

Autumn in the Great Bear Rainforest

Exploratory Photo Adventure 2025



New for 2025 – my first 10-day autumn Great Bear Rainforest SUPER VOYAGE! By extending past *Autumn in the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventures* by a two extra days we'll have even MORE time in the Great Bear! This means we can visit more photographic locations and have more route options. As always, our “targeted” subjects on this photo tour will include Grizzly Bears, Black Bears, Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, Sea Otters, possibly coastal Gray Wolves and Spirit Bears, landscapes and seascapes, and more. And, we'll do all this while traveling into the depths of the Great Bear Rainforest aboard a classic and spacious 70-foot wooden schooner, the *Passing Cloud*.



Hey - Who Goes There? Northern River Otters are found throughout the Great Bear Rainforest, including in both fresh water and salt water. This pair was part of a romp containing 4 otters (which was very likely a family consisting of a mother and 3 pups).

The Region – And Our Expedition At A Glance. The portion of the British Columbia mainland coast that stretches from Rivers Inlet in the south to the Skeena River in the north is often referred to as “The Great Bear Rainforest”. At over 64,000 square kilometers (25,000 sq. mi.) it is the largest tract of temperate coastal rainforest left on planet Earth. Here the coastal mountains meet the Pacific Ocean – the area is cut by hundreds of steep-sided inlets/fjords and there are countless islands. The more inland portions of the Great Bear Rainforest (AKA the “*Inner Great Bear*”) are characterized by thick forests cut by steep-sided inlets – here forest literally meets salt water! Another characteristic feature is the presence of wide, fertile estuaries where inland rivers and streams drain into the inlets and fjords. These estuaries are wildlife viewing and wildlife photography hotspots!

The portions of the Great Bear Rainforest more directly facing the Pacific Ocean (AKA the “*Outer Great Bear*”) are more wind- and “sea-swept” and include many islands and islets with more stunted tree growth and are generally more open than the forest of the Inner Great Bear. Many portions of the shoreline even have long, sandy beaches!

Both faces of the Great Bear – *the Inner and Outer* – are true wilderness and stunningly beautiful! They are rarely visited by humans. And both faces share many fascinating wildlife species, including Grizzly Bears, Black (and Spirit) Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, Wolverines, American Martens, Bald Eagles, Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, and Harbour Seals. The Outer Great Bear adds even more species to this strong list – here Steller Sea Lions, Sea Otters, additional whale species (such as Fin Whales), and many species of waterfowl and seabirds are more commonly seen, adding even more faunal diversity to our adventure!

Because of the long duration of this photo tour we have two primary route options (see map on right side of this page). Both of our possible routes provide us with opportunities (if weather conditions and the sea state permit) to explore portions of the Inner and Outer Great Bear. This gives us a greater chance of seeing and photographing coastal Gray Wolves, Sea Otters, Steller Sea Lions and Fin Whales than on a typical (and shorter) Great Bear photo tours. The exact route we take will be



dependent on weather and wildlife distribution and abundance as determined in the weeks leading up to our adventure.

This is a Tour of Exploration! The *Autumn in the Great Bear Rainforest Super Voyage 2025* is a true tour of photographic exploration. We'll explore the inlets, bays and old-growth forest of the spectacular mid-coast of British Columbia. We'll walk trails and beaches, explore creeks, and search for the unique mix of subject matter that only the Great Bear Rainforest can provide! The photographic opportunities on this tour will be absolutely amazing.

This is a multi-faceted trip, focusing not only on the bears, but on *all* the inhabitants of the Great Bear Rainforest – and the entire ecosystem in which they thrive. While the bears are an integral part of this trip, we will be approaching this trip *with an attitude of finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find*. This may include many species of terrestrial and marine wildlife and birds, intertidal scenes, landscapes, seascapes, and more! ***Please be aware that if your sole goal is to photograph bears (to the exclusion of other subject matter you will be presented with), this may not be the trip for you.***

About the Photography "Style" On This Photo Tour. On this trip – as on my other photo tours – this is a “*photography in true wilderness*” experience. This means we will spend the bulk of our time in isolated and remote wilderness and away from other humans (and other photographers). We'll have to “track down” our subject matter without the help of other outfitters, spotters or real-time online apps listing recent sightings (i.e., there is no “network of sightings” for us to plug into!). Additionally we'll have no “set-up” situations where we can set up in a specific location ahead of time and with the knowledge that a certain species will predictably appear and pose for us! The advantage of our “*photography in true wilderness*” approach is that it produces a far more unique and personalized experience and it can often lead to more original and compelling photos. A possible downside is that it means we don't know the specifics of the shooting conditions ahead of time and thus may put more onus on the photographer to make snap technical and creative decisions in a field

Seeking Natural Art! While finding and working with several species of “charismatic megafauna” is a big part of our experience, we'll be approaching this trip with an attitude of *finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find*.



