

Cordova: Alaska's Hidden Treasure

A coastal fishing town tucked between mountains and marine waters, Cordova is surrounded by natural beauty and diverse abundant wildlife. Home to the world famous Copper River wild salmon, millions of migrating shorebirds in spring and thriving moose and bear populations, the region draws wildlife recreationists of all kinds.

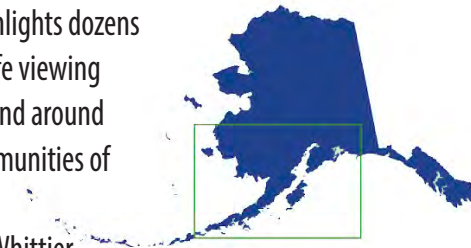
Before the first European contact in the mid-1700s, these lands were the hunting and fishing grounds of the Chugach and Eyak people. The Russians established a thriving trading post in the area in the late 1700s. American traders and military expeditions arrived after the U.S. purchase of Russian America in 1867, and the development of commercial fisheries and gold mining soon followed.

Commercial fishing continues to be an economic mainstay in eastern Prince William Sound. Ferry service links Cordova and neighboring communities, including Valdez and Whittier.

For information on tours and lodging, consult the Cordova Chamber of Commerce. Visit www.cordovachamber.com or call (907) 424-7260. If you're in town, stop by the visitor center at 414 First Street.



From the shorebirds of Cordova to the brown bears of Kodiak Island, from the caribou of Cold Bay to the whales of Unalaska, the South Coastal segment of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail highlights dozens of wildlife viewing sites in and around the communities of Cordova, Valdez, Whittier, Kodiak, Sand Point, Chignik, Cold Bay, False Pass and Unalaska. Pick up community brochures along the coastal trail and check for Alaska's South Coastal Wildlife Viewing Guide in stores and online.



For more information on wildlife viewing across Alaska, visit www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov.



Photos

Western sandpiper cover ©Milo Burcham • Moose ©Cori Indelicato • Dunlin ©Bob Armstrong
Black bear ©Mike Truex • Dusky Canada geese ©Sean Meade • Delta wetlands ©Ron Niebrugge
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CORDOVA


Wildlife Viewing Guide





www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov


Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Watch Our Wildlife


Wildlife Viewing Tips

 **Keep a Low Profile.** Enjoy watching animals' natural behaviors and try not to attract their attention with sounds. If your presence is causing an animal to stop feeding or act restless, give it more space. Be especially respectful of nesting and denning areas, rookeries and calving grounds, and critical feeding areas. With whales, avoid causing them to change their behavior; approach no closer than 100 yards.

 **Time it Right.** Dawn and dusk are when many wildlife species are most active. Midday warmth energizes dragonflies and butterflies and creates thermals for eagles and hawks. Low tides expose tide pools and a wealth of food for birds and mammals.

 **Look for Clues.** Tracks, droppings, trails and twigs tell stories of wildlife: what they are eating, where they live and when they passed through. Noticing and reading these clues adds richness to wildlife viewing. Tracking books and workshops will help you learn.

 **Help Keep Wildlife Wild.** Never feed wild animals. Doing so can cause them to associate people with food, which can cause trouble (it's illegal too). Human food can also make animals sick.

 **Be Considerate of Others.** People use and enjoy Alaska's wildlife in a variety of ways. Respect private property and give hunters, anglers and others plenty of space.



Dusky Canada geese nest almost solely on the Copper River Delta



Wildlife Viewing Fun Facts

Tideland tidbits: Shorebirds are well adapted to finding food. Short-legged species run back and forth with water's ebb and flow to reach exposed invertebrates on the beach. Others poke their bills up and down in the mud like sewing machines to search for tasty morsels. Long-billed shorebirds open just the tip of their bills when they probe to collect a bit of food without a mouthful of mud too. Their prey are tiny and plentiful protein-packed invertebrates. The shorebird species that are most abundant in spring—Western sandpiper and dunlin (above)—favor small pink clams known as Baltic macoma. These clams reach densities as high as 5,000 clams a square yard. Slow growers, they may live up to eight years on the delta—unless a shorebird eats them first. In the spring the delta is an important stopover for millions of shorebirds heading north but in the fall the birds are more dispersed. No longer in a rush to breed, they may stop at wetlands other than the main ones and their journey south is a relatively more leisurely affair.



Agile climbers: Mountain goats, shaggy sure-footed ungulates (hoofed animals), can out climb many predators thanks to their unique foot structure. Their hooves have hard, sharp edges surrounding rubbery concave footpads that act like suction cups when weight is applied. The two halves of the hoof also move independently of one another, resulting in a better grip.



