

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

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2013 Friends On The Road!

2013 was a very busy year with lots of travelling combined with some exceptional opportunities.

I started the year as I did 2012 and visited the snowy owls over on the British Columbia coast at Boundary Bay. This year I was fortunate not only to encounter snowy owls and northern harriers but I also managed a couple of 'firsts' when I came across several short eared owls and a splendid long eared owl in its prime.



Long Eared Owl

Next it was over to Tofino for a check on the migrating grey whales. Not very 'showy' whales this far north, but I always like to see them when I can, along with the sea otters that live in the area.

In April we had a special event which I was pleased to be able to help out with. Bears Matter (www.bearsmatter.com) a Vancouver Island based charity which not

only raises funds to help protect local bears and wildlife, but bears worldwide.

One of his year's fund raiser events was in Qualicum Beach here on Vancouver Island and saw a hero amongst bears & bear lovers; Charlie Russell give a presentation about his exceptional work in the remote far Eastern Russian peninsula of Kamchatka. If you have never seen the film 'Edge of Eden', which shows the work Charlie did in Russia, I would highly recommend it.



Yours truly with Charlie Russell - a hero of bears everywhere!

It was great to finally meet Charlie and to help out with the event.

May saw myself and a couple of friends head off to northern BC, initially in search for spirit bears. Although unsuccessful for the elusive white bear on this occasion, we did manage to see lots of other wildlife, including a coyote, which was another first for me.

It was also good to be able to include a springtime return visit to the Nisga'a

Memorial Lava Bed Provincial Park, (see last year's [newsletter](#) page 3) and to be able to share this spot with someone else who had not known of it before.

That short road trip saw us arrive in Prince Rupert from where I once again flew into the Khutzeymateen.

As I had been on my first visit in 2012 and still am every time I visit, my two colleagues were just in awe of the spectacular beauty and superb wildlife of this area. The bear encounters were exceptional and even the rain wasn't too bad! It was good to see old friends both human and bruin including the 'Queen of the Khutz' still with her two cubs.



Queen of the Khutz & Cubs

There was no time to stop after the Khutzeymateen, as soon as we arrived back on Vancouver Island the three of us headed off to photograph the bears of Knight Inlet.

It was great to return to this area - the day being made extra special when I was treated to the sight of three brothers. Now about 30 months old, I'd first seen them as new cubs of the year back in 2011.



Band of Brothers - Age 30 months

They were all still together and doing well having recently left their mother. It is always special to see the same bears year after year, but three cubs having all made it to this important stage of their lives is very rare.

Mid-June saw me return to Knight Inlet for a couple of photo-tours I had arranged. Over the years many people have asked how could they join me when I go and photograph the bears. So this gave some the opportunity as well as the chance, for those who wanted it, to pick up a few field tips at the same time. The two tours were a great success and all who attended seemed very pleased with their days encounters.



Mom & Cub

July saw me at several shows around the Island as well as another photo tour opportunity, when I was able to take a group out on a marine photo tour - photographing the region's marine life.

This was also a good day out, offering different challenges to photographing bears. We managed to encounter orca, seals, black bears and lots of birds,

including numerous eagles feeding on a local rapids system that forces fish to the surface for the eagles to pick off.

The very beginning of August saw the first 'super pod' of orca come together in Johnstone Strait and thanks to [Discovery Marine Safaris](#) I was there to record the events of the day for them. Without a doubt the highlight of the day was seeing a female orca breach a number of times and on one occasion I was fortunate to catch the whole sequence.



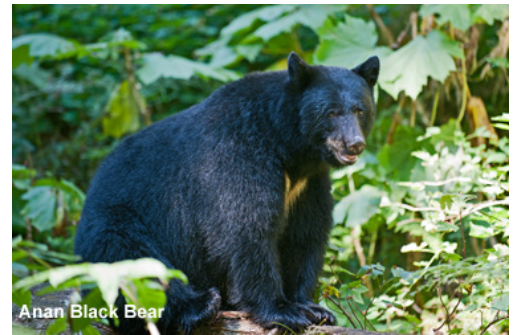
Low Flying Orca!

After a great showing at the August Nautical Days holiday weekend event here in the Comox Valley, I was back on the road the next day once again bound for Prince Rupert. This time I boarded a ferry that took me over the border into SE Alaska.

My destination was Anan Creek, via Wrangell Island. Here a friend of mine and I had hired a US Forest Service cabin for a week photographing grizzly & black bears in the bush of Alaska's Tongass National Forest.

It was an exceptional week with some fantastic encounters and lots and lots of photographs.