Nikon D2Xs with Nikkor 200mm f2.0 VR. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 100
© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Follow-the-Leader – Coastal Gray Wolf Style! While normally shy, reclusive and rarely seen, on some of the outer islands of the Great Bear live and play on white-sand beaches. Here an adult wolf is being chased by three of its pups-of-the-year.



Nikon Z9 with Nikkor Z 800mm f6.3S. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 3600

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setting. This means it may challenge – and encourage you to expand – your photographic skills more than other photo tours do!

Our Wildlife Subject Matter: While this is a *photography-in-true-wilderness* trip, we are definitely headed into a target-rich environment! Here's a quick run down of both our “*most likely*” wildlife subjects and our “*less likely but possible*” wildlife subjects:

A. Most Likely Subjects (50% or greater probability of encounter):

- Black Bears
- Grizzly Bears
- Harbour Seals
- Steller Sea Lions
- Humpback Whales
- Bald Eagles
- Herring Gulls
- Dall's Porpoises
- Surf Scoters
- Harlequin Ducks
- Common Loons
- Sea Otters
- River Otters
- American Mink
- Great Blue Herons
- Asst'd songbirds
- Asst'd seabirds
- Asst'd shorebirds
- Fantastic Landscapes & Seascapes

B. Less Likely But Possible Subjects (<50% probability of encounter):

- Killer Whales
- Coastal Gray Wolves
- Spirit Bears
- Minke Whales
- Fin Whales
- Pacific Marten
- Elephant Seals
- Wolverine
- Marbled Murrelets
- Pacific White-sided Dolphins

2025 Trip Start and End Points: The photo tour starts and ends in Bella Bella, BC.

2025 Dates: September 20-30, 2025 including arrival and departure days (10 nights/11 days). September 21-30, 2025 aboard the *Passing Cloud* (9 nights/10 days).

2025 Price: \$11,000 CAD plus 5% GST.

What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation in Bella Bella beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Sample Itinerary)
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Passing Cloud*
- A highly-experienced crew, wildlife guides, chef and a professional photography guide
- All First Nation, Conservation, and Stewardship fees
- Use of onboard gear and resources, including rubber boots!
- Use of Zodiac® and all associated safety gear (life jackets, etc.)

What's Not Included?

- Transportation between your home and Bella Bella, BC at the beginning and end of the trip
- Personal belongings and equipment
- Meals and accommodation in Bella Bella prior to Day 1 of the photo tour
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or missed flights
- Any gratuities for the crew of the *Passing Cloud*

What To Expect?