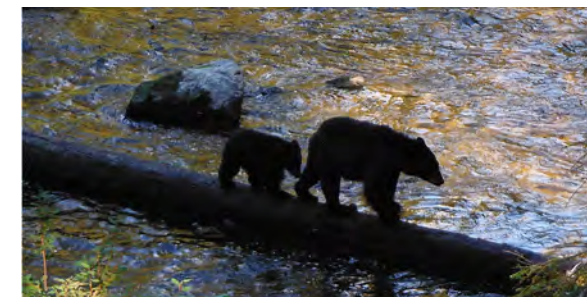
Traveling Safely in Bear Country

Make noise (sing, clap, talk) while you travel to reduce your chances of surprising a bear. Be especially alert along noisy streams, in thick brush and when visibility is poor. Always keep your belongings (backpack, food, fish, etc.) with you or in bear-resistant storage.

If you see a bear, **stay calm**. If the bear does not notice you, leave quietly, keeping your eyes on the bear. If it does notice you, face the bear, wave your arms and talk to it calmly. If it approaches you, stand your ground.

Never run from a bear, you may provoke a chase. Also, if a bear is surprised at close distance, it may feel threatened and act defensively, especially if it has cubs or food.

If a bear strikes, play dead or fight back. The choice depends on whether the bear is acting defensively or considering you as prey. For a defensive bear, lie on your front, keep your backpack on, protect your face and neck, and remain still. In the rare instance of a predatory bear, fight back. To learn more, visit www.alaskabears.alaska.gov.



STAY SAFE!

The mountains, trails, islands and waterways of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail are wild lands. For safety, take a guided tour or a companion, let someone know your plans and be prepared for emergencies with spare clothes, a first aid kit and a means of communication. Visit the Alaska State Parks' Staying Safe web page for details: www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/safety.

Wildlife Viewing Sites



A ten-minute drive along **Orca Road 1** ends at Orca Beach, a rocky mussel-encrusted shoreline at the head of Orca Inlet. It's also the site of the old Orca Cannery—now a private lodge—where surrounding waters offer consistent shore-side sightings of harlequin ducks as they pry limpets and chitons from stones with their hard-tipped bills. Barrow's goldeneyes frequent these waters and black oystercatchers may be spotted on the beach in spring. In winter, look for long-tailed ducks, scoters and, with a spotting scope, multiple species of loons. Along Orca Road in late summer, salmon crowd the creek entrance at a primitive campground called Fleming Spit (aka Hippy Cove). Chinook arrive from mid-June to mid-July and coho from late August through mid-September. Look for pelagic and double-crested cormorants atop pilings near the power plant and sea otters with pups off shore. At night listen for sea lions barking from haulouts on channel markers.

