

After several years without a proper vacation, Chris and I bit the bullet in March and flew to Hawaii, the Big Island. I always assumed that wintering humpbacks would be the focus of any trip to Hawaii, but as my cheat sheet grew to 28 pages in length, humpbacks fell to the bottom of the list. The whole trip was brilliant. We stayed at two places—one nice condo in downtown Kailua-Kona, the other a vacation rental on the mountainside overlooking the water near Captain Cook, with complete privacy, an unbeatable view, great layout, and lots of comical geckos. We played on several beautiful beaches, hiked across and up the side of a tropical jungle valley on the wet side of the island, drove almost the entire major road system, spent a day exploring Volcano National Park (with a brief glimpse of a nene), walked around some petroglyphs and Native Hawaiian temples, and encountered a pod of short-finned pilot whales on a whale watching charter. The highlight (at least for me) was a two-hour snorkel with a pod of gracious spinner dolphins. Chris was the first to spot them beyond the reef, murky shadows in the blue depths; that glimpse would have been enough to tickle me, but the shadows turned into group after group of dolphins and the dolphins just got bolder and friendlier the longer we were in the water. Several times I free-dove or ducked my head under water, trying to be interesting, and watched them respond and come over to me. Once, a pair swam by ever so slowly at arm's reach. And once, when Chris happened to be filming me, I played the leaf game with a wild dolphin. That encounter fulfilled a lifelong dream and was certainly one of the highlights of my life!

While we were gone, a friend house sat for us and fed the dog, fish, frogs, and (almost as importantly) the porcupines. Squeak and Lucy continued to visit regularly over the winter, and we were entertained almost daily by the charismatic Roubles. She often lingered on our front porch (where we do not leave food), napped in the sunshine in the bird feeders, and even climbed a tree onto the roof and wandered around there for half an hour before expertly climbing down. One day, Lucy (ever social) nosed up to good-natured Roubles and appeared to try nursing while Roubles sat on her hind legs, completely unresisting. Our porcupine biologist friend said it was highly likely that the two were related; though Roubles would not be lactating (porcupettes part from their mothers in the fall), perhaps Lucy was motivated by happy memories and wishful thinking. In the end, we discovered that we were wrong about that, though it only proved what a mellow and tolerant porcupine Roubles was. We saw him (for he turned out to be male) one time after we returned from Hawaii. Several weeks later I found his body not far from the house, the apparent victim of a fall from a tree (which is a common cause of injury and mortality among porcupines). We mourned him deeply, his loss only slightly alleviated by the visit of an enormous yellow porcupine just a few days after Roubles disappeared. Monstroso had arrived, a truly magnificent creature who quickly took to the routine on the porch. He and Squeak continued to visit long after porcupines usually scatter for summer activities, and long after Lucy discontinued her visits, but they too eventually stopped coming in May.

Spring adventures started with an unsuccessful but fun April trip up the Taku in pursuit of hooligan, that rich, super abundant smelt that swarm our large rivers in the spring. I planned an overnight trip in the middle of the week-long run (the timing varies each year) on a high tide. Chris, my mother, and I headed up to the river among countless seals, gulls, and eagles with the intent to overnight at the Bullard's Landing cabin; unfortunately, the only ice-free channel in the river was right in the middle and about a mile from the shore. There was no safe place to leave the boat and an open lead of water right along shore prevented us from even visiting the cabin by

foot, so we had to leave on the same tide we came in on. It was a spectacular, sunny day, though, and the wildlife was worth the trip.

The rest of summer adventures took on a theme of explorations complementing the historical research I'd begun in the spring on the Bullard's Landing (Taku) and Snettisham properties. I'd learned a tremendous amount about both areas through hours at the state historical library and, once summer came, I was on the ground exploring areas first hand. Up the Taku I found five of the six boundary markers on our 148-acre property, dug up barbed wire fencing from Ben Bullard's time (19-teens), found the rough location of my property near the lodge, explored the ruins of a 1900 era cannery in Sunny Cove, and walked through the site of the Taku Village near Point Salisbury. In Snettisham I explored the 1920s pulp mill in Speel Arm, the fox farm on Fanny Island, and dug up myriad artifacts at the homestead (which is probably not a very accurate name, as it turns out, but that will require more research). The highlight of Snettisham adventures was finding the Crystal Mine, something I've dreamed about and attempted several times over the last few years. Chris, Rob, and I finally bushwhacked our way through dense brush and near-vertical mountainsides to stumble upon the small portal, complete with rusting cart at the entrance. We were able to go about 150 yards inside before steep stairs cut in the rock with a fierce waterfall raging down stopped us. At the base we found small clumps of quartz crystals and on the way down the mountain we plummeted our way through piles of rusting machinery.