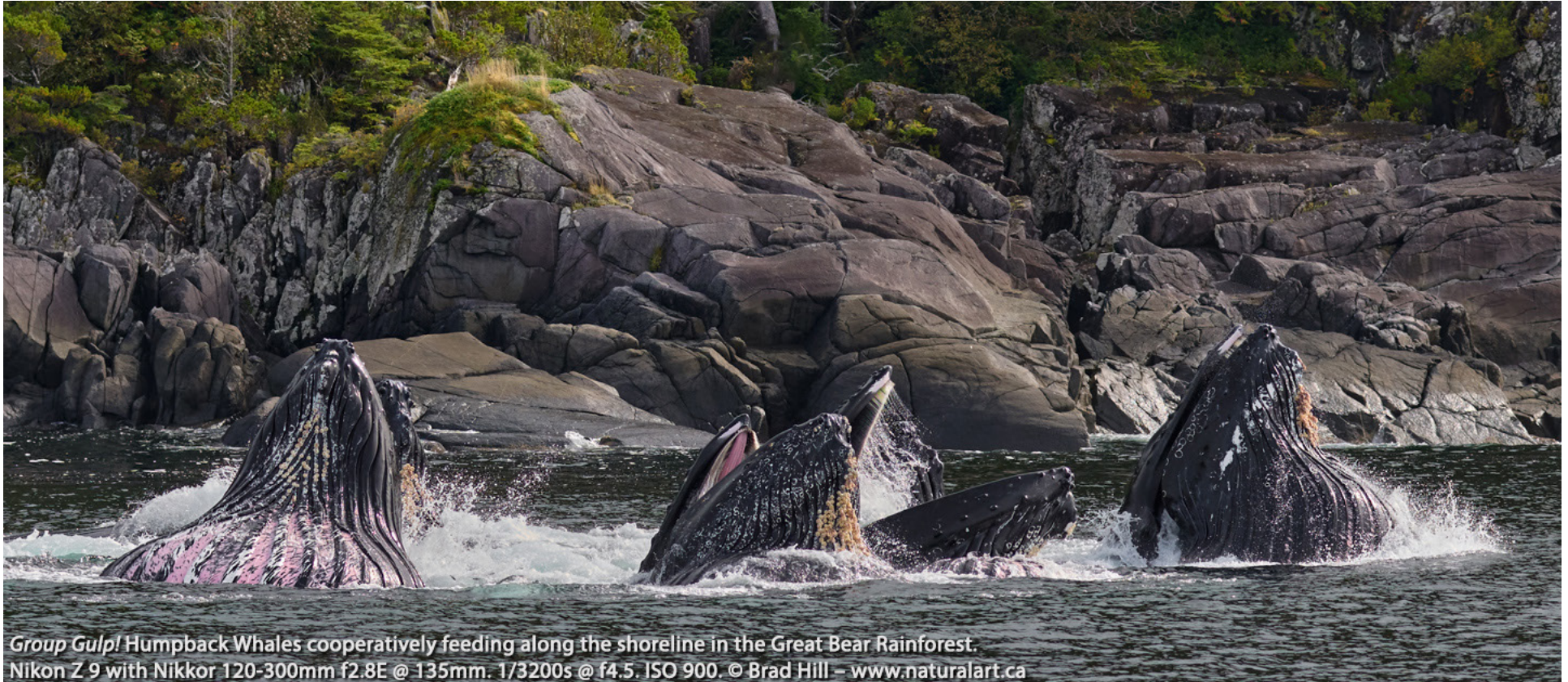
- Cool and rapidly “changeable” weather (daytime highs of about 12-17°C or 54-63°F) with the possibility of moderate to heavy rain
- *Mostly* calm seas, but with some bouts of rolling or choppy water
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!
- A truly unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Photo Tour Leader: Brad Hill



Sea Otter @ Rest. Sea Otters were extirpated from the entire BC Coast but are now enjoying a strong recovery. This particularly calm Sea Otter was photographed in the Great Bear Rainforest in late August of 2024. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S. 1/1600s @ f3.2. ISO 1250



Group Gulp! Humpback Whales cooperatively feeding along the shoreline in the Great Bear Rainforest.
Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor 120-300mm f2.8E @ 135mm. 1/3200s @ f4.5. ISO 900. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Accommodation: While in Bella Bella we'll be staying at the Shearwater Resort & Marina. Unless otherwise requested, you will have single occupancy accommodation (i.e., a room for yourself) in Shearwater.

This trip is being offered in association with *Outer Shores Expeditions*. While in the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying on their classic 70-foot wooden schooner – the *Passing Cloud*. Please be aware that you will be sharing a berth with one other person while on the *Passing Cloud*.

Sample Itinerary

The itinerary of the *Autumn in the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventure 2025* is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions.

The Big Picture! Our current intention is follow a roughly circular clockwise route through the Great Bear Rainforest. Weather and sea state permitting, we plan to first head west and north from Bella Bella and visit the outer portions of the Great Bear during the first days of the trip. Past history has shown that these outer reaches kick into salmon-fueled high wildlife activity levels earlier than the inlets and channels further inland.

Wildlife activity and weather patterns will dictate how far north we'll venture. During this time on the outer coast we'll be seeking out Humpback, Fin, and Killer Whales as well as other marine mammals such as Steller Sea Lions and Sea Otters. Terrestrial mammals we're hoping to encounter during in the first portion of the adventure include Black Bears and, with luck, Spirit Bears. With even more luck we'll encounter coastal Gray Wolves (which, on average, are more easily found on the outer islands of the Great Bear). Of course, during this time we'll doubtlessly encounter a wide range of sea birds and various species of sea ducks.

We'll start the second portion of the trip heading around the northern end of the biggest island in the Great Bear – Princess Royal Island. We'll then head south and visit a number of inlets and estuaries of the inner Great Bear that have strong populations of Grizzly Bears. Coastal Gray Wolves are also found in these inlets but can be tougher to find (and photograph) in these heavily forested inlets.

