

Into the Great Bear Rainforest

Exploratory Photo Adventure 2019

The *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventure 2019* offers 8 days of exploring and photographing one of the last great wildernesses on earth – the incomparable Great Bear Rainforest. This trip is about both exploration AND about photography – and having a great time! We’ll travel by sailboat, Zodiac, foot, and possibly even kayak into the heart of the Great Bear, always keeping an eye out for great photo ops of our “targeted” species, including Grizzly Bears, Black Bears, the rare white Spirit Bear, Humpback Whales, landscapes, and more. And, we’ll do it all from our very comfortable and spacious mobile base camp – the 71-foot sailboat, the *Ocean Light II*.

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 –



I'm Currently Pretty Tied Up! This male Sea Otter has wrapped itself in kelp to help anchor it in place while it rests. Sea Otters have recently re-colonized the region after a nearly century-long absence. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Nikon D5 with 800mm f5.6 VR. 1/1250s @ f11. ISO 1250

A Ghost on the Coast! Coastal Gray Wolves are quite common in the Great Bear Rainforest. But, with their secretive nature what isn't common is actually seeing or photographing one! © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon D5 with Sigma Sport 500mm f4. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 1800.

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 Harbor 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!

About The Spirit Bear. The almost mythical Spirit Bear is a rare, white-phased form of the American Black Bear. The subspecies of Black Bear found within the Great Bear Rainforest is *Ursus americanus kermodei* – the Kermode Bear. All the black bears in the Great Bear Rainforest (of any coat colour) are Kermode Bears. But not all Kermodes are white – only the rare Spirit Bear possesses the white coat.

Spirit Bears are not albinos. The white coat colour is caused by a recessive gene and only those bears with two copies of the gene (one inherited from the mother and one inherited from the father) have white coats. Bears that possess one copy of the recessive white coat gene and one copy of the gene for a “normal” coat have typical black coats and are carriers of the trait. The white coat colour of Spirit Bears can theoretically be found in Black Bears anywhere, but they are exceptionally rare in all parts of the Black Bears’ range. The one exception is on a small portion of the British Columbia coast where, for reasons that are only poorly understood, between 10 and 20 percent of the bears are white!

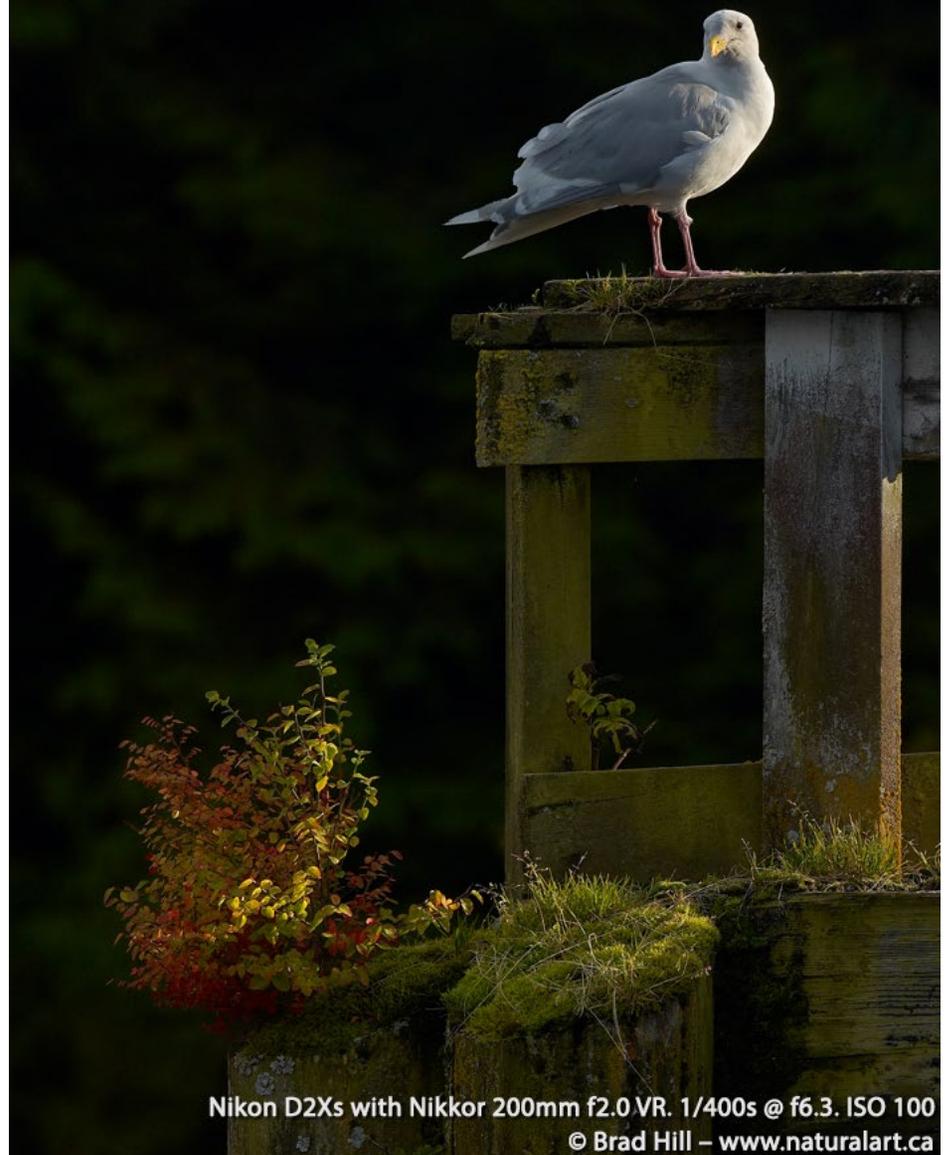
A Tour of Exploration! The *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Tour 2019* is a true tour of photographic exploration. We’ll explore the inlets, bays and old-growth forest of the spectacular mid-coast of British Columbia. We’ll walk trails and beaches, explore creeks, and search for the unique mix of subject matter that only the Great Bear Rainforest can provide! The photographic opportunities on this tour are always absolutely amazing. Due to potentially extreme weather conditions and rough terrain, and to increase our chances of seeing a Spirit Bear, we may utilize native-built viewing platforms in certain situations.