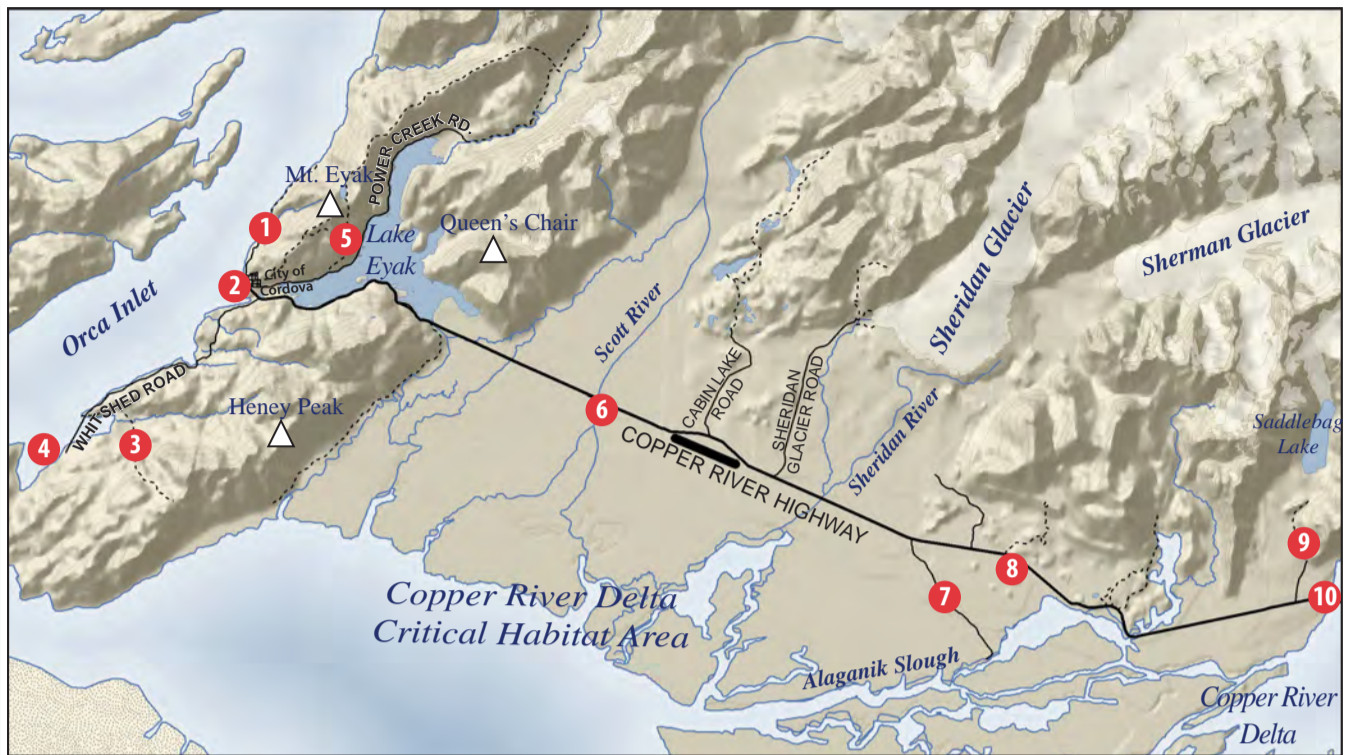
Wildlife viewing at the **Cordova boat harbor 2** is a serene experience in quiet winter months and more perilous during summer's hustle bustle. Long-tailed ducks, buffleheads, red-breasted mergansers, common mergansers, great blue herons, sea otters and other species seek shelter in these protected waters when the snow flies. Migrating shorebirds may be seen in May along the Breakwater Trail at the edge of the South Harbor. As commercial salmon fishing—Cordova's main industry—heats up in summer, the harbor becomes extremely busy. If you venture down, look for sea otters, glaucous-winged and mew gulls, black-legged kittiwakes and belted kingfishers but watch your step as fishermen lay their nets out on harbor floats to repair.

Canneries are in full swing and many gull species flock to the fish offal discharges, an excellent chance to hone gull identification skills.

A hike on **Heny Ridge Trail 3** crosses a variety of habitats, each offering unique wildlife viewing opportunities. The trailhead is about 5 miles from town along Whitshed Road, just shy of Hartney Bay. This 4.1 mile trail (one-way) traverses rainforest, muskeg (via boardwalk) and wetlands before it climbs to sub-alpine habitat on the ridge. Look for spruce grouse, varied thrushes, winter wrens and Townsend's warblers in the temperate rain forest. Northern pipits breed in the alpine tundra and black bears use the alpine tundra in fall if berries are present.

In May all eyes turn to **Hartney Bay 4** where the annual Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival celebrates the largest spring concentration of shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere. Over 4 million migrants including western sandpipers, dunlins, least sandpipers, whimbrels, short-billed dowitchers and several species of plover briefly touch down on the tidal wetlands to rest and feed on a smorgasbord of protein-packed marine invertebrates, like marine worms and macoma clams. Rufous hummingbirds, waterfowl, black bears, coyotes and the occasional moose may be spotted on the tidelands as well. Mid-July through August, many mew gulls and some Caspian terns are frequenting the bay. At the end of Whitshed Road, Hartney Creek has large numbers of pink and chum salmon in addition to black and brown bears, harbor seals, bald eagles and occasionally river otters.

Power Creek Road follows the western shoreline of Eyak Lake, home to ten fish species including sockeye, coho and pink salmon, cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden. Look for bald eagles, trumpeter swans, ring-necked ducks and scaups. River otters are often seen on the lakeshore. At 1.5 mile is the trailhead for the popular **Crater Lake Trail 5**. The trail is steep with numerous switchbacks and wooden bridges but subalpine



1. Orca Road	0.5 hr*	6. USFS Gazebo	0.5 hr	<p>— paved road - - - gravel road · · · · · trail</p> <p>Map is for locator reference only, not for navigational use.</p> <p> Hiking Trails Scenic Views Interpretive signs Camping</p> <p>* Suggested time at location.</p>
2. Cordova Boat Harbor	1 hr	7. Alaganik Slough Road	1 hr	
3. Heney Ridge Trail	5.5 hrs	8. Haystack Trail	1.2 hrs	
4. Hartney Bay	2 hrs	9. Saddlebag Glacier Trail	4.5 hrs	
5. Crater Lake Trail	4.5 hrs	10. Flag Point	0.5 hr	



Black bears often forage in berry patches and thickets.

meadows and wildflowers including chocolate lilies, columbines, wild geraniums and common paintbrushes make for a special trip. About 45 minutes into the hike is a splendid view of Eyak Lake. Those who complete the 2.6 mile hike to the top are treated to spectacular views of the Copper River Delta and Prince William Sound. Back at the lake, brown bears may be seen at Mile 7 at dusk—earlier on cooler days—feeding on spawning sockeye in July and August and coho from September through November. Dusk in summer is after 11 p.m.

