

Wildlife Viewing Seasonal Calendar

Southwest Alaska

wagtail, and red-throated pipit.

January

Sitka black-tailed deer on Kodiak

Island are often forced into coastal beach fringe forest by heavy winter snows at higher elevations.

The entire world population of emperor geese winters along the Aleutian Islands.

Watch for northern hawk owls sitting in the tops of spruce trees and along power lines in forested areas.

In forested areas, black-capped and boreal chickadees, common redpolls, gray jays, downy woodpeckers and black-billed magpies can be observed at birdfeeders.

During January, smelt begin running in large rivers.

February

The Alaska Peninsula caribou herd begins migrating from wintering to calving areas during February. Scattered bands may be observed on tundra flats inland from the Bering Sea coast.

Flocks of snow buntings, rosy finches, and occasionally McKay's buntings can be seen in tundra areas. These birds also visit birdfeeders around Cold Bay.

March

Beluga whales are occasionally seen at mouths of some large

rivers. Sea otters occur in bays on Kodiak Island, along the south side of the Kenai and Alaska Peninsulas, and along the north side of Unimak Island to Izembek Lagoon, and near Adak. They can be seen year-round.

Snow buntings return in large flocks. Look for them in open habitats, tundra fields, around towns, and coastal areas. Large numbers of king eiders appear along the coast in preparation for spring migration to Arctic Canada.

Common ravens begin building nests. Watch and listen for their aerial courtship antics and unique calls. Bald eagles return to their nesting territories and can be seen along the coast or major rivers.

April

Beluga whales follow smelt runs up several rivers and may be observed 15 miles up the Naknek River at King Salmon. They have been recorded over 500 miles inland along other rivers.

Male walrus begin hauling out at established areas including Round Island in the Walrus Islands State Game Refuge. Their haulouts may contain tens of thousands of animals.

An impressive northward migration of gray whales occurs through Unimak Pass.

Brown bears emerge from hibernation during April and May. They feed on grasses and sedges in moist tundra and coastal wetlands during this season.

Arctic ground squirrels emerge from hibernation. They may be seen in tundra areas of the mainland.

Spring bird migration intensifies as brant, snow, emperor, and greater white-fronted geese pass through in large numbers. Tundra swans return to the region in large numbers. Look for them along the coast and ice-free wetlands.

Large flocks of tundra swans gather along the Naknek River and near the King Salmon airport. Listen and watch for the aerial display ("winnowing") of common snipe around marshes and muskegs.

Many Eurasian species turn up in this region during spring. Among those occurring regularly are smew, tufted duck, falcated teal, garganey, Eurasian wigeon, common pochard, Steller's sea eagle, eye-browed thrush, Siberian rubythroat, white

May

Moose calves are born in tall-shrub thickets and muskegs. Sitka black-tailed deer fawns are born on Kodiak Island.

Steller sea lions begin pupping at established rookery sites on rocky coasts.

Spring migration continues. Migrant shorebirds and waterfowl are abundant. Seabirds arrive at their nesting colonies. Large rafts of puffins, murres, and auklets can be observed around offshore islands. Black-legged and red-legged kittiwakes begin occupying cliff ledges.

Most songbirds arrive. In forests and tall-shrub thickets, listen for the melodious songs of American robins, varied thrushes, orange-crowned, yellow, and blackpoll warblers. Northern water thrushes, redpolls, Savannah, white-crowned, golden-crowned, fox, and song sparrows are also common.

King salmon begin running in major rivers.

June

Beluga whales visit the mouths of major river systems in Bristol Bay (especially the Kvichak and Nushagak Rivers) to feed on migrating salmon.

Killer whales may be observed nearshore visiting seal and sea lion rookeries to prey on pups during summer.

Harbor seals begin pupping at established rookery sites along rocky coasts. A young pup is able to swim almost immediately after birth.

Caribou calving occurs in wet tundra areas in late May and early June. They are particularly sensitive to disturbance during calving. In late June, caribou cows with calves begin congregating in tundra areas.

This is the best month to visit the spectacular seabird rookeries of this region. Puffins, murre, auklets, and kittiwakes begin egg-laying and incubation.

Several seabird species that only occur in Alaska and Siberia can be seen, including red-legged kittiwakes, crested, least, parakeet, and whiskered auklets, red-faced cormorant, Kittlitz's murrelet, and Aleutian tern.