Our Daily Routine? Each day on this trip will be different from the others. The timing of low and high tides, weather, wildlife abundance and distribution, and the distance to the next “hot spot” all will play a role in determining whether we'll be pulling anchor and high-tailing it at first light or hopping in the Zodiac® to capture photos of wildlife in sweet morning light. On most mornings we'll be digging into a spectacular breakfast around 7 AM, though on occasion we may well be holding off on the morning meal until after a shooting session. And, on most days we'll be back in the *Passing Cloud* for our evening meal – and opening up some beverages – around 6:30 PM.

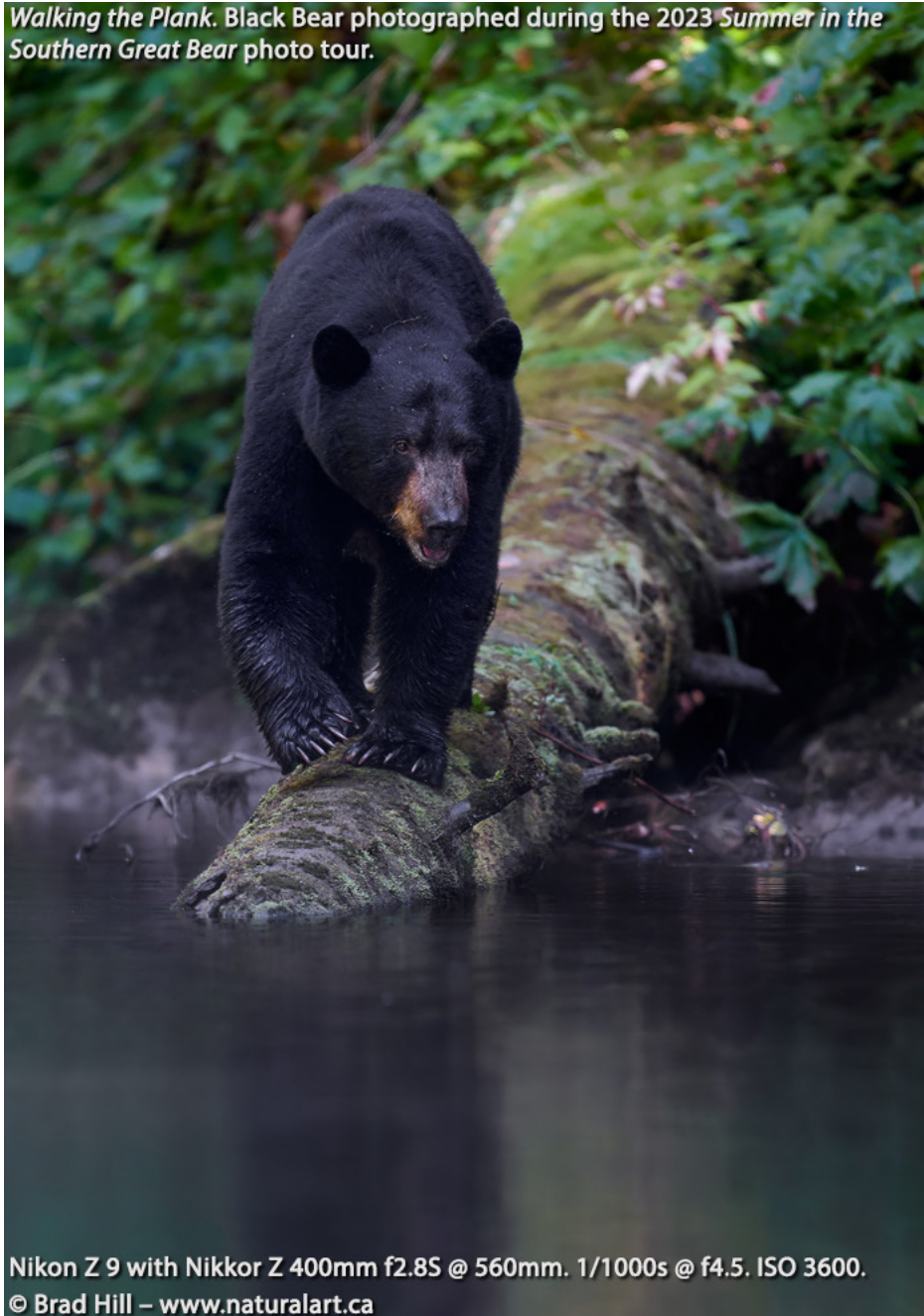
A Little More Detail! Here's a little closer look at one example of how our time together *might look*...

