

# Wildlife Viewing Seasonal Calendar

## South Coastal Alaska

### January

Moose in tall-shrub thickets and forest habitats are more easily seen as deciduous trees and shrubs are bare of leaves.

In forested areas, boreal and chestnut-backed chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, black-billed magpies, gray and Steller's jays, and hairy, downy, and three-toed woodpeckers visit birdfeeders.

Bald eagles, ravens, crows, magpies, and gulls often feed on deer that have died along beaches, or dead fish and marine mammals that have washed ashore. In some winters, tens of thousands of pine siskins, crossbills, and redpolls overwinter. Huge flocks feed in the treetops of hemlock-spruce forests.

### February

Harbor seals and sea lions occur in nearshore and inshore waters year-round throughout this region.

Many glaucous-winged and mew gulls, black-legged kittiwakes, murrelets, murre, and other alcids winter in offshore waters and may be observed from the Alaska Marine Highway ferries between Kodiak and other mainland ports. Common ravens begin pairing off in late winter. Their courtship antics and varied vocalizations can

be enjoyed throughout the region.

### March

Sitka black-tailed deer are often forced onto coastal beaches by snow accumulation at higher elevations in Prince William Sound and on Kodiak Island.

Many resident birds begin courtship and establish nesting territories. Listen for drumming woodpeckers and the melodious songs of pine grosbeaks and chickadees. Great horned, northern saw-whet, and boreal owls begin hooting at night. Snow buntings arrive. Look for them in open habitats including tundra, marshes, and agricultural fields. Redpolls, grosbeaks, and woodpeckers continue to visit birdfeeders.

### April

Brown bears begin to emerge from dens. Time to put away those bird feeders! Dall sheep herds move to lower mountain slopes.

Gray whales pass through the Gulf of Alaska en route to summer feeding grounds in the Bering Sea. They feed in shallow water and can often be seen from land promontories as well as from boats. Watch for their spouts

offshore along the outer coast.

Spruce grouse begin drumming and calling in early morning and late evening in spruce-hardwood forests. Golden eagles, gyrfalcons, and other raptors begin to drift northward in early April. Ptarmigan begin their cackling courtship displays in alpine tundra. Most waterfowl and shorebird migration occurs between late April and May. Watch for Canada and greater white-fronted geese, northern pintails, western sandpipers, red knots, dunlins, least sandpipers, and short and long-billed dowitchers in coastal wetlands from Yakutat through Prince William Sound. Spectacular movements and staging concentrations occur in many areas. About 20 million birds pass through the Copper River Delta area alone.

Pacific herring spawn on kelp beds in inshore waters during late April and May.

### May

Black bears emerge from dens and feed on fresh, green vegetation in subalpine areas. Scan hillsides carefully. In late May, sows with cubs may be spotted. Hoary marmots emerge from hibernation. Their long whistled calls can

be heard in alpine areas. Moose cows can be seen with calves

along roadside areas, particularly bordered by muskeg and tall-shrub thickets. Dall sheep with lambs and mountain goats with kids are found on steep rocky cliffs throughout the region.

Beluga whales enter river mouths where eulachon (a small oil-rich fish also known as hooligan) are spawning. Look for them along Turnagain Arm and at the mouth of the Kenai River at Kenai. Sea lions are concentrated at rookery sites to pup and breed.

The first migrant songbirds arrive in early May. Listen for the loud songs of ruby-crowned kinglets, the harmonic buzz of varied thrushes, and trills of dark-eyed juncos. Coastal wetlands and inland freshwater habitats are inundated with waterbirds. Red-necked grebes, Arctic, common, and red-throated loons, northern pintails, northern shovelers, American wigeons, red-breasted and common mergansers, trumpeter swans, and Canada geese are numerous. Arctic terns, mew, and Bonaparte's gulls also arrive. Black-legged kittiwakes, glaucous-winged gulls, tufted puffins, common murre, pigeon guillemots,

and double-crested, red-faced, and pelagic cormorants return to nesting colonies on offshore rocks and islands. Listen for the courtship “winnowing” of common snipe in muskeg and freshwater habitats.

Thousands of fish-eating birds (including gulls, cormorants, scoters, long-tailed ducks, mergansers, and loons) gather around herring spawning areas.

In late May, a westward passerine migration occurs along snow-free alpine ridges. Gray jays and common ravens fledge their young in mid-to late May. Large numbers of ruddy and black turnstones, surfbirds, whimbrels, wandering tattlers, and lesser, golden and black-bellied plovers migrate northward and often stop along rocky coasts. Varied thrushes, and Savannah, fox, white-crowned and golden-crowned sparrows also frequent this habitat in spring.

In May and early June, tens of thousands of pelagic birds pass through the offshore waters of the Gulf of Alaska. Watch for albatross and tremendous flocks of shearwaters in offshore waters. Shearwaters sometimes occur in nearshore waters during severe storms.

Wood frogs begin chorusing around bogs and lakes. Their calls sound like quacking ducks.

## June

Harbor seals with pups are common on ice floes in many bays and fjords. They can be seen near the Columbia Glacier.

Dall sheep ewes and lambs form large bands that can be spotted on grassy alpine slopes. Windy Bay and Beluga Point along the Seward Highway are good places to see sheep near the road.

Songbirds continue singing as egg-laying and incubation occur. Alder flycatchers, bank swallows, and blackpoll, yellow, and Wilson’s warblers arrive in early June. This is the best month to view many alpine birds. Water pipits, horned larks, redpolls, and longspurs sing in alpine areas. Willow, rock, and white-tailed ptarmigan begin nesting. Listen for the haunting calls of Pacific and Arctic loons along lakes and ponds.