The cabin is a 1.5 mile trail hike from the main viewing area and I would walk this daily, encountering bears along my route - some on the trail and some just off. The main access point is controlled by forest rangers in the summer as is the main viewing area and day visitors would come and go throughout the day but to really 'see' the area and to learn the day to day comings and goings of the bears, both black and brown, you really need to be there for several days.



Anan Black Bear

After the great trip to Anan it was back to Rupert and on the road through BC once again.

Around 6.30am on a grey wet morning I was heading through the same area that we had spent a lot of time searching for spirit bears in the spring. In the distance I saw what looked like a large whiteish boulder in a field, but as I got closer, I noticed the big rock was moving.



Coyote

Sure enough, after hours of unsuccessful searching previously, there it was, a beautiful spirit bear having breakfast!

I continued my tour throughout this area and it was great to meet up with several friends from previous travels and also meet many new ones along the way, although I missed not seeing others.

For me friends not only include people. Returning to locations year after year and seeing the same bears and other wildlife return, often with young, is also like seeing old friends and this trip was no different. I saw bears I'd seen previously and in one location, after many days of waiting was once again treated to the very special sight of wolves fishing. An exceptional day was when two adults brought down a pup and took him fishing too. (See '[Wolf Pup](#)' on the website for more of this story).



Bute Family

As I travelled across the province I checked out several new locations and returned to some old ones. At one regular spot I was walking a trail when I heard a lot of squealing and screeching. I broke my way through the bush to the lakeside and found four or five otter harassing a beaver, even screeching at it from on top of its own lodge. Finally the young otters left the beaver to his own devices. Later I learned that otter will actually kill a beaver and take over it's lodge given half the chance.

Having been unsuccessful at meeting one of my targets in BC I decided to cross the provincial borders once again, this time in to Alberta and spent several days in Jasper National Park.

This was my first visit to Jasper and I liked it. Although it took some time and lots of pointers and advice from many of



Spirit Bear 2013

those aforementioned friends I finally managed to obtain several 'firsts' that I had hoped to catch in BC. Amongst these were big horn sheep - the BC location I had headed to was inaccessible for my vehicle. I came across several males on a rocky crag one afternoon whilst out on a trail and later came across a flock of females and lambs along the road.

I spent several early mornings sat beside lakes in the hope of seeing some moose and finally had some success when a female came out for her early morning roots. But no large bull moose this year, that will have to go on the 2014 list!

Another first. this time a large superb looking elk stag. I had seen a number of females when I entered the park, but after several days hadn't seen any males, but then one morning this all changed.

I was on a trail around a small pond and had seen four or five female elk in a copse behind the trail - so I decided I would make my way around the pond and sit and wait to see what happens. As I walked along, a bush on my left moved and there he was, staring at me, the 'forest lord' - a very large looking stag about twenty-five to thirty feet away!

If I carried on I'd go closer, so I backed off slowly the way I came - he started to walk over towards me. I stepped off the trail on his side - he stopped and carried on eating. I stepped back on the trail and continued to back off... he came running head down!

I stepped off the trail again on his side and put a tree and some bushes between us. He stopped again and started eating the bushes. I avoided the trail and bush whacked my way out to my vehicle.



Wolf Pup (with adult behind!)



Forest Lord

My First Bull Elk Encounter - it won't be soon forgotten

Going back the way I came along the trail was taking me towards his females and he didn't like that. That is why I kept stepping off the trail on his side and why he calmed down again each time.... Phew, glad I remembered that bit of friendly advice!

Once again with a new portfolio full of the many amazing sights wildlife has to offer it was back to Vancouver Island to prepare for the very busy Christmas market season.

But not before one more trip to see some grizzly bears. My friends at [Discovery Marine Safaris](#) had asked if I could try and get some new grizzly bear shots for them, so we headed off on one of their grizzly bear tours to Bute Inlet on the BC mainland coast. It was a great day with several sightings and the highlight being a mom with three new cubs of the year!

What a great way to finish off the year in the field with three new born cubs around 10 months old - who knows hopefully in two years time I will get to see the three of them still hanging out together having recently left their mom, I hope so!

The new website continued growing through 2013 too and saw over 13,000 hits from 75 different countries this year.

Looking forward to 2014 - I've recently had confirmation of two boat charters for field trips to photograph the bears of Knight Inlet again in June. These tours will only have limited space, so if you'd like to attend sign up on the [website](#) as soon as possible.

I'll be back on the road throughout 2014 searching for new encounters and hoping to meet some old 'friends' along the way.

New images will be posted throughout the year and news will continue to appear regularly on the blog page of the website. Don't forget to '[subscribe](#)' to be amongst the first to learn of 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

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