Chris and I also went on our annual camping/fishing trip to Pavlof Harbor on Chichagof Island. This year we brought along an inflatable kayak to cross the lake to the mouth of the river where we like to fish; finding no cohos there, but noting a lot of jumping elsewhere in the lake, Chris suggested we try casting from the kayak. We did, with unexpected and exhilarating success. Just casting from a reclined sitting position is difficult enough, but landing the fish with the wind pushing the boat around and no room to move inside proved a bigger challenge (and any paddling would spook the fish away from the net). All four fish we caught that afternoon wound up in our laps to be bonked before returning to the net to bleed out. I'm sure it would have been comical to watch. We took another big camping trip up Taku Inlet with Katie and Rob, staying in two places I'd wanted to explore: the tiny, spectacular Scow Cove and Sunny Cove farther south.

At the homestead, major improvements were few and far between. I built two sets of stairs on the paths around the property (vastly improving walking comfort), created a new path between the bridge and Harbor Seal cabin, widened and improved several other paths, and deprecated outdated ones. Other than that, I made repairs to the waters system, replaced the broken window in Harbor Seal, scrubbed the outhouses, and did a few other improvements here and there. Oh, and I also enjoyed myself, exploring more than I have in the past and spending considerable time on the porch watching the river and the birds (and, once, a brown bear). The river boat was launched for the first time in three years and made it farther up the river than it has ever been before, but not quite over the bars. My biggest accomplishment was simply spending time there. For two summers I've planned to spend a week a month there and have almost entirely failed. Having Fridays to work with did help this summer (I now work a 4-day work week), but it wasn't until September that I finally realized my dream. I headed down on a Thursday and didn't return until the two Mondays later. The first week was solitary (with Cailey), then my mother

flew down and joined me for the last few days of close up. We were intending to come back on Saturday, but heavy seas from Gilbert Bay kept us an extra night. On Sunday we made it to Taku Inlet but hit a nasty northerly that prevented us from crossing. We spent an adventurous night at the Tiger Olsen state cabin in Taku Harbor while a huge southeasterly blew in, warm and well fed with the camping and emergency gear I had on board along with the extra food and blankets we were bringing back to town. It was a fun and adventurous way to end the summer!

At work I started my first full year as a “Program Coordinator” for the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, the program I’ve helped manage for seven years and under which I now have greater responsibilities. In addition to meetings in Anchorage and Seattle, work took me to San Diego in October for grant training and there I was able to stay several days with my friends Eric and Patty. We hiked outside San Diego, near Julian (where we overnighted in a Forest Service campground cabin), and in the Anza-Borrego Desert (a spectacular hike through slot canyons to old calcite mines). We also ate at a panoply of amazing restaurants, sampling food from Thailand, China, India, Japan, and Italy. Closer to home, I traveled to Prince of Wales Island for site visits in July where I helped assess a culvert for fish passage; tromped through Twelvemile Creek (where trees and root wads had been returned to the creek through our funding); and visited the tiny Haida village of Kasaan (where we saw a traditional Haida longhouse, some of which was over 100 years old with the original totem house posts). The highlight was unexpectedly helping to carry one of four totem poles from the carving shed in Hydaburg (another Haida village) to its totem park up the hill. It took about an hour to get there (with frequent breaks), walking the streets among a group of locals and visitors, Haida regalia on many of the participants. Chris came along on this trip and we stayed on Prince of Wales for the weekend, driving 3.5 hours along old logging roads north to the El Capitan limestone cave, the largest known cave system in Alaska, which we toured with Forest Service guides. On the way we saw 31 deer and one black bear on the side of the road.