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! *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.*

2019 Trip Start and End Points: The photo tour begins in Bella Bella, BC. It ends in Terrace, BC.

2019 Price: \$7699 CAD plus 5% GST.

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



The Original Big Gulp! Humpback Whales feeding along the shoreline in the Great Bear Rainforest.
Nikon D4 with AF-S 80-400mm VR @ 180mm. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 1600

2019 Date: September 11-20, 2019, including arrival and departure days.
Aboard the *Ocean Light II* from September 12-20, 2019.

What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation in Bella Bella, BC beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Ocean Light II*
- A highly-experienced bear guide and professional photography guide
- A great cook and crew
- 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 of the trip and from Terrace, BC to your home at the end of the trip
- Personal belongings and equipment
- Any meals and accommodation in Bella Bella prior to Day 1
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or missed flights
- Any gratuities for the crew of the *Ocean Light II*

What To Expect?

- Cool weather (daytime highs of about 12-17C or 54-63° fahrenheit); rain showers, with the possibility of heavy rain
- Mostly calm seas, but with some short-duration bouts of rolling 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

Accommodation: While in Bella Bella we will be staying at the Shearwater Resort & Marina.

While in the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying on the *Ocean Light II* sailboat, a 71-foot ketch. Please be aware that it is likely you will be asked to share a berth on the *Ocean Light II*. This will be dependent on the make-up of the group (e.g., the number of couples attending, gender mix of the participants, etc.).



The Hangout. Nikon D4 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/400s @ f7.1. ISO 640

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Fitness Requirements of Participants

This photo tour requires an above average level of physical fitness and both good mobility and balance. In all likelihood we will be hiking while on this trip and this hiking may include sections in creeks with slippery, rocky bottoms. We will be shooting images from the deck of the sailboat, from within a Zodiac, and on shore. To participate in this trip you should be able to perform the following tasks:

