

Wildlife Viewing Seasonal Calendar

Central Alaska

Refuge at Fairbanks and Clearwater Lake near Delta.

January

Look for tracks of marten, fox, hare, and lynx in snow in spruce hardwood forest and along streams. Northern flying squirrels and red squirrels sometimes visit birdfeeders.

Look for flocks of redpolls in alder thickets. Black-capped and boreal chickadees, three-toed, hairy, and downy woodpeckers, pine grosbeaks, gray jays, and red polls visit established birdfeeders.

Mallards, common mergansers, bald eagles, and other birds may over winter around spring-fed lakes and streams. Clearwater Lake near Delta is one of the few accessible lakes that remain open through winter in this region.

February

Furbearer tracking is still excellent. Squirrels continue to visit birdfeeders. Red squirrels begin pairing off. As the weather warms, voles and shrews may venture above the snow. Look for their tracks near carcasses and birdfeeders.

Caribou occur along the Parks Highway near Healy.

Common ravens begin pairing off and make courtship displays and interesting vocalizations. Chickadees, woodpeckers, grosbeaks, and

redpolls still visit birdfeeders. In late February, chickadees begin singing and searching for nest sites.

March

Moose frequent lowland muskegs and tall-shrub thickets. Moose sometimes concentrate in groups of 3-30 animals in willow thickets along rivers. Spring is the breeding season for lynx. It's sometimes possible to hear them yowling at night in spruce-hardwood forest areas, particularly along rivers.

Watch for flocks of ravens and jays to locate carcasses where tracks and sign of fox, marten, lynx, and wolf may be found.

Woodpeckers begin drumming and searching for nest sites in forest habitats. Boreal and great-horned owls call during the night in spruce-hardwood forests. Snow buntings—the first sign of spring—return from wintering areas. Watch roadsides, open fields, and alpine areas. Migrating ptarmigan, sometimes in flocks of hundreds, occur along river valleys and mountain passes.

Blackfish are often visible around open holes (muskrat push-ups or ice-fishing holes) in ice or stagnant ponds. Signs

of otter or mink are common around holes where they've been feeding on blackfish.

April

Hares begin to breed, often running about in daylight or twilight. Watch most habitats for tracks and sit quietly in an area where hare sign is evident.

Dall sheep may occur at lower elevations where they seek out the first green vegetation of spring. Dall sheep rams often travel in large herds in spring. Watch for sheep in the alpine and subalpine zones of mountains with rocky slopes and cliffs.

Brown bears begin to emerge from hibernation in May—caution is particularly important during this season.

Northern hawk-owls begin calling from the tops of spruce trees, snags, and power lines near forests. Ptarmigan begin cackling from their territories in alpine tundra. Ruffed and spruce grouse begin courtship drumming and displays in forests. Migrating ducks and geese begin to arrive in mid-to-late April. Watch the skies, grain fields, lakes, and rivers throughout the upper Tanana River valley. Late April is a good time to visit Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl

The major spring movement of hawks—buteos, accipiters, eagles, falcons, and harriers—occurs in late April. Watch for them flying along ridges, river valleys, open areas, and overhead. Sawmill Road near Delta (Mile 1403 Alaska Highway) and anywhere along the mountains between Delta and Tok are good places to look. Wood frogs and boreal toads begin chorusing in ponds, ditches, and stream sides in late April. Juvenile chum and king salmon emerge as fry and may be seen in eddies of clear-running rivers, including the Chena and Salcha Rivers.

May

As ice-out occurs in ponds and streams, beaver begin rebuilding dams and gathering fresh vegetation for their young. Many occur along the Alaska Highway between the Canadian border and Fairbanks. Caribou begin calving and may be visible along the Taylor Highway. Muskrats begin forming pairs. Listen for their squeaky vocalizations around lakes and ponds. River otters are frequently observed moving along streams and rivers this time of year. Porcupines bear their young. Spruce bark is the porcupine's primary

winter food. Look for tree trunks with peeled off bark.