Day 1 – September 20, 2025

Arrive in Bella Bella, BC. Make your way to the Shearwater Resort and Marina. You may check-in any time from 3 PM on. If you arrive early in the day feel free to go for a walk or check out the facilities. Our first official activity will be meeting in the restaurant for dinner at 6:30 PM.



Walking the Plank. Black Bear photographed during the 2023 Summer in the Southern Great Bear photo tour.



Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/1000s @ f4.5. ISO 3600.

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Day 2 – September 21, 2025

Early breakfast, followed by boarding the *Passing Cloud* at the marina in Shearwater. After meeting the crew and guides of the *Passing Cloud*, allocating cabins, and a brief orientation we'll begin our journey by heading west and north towards the "Outer Great Bear". With our intended route we could easily encounter Sea Otters and several other species of marine mammals.

Days 3-6 – September 22-25, 2025

During these days we'll explore the west side of Princess Royal and other islands of the "Outer Great Bear". This region offers a high diversity of marine and terrestrial wildlife, so our subjects may include Killer Whales, Humpback Whales, Fin Whales, Steller Sea Lions, Black (and possibly Spirit) Bears, and Northern River Otters. And, quite notably, during these days our chances of encountering and photographing coastal Gray Wolves are quite good!

Days 7-10 – September 26-29, 2025

Over this time we'll travel over the north end of Princess Royal Island and enter the long channels and inlets of the "Inner Great Bear". Suddenly the topography will steepen, and we'll have high mountains and steep cliffs on both sides of the deep inlets. The channels and inlets are still full of marine mammals in this region and at the end of many inlets are wide, lush estuaries with salmon streams and all that feed upon them, including Grizzly Black Bears, Bald Eagles, and more! Each day will bring new adventures and new wildlife subject matter!

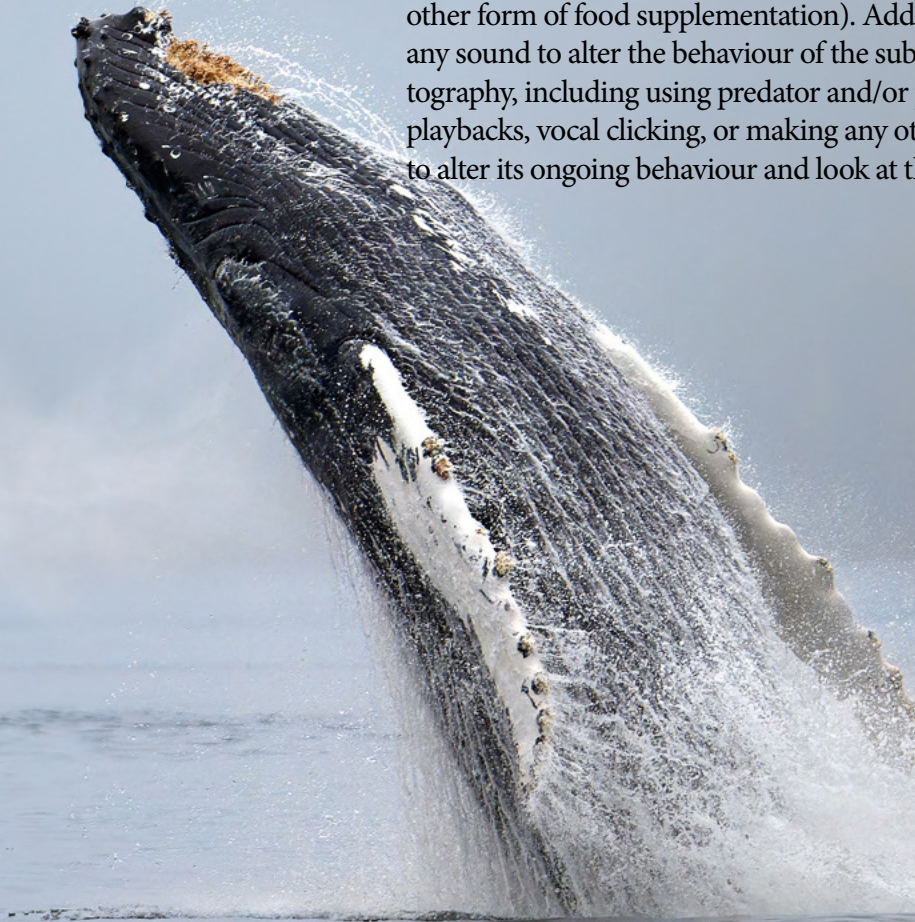
Day 11 – September 30, 2025

As we're traveling the short distance back to Bella Bella we'll be on the lookout for last minute wildlife sightings. Once we get to Bella Bella we say farewell to our shipmates before disembarking and heading to the Bella Bella Airport. And, of course we'll be left with great memories and great photos of a wonderful adventure.

My Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

Wildlife conservation is the primary reason for my involvement in wildlife photography and for running photo tours. As such, *I place the welfare and value of our subjects above the value of any photograph of them.* This philosophy is embodied in my *Wildlife FIRST!* rules of conduct that guide our collective actions during all my photo tours. These four simple ethical rules state that:

1. Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* should engage in *passive wildlife photography only*. This means striving to capture images of wildlife behaving as naturally as possible and without the photographer taking any actions to guide the subject(s) toward desirable settings and/or backdrops or elicit specific “poses”.
2. Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* should do *nothing intentional to alter or influence the behaviour of their subjects for the purpose of photography*. This includes NOT intentionally influencing their distribution in space and time or influencing their behaviour. This translates into NOT engaging in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation). Additionally, it extends to not using any sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography, including using predator and/or prey calls, song or vocalization playbacks, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to cause the subject to alter its ongoing behaviour and look at the photographer.



The Humpback Ballet. Humpback Whale numbers have been on the rise in recent years in the channels and inlets of the Great Bear Rainforest. The whales are commonly seen during my photo tours – but capturing a breach shot is a special and rare treat!

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor 120-300mm f2.8E @ 300mm. 1/2500s @ f3.2. ISO 640. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

3. While conforming to and working within any legal guidelines determining minimum allowable approach distances, **wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* should allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the subject-to-photographer distance it is comfortable with.** This principle serves to reduce stress on the subject – and also allows the capture of photographs of the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.
4. **Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* always consider both their *individual and the overall collective effects* photographic activities can have on the subject(s).** This includes being aware of *your total time spent with the wildlife subject(s)* and, whenever possible, *the total time spent with the subject by all photographers utilizing the subject.* In practice this means the photographer may have to withdraw from the subject and cease photographic efforts of it, especially if there is any indication that his or her presence is impacting on the subject's behavioural routine (including activities such as feeding, resting and/or sleeping, caring for its offspring, etc.). This consideration is always important and may become even **MORE** important if multiple photographers or groups of photographers are simultaneously or sequentially sharing the same subject(s).

We **will** be adhering to these 4 rules during all my BC coastal photo tours.

All images in this trip compendium and on the *Natural Art Images* website (www.naturalart.ca) were captured following these **Wildlife *FIRST*** rules of photographer conduct.

For more information about this amazing trip contact Brad Hill at:

seminars@naturalart.ca

Calm. Curious. Harbour Seals are ubiquitous on the BC coast but, despite this, they are still fantastic subjects and offer nice options when we're "between bears." © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon Z9 with Nikkor Z 800mm f6.3S. 1/1000s @ f6.3. ISO 1100

Black-on-Black – Emerging from Shadows.





It's a Family Affair. We encountered this wolf family in a remote inlet on the outer side of the Great Bear Rainforest (the "Outer Great Bear") during our *Summer in the Southern Great Bear* photo tour in 2023.

One Whale of a Morning! Great Bear Rainforest photo tours can offer up some absolutely amazing “animalscape” opportunities. This early morning summer scene occurred during a year where we had a lot of wildfire smoke to deal with. The smoke wasn’t entirely pleasant, but it did contribute to producing some amazing scenes!



The "Inner" Great Bear – River Meets Ocean @ Sunrise! Coastal estuaries occur where rivers drain into the ocean – and are where bears, wolves, and many other wildlife species are commonly found in the spring and summer. We'll visit several estuaries during our *Great Bear Rainforest* photo tour!



Autumn Sunrise in the Great Bear. While most photographers travel to the Great Bear Rainforest to see and photograph the wildlife, the scenery and the landscape photography can be spectacular.



Unnamed Falls! Go off the beaten path in the Great Bear and you can find stunning scenes that few have ever witnessed.



The "Outer" Great Bear – Where Rock Meets Sand! Many of the western-most islands and shorelines on the BC coast offer a beautiful mix of beach, forest, and rock! In this region we find greater numbers of Sea Otters, Steller Sea Lions, and Coastal Gray Wolves



