas markets & local malls roadshow.

They proved to be a great success and I was astounded by the interest shown in my work and thank everyone for that & for their purchases throughout the year. My spirit bear print Black & White sold out - all 75 editions of that print have now gone with the last one going three days before Christmas.

The website continues to grow and will be cleaned up a little over the coming winter months. 2014 saw a little over 1,000 'hits' more than in 2013 taking it to over 14,000 views from 87 different countries this past year alone. So if you're abroad anytime and have a weblink, why not check the site out for something new and see how many countries we get next year.

As for 2015? Hopefully it will be much of the same - plans and research are already underway for field trips to several locations over the course of the year and I will keep looking for more firsts as well as hoping to spot some old favourites to add to my ever expanding portfolio.

I've recently had confirmation of a boat charter for a photo tour to photograph the bears of Knight Inlet again in June. These tours only have limited space, so if you'd like to attend sign up on the [website](#) as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

New images will be posted on the website throughout the year and news and stories will continue to appear regularly on the blog page. Don't forget to '[subscribe](#)' to be amongst the first to learn of blog updates and reports 'from the field' as well as news of any open field trips.

I'll be at a few shows locally here on the Island when I can throughout the year too, so if you're out and about at any of the shows, please stop by and say hi.

*Have a great year!*

*Steve*



[www.stevewphotography.ca](http://www.stevewphotography.ca)