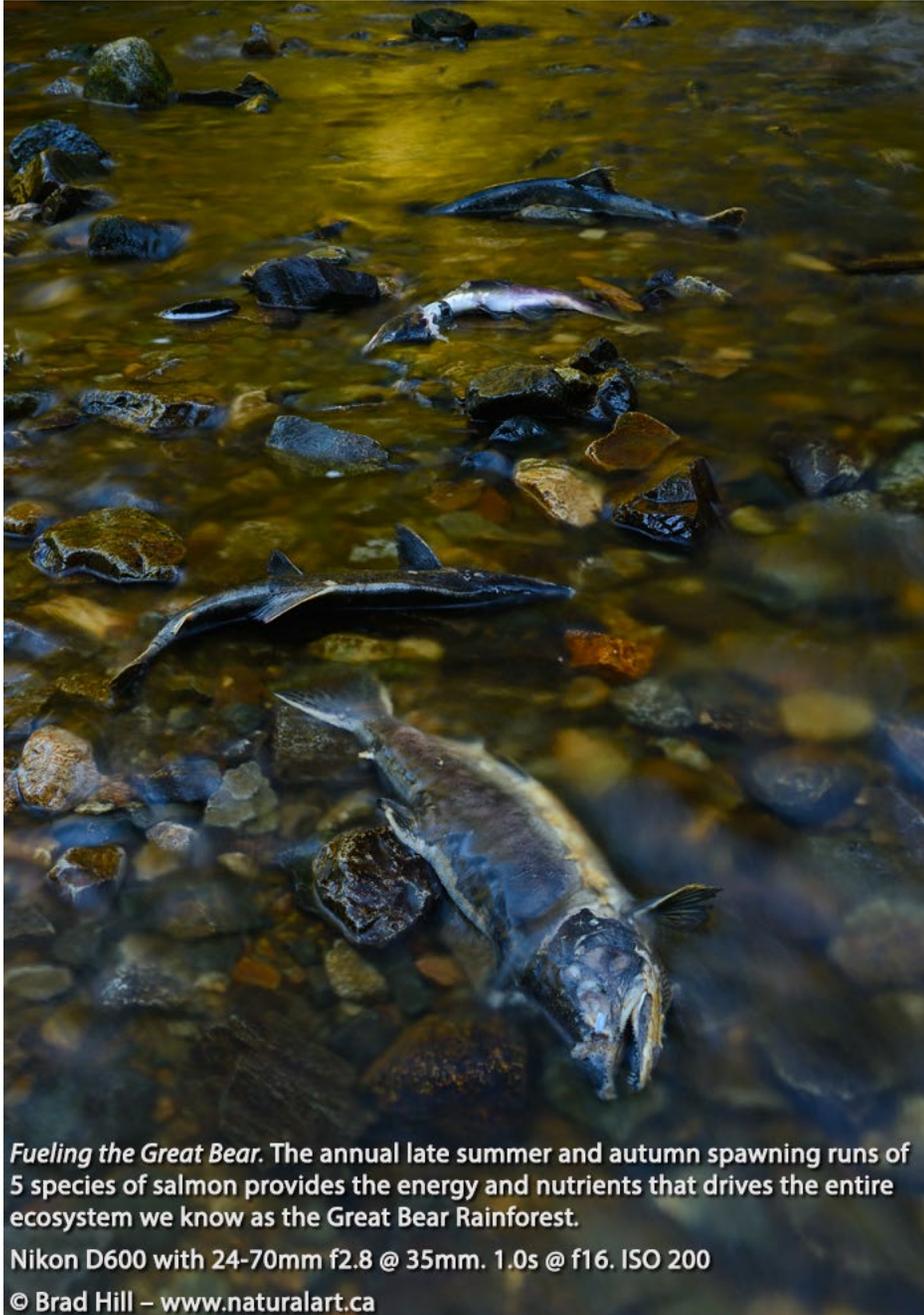
- ***Be able to hike up to 4 km (up to about 3 miles) on uneven, slanted and potentially slippery terrain and/or over some obstacles that could be up to a meter or slightly more high (e.g., large fallen logs) - all while carrying your own camera gear.*** In most years our best Spirit Bear photography ops come from selected locations on islands. Access to these locations is by walking only.

- ***Be able to easily move between the sailboat and the Zodiac®.*** This involves climbing up or down a 5' vertical ladder.
- ***Shoot your camera from within a Zodiac®.*** This involves multiple tasks, including shooting your camera while sitting on the pontoon of the Zodiac® or, at times, while sitting on the floor of the Zodiac®. In some cases you may find that the most convenient way to shoot will be while kneeling (on your knees) on the bottom of the Zodiac®. This is the reason knee pads are included as optional items on the gear list. Note that tripods can **not** be used within the Zodiac® and while it is theoretically possible to use a monopod in the Zodiac®, few photographers find it



Beauty in the Beast. 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 our photo tours – but capturing a breach shot is a special and rare treat!

Nikon D5 with Sigma Sport 150-600mm @ 550mm. 1/1250s @ f7.1. ISO 4000. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Fueling the Great Bear. The annual late summer and autumn spawning runs of 5 species of salmon provides the energy and nutrients that drives the entire ecosystem we know as the Great Bear Rainforest.

Nikon D600 with 24-70mm f2.8 @ 35mm. 1.0s @ f16. ISO 200

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

practical. The obvious consequence is that you must be able to *hand-hold the camera/lens system* that you will be bringing and using on this photo tour.