Once summer activities wound down, I began tackling a long-awaited project: rebuilding Mona’s mew. Though legal for a flightless red-tailed hawk, it was originally built for a falcon and I thought it could use a little expansion for both our sakes. My original intent was to simply move the front wall forward four feet (changing the dimensions from 6’x14’ to 10’x14’, but once I started working with that wall I discovered that it was too rotten from years of exposure to salvage once detached (the mews are necessarily exposed to the unkind Southeast Alaska weather). I also scrapped one of the side walls. In the end, I left only the back wall and one existing side wall and removed all other infrastructure. From there I scraped out new foundations, erected two new walls (one with a new door), and then replaced the entire roof with clear tuftex. Connecting the new walls to the old walls was a bit of work, since some of the end studs were rotten, but eventually I had a good shell. Plywood siding went up over the bottom four feet and 1”x2” slats covered the rest (the front wall wound up well over 9’ tall). Finally I was ready to outfit the interior with a variety of perches closely enough spaced to allow Mona to jump from one to the next. It was a tremendous amount of work, and I was weary to the bone by the end, but the result was fantastic. I had two high corner perches in the front—one was on the end of a beautiful birch tree root wad I’d found at Sandy Beach, the other a natural bow perch wrapped in sisal—then a tier of lower perches attached to branches wrapped in sisal that connect to the hide box against the back wall on one side and another perch against the back wall on the other side adjacent to her elevated water dish. The last days of construction were in the bitter

cold, but eventually her new mew was complete—not only larger but much better outfitted with perches. I'm happy to say that she moves around the whole mew like a monkey (making use of all the perches, the hide box, and the water dish) and that all the subsequent behavior changes have been positive and unexpected. The mew construction took up two months of my fall—working every weekend and after work when it was light enough—and consumed not just my time but my energy as well. By the time it was done, I had to use the remains of my energy to tackle the house projects that I'd put on hold. Consequently, I hunted only one day this fall and did not see a deer.

I also had the privilege to rehabilitate a bird for the raptor center. Just before Thanksgiving I received an injured crow who'd been found on the side of the road, hungry and unable to resist capture. I didn't have high hopes for him at first (rehab of that sort rarely work out well) but, to my surprise, he sprung back to life quickly—all except his left leg which had been shot with a pellet gun. I consulted with a crow expert (John Marzluff from the University of Washington) who confirmed that one-legged corvids often survive in the wild, so with that good news and the pellet removed by a vet, Bato started a two-week regimen of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. After a week, he moved to a mew outside where he could fly a little and regain his strength and where he continued to impress me with his presence of mind, if that's the right phrase. I've never had a patient who seemed to grasp my intent as Bato seemed to. They usually struggle and try to flee no matter how many times I bring them food and treat them well (that's to be expected, of course), but you always hope they'll recognize your intentions. I really felt that Bato did, watching my actions with a certain alertness and serenity, which was a rare treat. When the time came for his release, I met up with my mom, Chris, and the people who had captured him down at my office where I'd been watching crows come to the intertidal zone all week. I wanted to make sure he had crows nearby to help protect him as he readjusted and to give him companionship if possible (much of the Juneau crow community bands together in the winter). We waited for about an hour before we found some crows around another side of the building and released him. Bato flew into an alder tree and perched overlooking the water for about ten minutes. Then a flock of over 65 crows appeared, flying north up the channel; as they passed, Bato bolted from his tree and flew after them, disappearing over the bridge in their wake. Every day at work I wait for crows (I moved to a cubicle with a small window overlooking the channel in July) and study them all in the hopes of seeing one-legged, banded Bato!

The year ended with an explosion of porcupine activity. Squeak showed up for the first time in late July and within weeks was an almost nightly visitor. Lucy also appeared once in early August, then reappeared later in the fall. Squeak made a few long departures (one lasted nearly three weeks) and I like to think that he was out wooing female porcupines (he is four this year and getting quite large). One evening in November Squeak was joined by a tiny, wheezing brown porcupine that we named Piper. Within two weeks, the crew was joined by two more young-of-the-year porcupines, Parker and Night Ranger (both yellow but with wildly different personalities). And, finally, a monstrous yellow porcupine appeared in late November with a big scar down the middle of his nose; Monstroso had at last reappeared. With such a large group, we began seeing trios fairly often, and finally had four porcupines show up at once (three of which came in the house at the same time). And, over the course of six hours, we had all six show up one evening in December. We now keep a log of all porcupine activity and have dreams of DNA analysis in the future.