Most seabirds are incubating eggs or raising chicks during June and July. This is the best time to view seabird rookeries. Black legged kittiwakes, tufted puffins, common murre, pigeon guillemots, and other species may be observed on oceanic islands.

Dabbling ducks begin hatching young. Watch for mallard, northern pintail, and northern shoveler with young. Other waterfowl, including

trumpeter swans and Canada geese are incubating eggs.

Many fish processing plants start up. Thousands of glaucous-winged, mew, herring, and Bonaparte’s gulls are attracted to the outflows.

## July

Beluga whales follow spawning salmon up large rivers. The mouth of the Kenai River and Turnagain Arm near Beluga Point are good places to look for these white whales. Minke, humpback, and killer whales as well as Dall’s and harbor porpoises frequent Prince William Sound.

Brown and black bears frequent salmon spawning streams. Watch for their tracks and other sign.

Arctic and Aleutian Terns are feeding young. Look for them in coastal and freshwater wetlands. Swallows and shorebirds begin southward migration in mid-July.

Kittiwakes, puffins, guillemots, and auklets are carrying food to their young, which remain in nests during July. Common murre chicks leave their nests and swim to sea with their parents during mid-July.

Sockeye (red) and chum salmon begin their spawning runs. Red salmon can be seen jumping falls along the Russian River on the Kenai Peninsula. Boreal toads and

wood frogs can often be located during summer.

## August

Harbor seals prey on anadromous fish and swim into large river mouths.

Singing voles begin building food storage piles. Look for their haypiles in grassy alpine meadows and sit quietly nearby to listen. Beavers begin storing food for winter and repairing their lodges. They are most active in early morning and late evening.

Shorebird migration continues. Juvenile shorebirds often migrate separately from adults. Watch for migrant flocks along coastal wetlands and rocky shores. Peak songbird migration occurs from August through mid-September. Watch for flocks of warblers, sparrows, and thrushes. Some flocks contain several species. Chirping and chittering can sometimes be heard at night when large flocks pass overhead. Raptor migration begins during late August. Bald eagles, glaucous-winged gulls, and fish-eating waterbirds are common along streams where they feed on spawned out salmon.

Silver salmon runs begin.

## September

Sea lions begin moving around between colonies. Sea lion pups often form gangs

and frolic around haul-out areas. Harbor seals shed their pelage and haul out during this month; they are particularly sensitive to disturbance.

On Afognak Island, elk begin bugling to establish territories and attract females.

Hoary marmots enter hibernation during late September and October. Moose begin rut in fall. Males with huge antler racks often spar with each other. Keep a safe distance.

Raptor migration reaches a peak. A steady movement occurs along Turnagain Arm near Anchorage and over the Copper River Delta. Watch for bald eagles, northern harriers, and sharp-shinned hawks.

Peak waterfowl migration occurs during mid-September to mid-October. Severe storms offshore frequently cause waterfowl to pile up along the coast before migrating over the Gulf of Alaska. In some years, tens of thousands stage at the mouths of coastal rivers, notably the Marti and Bering Rivers on the Copper River Delta.

Sandhill crane migration occurs throughout the month. Over half a million cranes have been recorded passing over the Copper River Delta in just a five-day period. Fork-tailed storm-petrels occur in

nearshore waters of Prince William Sound and may be seen along the Alaska Marine Highway. Black oystercatchers begin flocking together. Flocks of five to thirty birds are sometimes observed. Watch for them along rocky coasts.

## October

Brown and black bears enter dens.

Hundreds of Bohemian waxwings flock together and feed on the berries of mountain ash and chokecherry. Some large concentrations occur in downtown Anchorage. In some years, mass movements of crossbills and pine siskins occur during October. Watch for large flocks, particularly in coniferous forests.

## November

Dall sheep and mountain goats rut in alpine areas during this month. Rams may be seen fighting occasionally. Sitka black-tailed deer begin rut. They occur on several islands in Prince William Sound and on Kodiak Island.

Weasels and snowshoe hares are in winter pelage. When snows are late, their white coats are easy to spot. During winter, animal tracks are fun to find and identify.

## December

Some mammals are easier to detect in winter because their tracks are visible in snow. Look for tracks of wolf, fox, marten, mink, and river otter.

Sitka black-tailed deer are often forced onto beaches and the forest fringe by heavy snows. In severe winters, deer are sometimes forced to feed on kelp washed up by storm tides and many die of starvation.

Along rocky shores, watch for rock sandpipers, dunlins, surfbirds, black turnstones, and black oystercatchers. Some rocky coasts are accessible near Homer, Seward, Valdez, Kodiak, and Yakutat. Nearshore marine waters are used by a variety of over-wintering waterbirds. Common and Steller's eiders, common and Barrow's goldeneyes, long-tailed ducks, and black, white-winged, and surf scoters are most common. Also, gadwalls, Arctic, common, and red-throated loons, red-breasted mergansers, and red-necked grebes may occur.

Homer and Kodiak are among the best accessible locations to see these wintering birds.

Bald eagles, common ravens, northwestern crows, and glaucous-winged, mew, Bonaparte's and herring gulls forage over mud and tidal flats.

## Other resources:

Wildlife Viewing Program:  
[www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov](http://www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov)

State of Alaska Travel Info:  
[www.travelalaska.com](http://www.travelalaska.com)

Alaska Public Lands Information Centers:  
[www.alaskacenters.gov](http://www.alaskacenters.gov)

Alaska State Parks:  
[www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks](http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks)

Alaska Marine Highway:  
[www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs)

US Forest Service:  
[www.fs.usda.gov/r10](http://www.fs.usda.gov/r10)