On some occasions it WILL be possible to stand in the Zodiac® when shooting, but you will be shooting while sitting or kneeling far more frequently. A degree of flexibility and/or suppleness can make your time in the Zodiac® far more productive and enjoyable!

Sample Itinerary

The itinerary of the *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventure* is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions. Here's *an example* of how our time together may look! The route we have chosen provides us with opportunities to explore both faces of the Great Bear – *the Inner* and the *Outer Great Bear*. This is only *a sample itinerary* and how we actually spend our days may differ from this proposed route and schedule.

Day 1 – September 11, 2019

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.

Day 2 – September 12, 2019

Early breakfast, followed by boarding the *Ocean Light II* at the marina in Shearwater. Following meeting the crew and guides of the *Ocean Light II*, allocating cabins, and a brief orientation we'll begin our journey into the Great Bear Rainforest. Our voyage will immediately take us north into glacier-carved fjords of the "*Inner Great Bear*" where photographic opportunities can abound! The narrow channels we'll travel through are home to Humpback and Killer Whales, Sea Otters, Elephant Seals and countless seabirds. End of day should see us stopping in a secluded

anchorage where we'll be able to watch for wildlife from the deck of the *Ocean Light II*.

Days 3 through 9 – September 13-19, 2019

Expect each day to be full and very different from the previous one! We'll mix marine mammal viewing from the *Ocean Light II* and from the Zodiac® with visiting coastal streams and estuaries in search of carnivores that will visit them to feed on salmon. While we'll opportunistically work with any subject matter we find, we will place emphasis on finding Humpback and Killer Whales, Grizzly and Black Bears (including Spirit Bears), Steller Sea Lions, Sea Otters and Bald Eagles. The subject matter we may "opportunistically" work with (as we encounter them) could include Harbor Seals, Fin Whales, Dall's Porpoises, coastal Gray Wolves, Great Blue Herons and, of course, great sea- and landscapes!

During these days we will spend time shooting from the *Ocean Light II*, the Zodiac®, and land-based locations we will be hiking to. And we'll be constantly adjusting our schedule –and possibly our route – based on weather conditions and the ever-changing distribution of our "prey" – *whales have tails, bears have feet, and eagles have wings – and they can all MOVE! ;-)*

Day 10 – September 20, 2019

Breakfast on the *Ocean Light II* near Kitimat, BC. Shortly thereafter our time together in the fabulous Great Bear Rainforest will draw to an end, but you'll be left with many fabulous memories and photographs!

Our Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

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

1. We engage in *PASSIVE* wildlife photography only. This means we strive to capture images of wildlife behaving as naturally as possible and without the use of "set-ups", contrivances, or any actions that could guide the subjects toward desirable settings and/or backdrops or elicit specific "poses".



Shake it Up! Adult male Grizzly pausing in his pursuit of prey for a quick shake.

Nikon D4 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 560.

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Going Down! A "natural" monochrome of a Humpback Whale diving deep in the Great Bear.

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon D500 with Sigma Sport 120-300mm f2.8 @ 270mm. 1/1250s @ f4.5. ISO 800.

2. We do nothing intentional to alter or influence the behaviour of our subject(s) for the purposes of photography. This means we do not engage in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation). Additionally, we will not use any form of sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography (including using predator and/or prey calls, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to encourage the subject to look at us).
3. While respecting any legal guidelines on minimum approach distances, we always allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the distance it is *comfortable with* between itself and us. This principle not only serves to reduce the stress on the subject, but it also allows photographers to capture the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.
4. We strive to always consider both the individual and collective effects our photographic activities can have on our subjects. This includes being aware of the total time spent with the subjects. This means we will often break contact and withdraw from the subject, especially if there is any indication that our 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 working with the same subject.

Coy – Harbor Seal



Nikon D850 with Nikkor 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/640s @ f4.5. ISO 640