The Pribilof Islands (part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge) and Walrus Islands State Game Refuge are the most accessible viewing areas in this region.

Most songbirds continue to sing during egg-laying and incubation. Listen for the eerie calls of common, Arctic, and red-throated loons on inland lakes.

July

Several thousand walrus haul out on Round Island in the Walrus Islands State Game Refuge. On the Pribilof Islands, northern fur seals begin pupping.

Brown bear can be seen fishing for salmon below falls or riffles where migrating salmon are concentrated.

Flocks of sooty and short-tailed shearwaters arrive in Bristol Bay after migrating from their nesting grounds in Chile, Australia, and New Zealand.

Individual flocks may contain millions of birds. Waterfowl broods are a common sight in freshwater and coastal wetlands. Southward migration of shorebirds begins. Small flocks may appear in wetland areas.

Arctic char move into rivers.

August

Caribou begin migrating to their wintering areas. Brown bears begin feeding more heavily on berries, but fishing activity also peaks at some salmon streams. Beavers begin renovating their lodges and storing food for winter.

Waterfowl begin congregating in preparation for fall migration. Brant begin arriving in Izembek Lagoon where they feed on eelgrass

prior to migrating south. Silver salmon begin spawning.

September

Harbor seals shed their coats and haul out in large numbers along the coast during late August and September. They are especially sensitive to disturbance at this time.

Moose, caribou, and deer begin rubbing the velvet off their antlers by rubbing them against trees and shrubs.

Large concentrations of waterfowl occur in coastal wetlands. A large portion of the Pacific population of brant passes through Izembek Lagoon near Cold Bay. Peak concentrations of molting Steller's eiders occur in Izembek Lagoon during September.

Sandhill cranes migrate through this region in large numbers. Impressive movements can be observed along the coastal lowlands of eastern Bristol Bay.

Sharp-tailed sandpipers visit Southwestern Alaska before migrating to South Pacific islands for winter. Look for them in freshwater and coastal wetlands.

October

Caribou begin rut. Males often display aggressive behavior. Snowshoe hares and weasels turn white as winter approaches.

Brant, emperor and Canada geese, Steller's eiders, and northern pintails congregate in Izembek Lagoon near Cold Bay. Birds of prey frequent Cold Bay and other coastal areas to hunt waterfowl. Look for gyrfalcon, peregrine falcon, and bald eagle. As Bristol Bay freezes up, most water birds disperse.

Ducks, geese, and swans migrate to more southern areas along the Pacific Coast of North America. However, emperor geese and many sea ducks move westward out the Aleutian Islands chain or east into the Gulf of Alaska. Snow geese flocks migrate south along the north coast of the Alaska Peninsula en route from staging areas on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

In late October and early November, brant leave Izembek Lagoon in a massive exodus for a nonstop flight across the Gulf of Alaska to coastal California and Mexico.

November

Most brown bears dig winter dens and enter a period of dormancy. Walrus males leave Round Island to join females in the Bering Sea pack ice.

In winter, seabirds move offshore and into passes between the Aleutian Islands. Auklets, puffins, murre, kittiwakes, eiders, long-tailed ducks, and scoters may be seen by any who venture into the

turbulent seas. Ptarmigan congregate in large flocks along river bottoms and tundra areas where willow and dwarf birch are plentiful.

December

During winter, moose move to river bottoms and foothills to feed on willows and other browse.

Wolves, wolverines, and red foxes are easier to spot in winter against a background of white snow. Look for their tracks along rivers, ridges and coastal areas, especially after a fresh snowfall.

A variety of sea ducks winter in ice-free bays throughout this region. King, common, and Steller's eiders, white-winged and surf scoters, long-tailed, and harlequin ducks are common.

Common and red-breasted mergansers, Barrow's goldeneyes, buffleheads, tundra swans, and American dippers use ice-free streams throughout winter.

Some unusual Eurasian birds, including whooper swan, tufted duck, and smew, occur every winter in this region.

Other resources:

Wildlife Viewing Program: www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov

State of Alaska Travel Info: www.travelalaska.com

Alaska Public Lands Information Centers: www.alaskacenters.gov

Alaska State Parks: www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks

Alaska Marine Highway: www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs

US Forest Service: www.fs.usda.gov/r10