Cordova's only highway, the Copper River Highway, cuts across a diverse landscape inhabited by brown and black bear, wary but abundant moose, swans, eagles, and many other species. The road normally runs 52 miles through the Copper River Delta to its terminus at Childs Glacier Viewing Site and the Million Dollar Bridge but in 2011 a bridge washout at Mile 36 cut short the drive. Childs Glacier is still accessible by boat with several charter operators available but as of print time in late 2013, no date had been set for reopening the bridge. Check with the Visitors Center for the most up-to-date information. The drive is still well worth making starting with the **US Forest Service gazebo 6** at Mile 10. Nesting trumpeter swans are common; look for their grey-plumed young, called cygnets, in summer. Horned grebes are sometimes seen in spring. Active beaver lodges occupy both sides of the road. The many songbirds in willow and alder patches along the highway proliferate as you near the river. Listen for fox and song sparrows, hermit and gray-cheeked thrushes, Wilson's and yellow warblers and many other species in late May and first half of June.

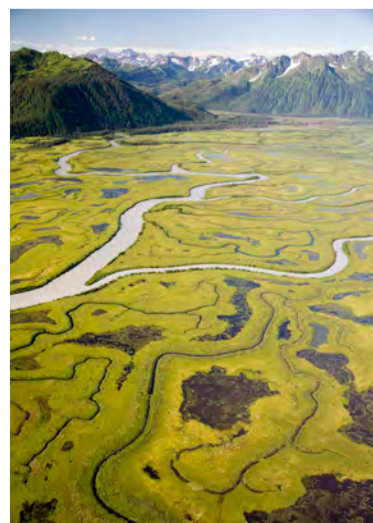
Alaganik Slough Road 7 at Mile 17 heads southeast about three miles to a boat launch, kiosk, boardwalk

and viewing blinds overlooking richly productive wetlands. Look for red-throated loons, horned grebes, northern pintails, merlins, short-eared owls and northern harriers. This is the primary breeding area for dusky Canada geese and in spring and summer you may see ring-necked ducks, scaups and wigeons in ponds just before reaching the boardwalk. Other area birds include red-necked phalaropes, Arctic terns, and greater yellowlegs. Listen for the "winnowing" of a snipe in spring, a low whistling made by air flow through the male's tail feathers. In spring small fish called eulachon spawn in the river. Seals and sea lions follow these oily protein-packed fish up river and dozens of eagles and thousands of gulls feed in frenzied flocks. Check with ADF&G to find out if the eulachon are running, generally in May and early June.

At Mile 19.2 is **Haystack Trail 8**, a short (.8 mile one way) mostly boardwalk trail through spruce and hemlock to a knoll overlooking the Delta. Look for trumpeter swans, moose and occasional brown bears. In the distance is the Gulf of Alaska and Kayak Island where Russian explorer Vitus Bering first set foot on these shores in 1741. The haystack-shaped hills are the tops of ancient mountains, near buried over time.

At Mile 25 Saddlebag Road heads one mile north to the start of **Saddlebag Glacier Trail 9**. This 3.1 mile trail winds through cottonwood stands and spruce before reaching a small glaciated valley and the outlet of Saddlebag Lake. The far end of the lake in view of Saddlebag Glacier is a nice spot for a summer picnic. Mountain goats may be seen on nearby cliffs. Watch for brown bears and woodland birds. Townsend's warblers and goshawks have been spotted here.

The first Copper River bridge is at **Flag Point 10** at Mile 27. If you pull off the road and scan the cliffs, you may see mountain goats feeding on moss and lichens. Small roadside tributaries often have coho salmon running through November. Wildlife becomes more scarce beyond the first two bridges but check the cottonwood stands along the sandy river banks for bald eagles and northern hawk owls. Several eagle nests can be seen from the road. Ponds may harbor horned grebes, red-necked phalaropes and trumpeter swans.



The delta's verdant wetlands