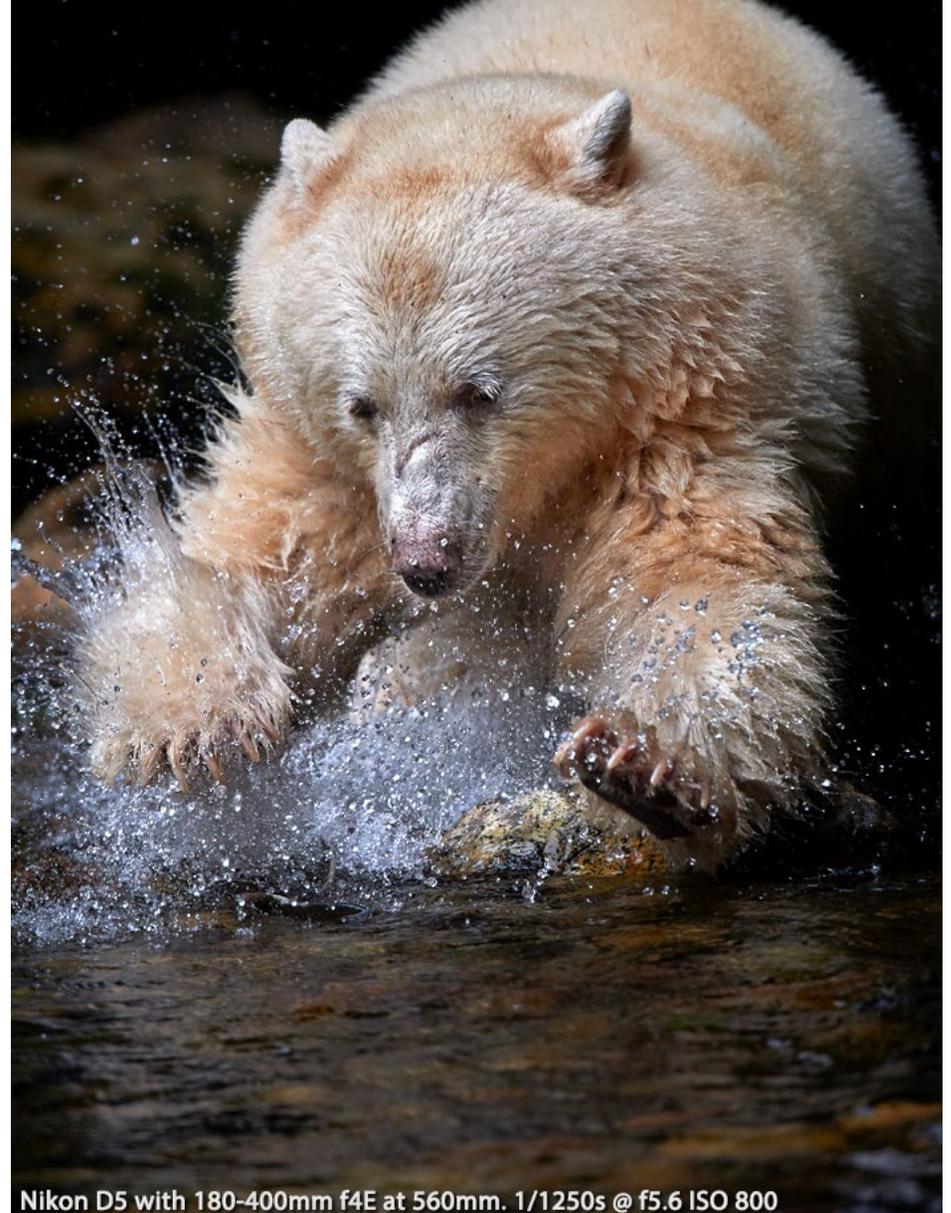
Those participating in our photo tours are expected to conform to these rules of photographer conduct.

All images in this trip compendium and 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

The Pounce – Fishing Spirit Bear! All Black Bears in the region are of the *Kermodei* subspecies but only those with two recessive genes for the white coat become all-white Spirit Bears. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon D5 with 180-400mm f4E at 560mm. 1/1250s @ f5.6 ISO 800



Eagles in the Mist. There is no better place to capture images of eagles and other wildlife with stunning backdrops than the Great Bear Rainforest. Nikon D4 with 70-200mm f4 VR @ 150mm. 1/160s @ f8. ISO 720. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Channels of the Great Bear. Our photo tour begins in the glacier-carved channels, inlets, bays, and estuaries of the central BC coast. Here towering mountains fall steeply to the Pacific Ocean, with forest often meeting the water line! Humpbacks, Killer Whales, Harbour Seals and the occasional Steller Sea Lion are found in these waters. Brown and Black Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, and many other species reside in the thick forests.



The "Outer" Great Bear – Big Beaches, Big Skies. The open spaces of the outer coast (and "Outer" Great Bear) is in almost stark contrast to the "tighter" and darker "Inner" Great Bear Rainforest. By including both faces of the Great Bear we increase the diversity of wildlife we can encounter and the types of landscapes and seascapes to see and photograph.



The Great Bear's Lookout. Grizzly watching over its domain – in comfort & style!



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



Coming & Going. Humpback whale surfacing and blowing and abruptly doing a deep dive.