Migrating cranes pass over Tok and Big Delta during the first week of May. Over 200,000 migrate through the area. Watch for them in fields and open areas throughout the region. Migrating tundra and trumpeter swans often occur on lakes and ponds throughout the area.

In early May, sharp-tailed grouse display on leks (courtship sites) in muskeg and early succession forest. Geese and ducks continue to arrive and diving duck migration begins. Watch for canvasbacks, buffleheads, common and Barrow's goldeneyes, and redheads in rivers, streams, and lakes. Listen as the first songbirds, including varied thrushes, dark-eyed juncos, and ruby-crowned kinglets, begin singing in forested habitats.

Lapland longspurs migrate through, sometimes in flocks of thousands. Watch open areas, fields, and alpine locales. Long-tailed ducks, harlequin ducks, and white-winged and surf scoters migrate through in mid-to late May.

As shorebird migration begins, watch open fields and wet meadows for lesser golden plovers, long-billed dowitchers, and semipalmated, Baird's, pectoral, least, and western

sandpipers. Listen for the warbling song of American dippers (water ouzel) along lakes and fast-flowing streams. Willow ptarmigan are still giving courtship displays in alpine tundra. Listen for common snipe winnowing in muskegs and along lakes and rivers.

June

Beaver continue refurbishing their lodges—watch for them in late evening and early morning in ponds and sloughs. Mountain goat nannies with young may be spotted on steep cliffs and alpine areas in the Talkeetna Mountains.

Watch for black bears with cubs around ponds, potholes, and sloughs in lowland areas. Moose calves are born. Watch for cows with calves along roadsides, in muskeg, tall-shrub thickets, and old burns.

Bison summer along the Delta River. They can be observed from Mile 242 on the Richardson Highway. This is also a good time to search out pikas, marmots, and Arctic ground squirrels in alpine tundra.

Most songbirds sing throughout June and are easier to locate and observe than during other times of the year. Listen for warblers, sparrows, thrushes, flycatchers, and waxwings. Alder flycatchers, western

wood peewees, and bank swallows arrive in early June. Visit tundra sites to hear and see courting shorebirds and alpine songbirds. Red-winged blackbirds can be found in cattail marshes in the Tanana River valley. Loons wail in late evening and early morning from lakes throughout the region.

Most birds are nesting—watch for broken wing and other distraction displays, aggressive behavior, and recently fledged young.

July

Bison can still be seen from Mile 242 on the Richardson Highway. Black and brown bears frequent salmon streams to catch spawning salmon and feed on carcasses. Berries begin ripening in late July, so bears start to frequent berry patches. Watch for them in tall-shrub thickets and old burn areas.

Pikas start to collect dry grass for winter. Watch for their haypiles in rocky alpine slopes.

Young grebes, waterfowl, shorebirds, and grouse have hatched. They travel and feed with their parents. Loons, grebes, and mergansers often carry young on their backs. Junco, sparrow, and most other songbird young may be independent of their parents.

Thrushes and flycatchers may be just fledging young, however. Swallows begin flocking together and leave the region. Watch for large flocks along rivers, streams, and open areas.

Red salmon spawn in streams in more southern areas of central Alaska, including the Copper River. Tiny, young Arctic grayling swim in shallow stream margins.

August

Brown and black bears frequent berry patches and salmon streams.

Little brown bats feed near forest openings and over fields in late evening. Red squirrels begin frantically storing spruce cones and harvesting mushrooms.

Loons are still feeding their young. Bald eagles congregate along salmon spawning streams. In late August, spruce grouse begin frequenting stream sides, lakeshores, and roads in early morning to secure grit for the coming winter. Male often rejoins hen and brood in late August.

Spawning chum and king salmon may be observed in the Chena and Salcha Rivers along any of the highway crossings on Chena Hot Springs Road. They have swum 1,000 miles from the Bering Sea to spawn.

September

Moose are near rut—watch for males with large racks. This is a good time to visit Denali National Park to watch moose. Watch for caribou along the Taylor Highway during August and September. The entire Forty-mile caribou herd passes through this area en route to wintering grounds.

Pikas are easiest to locate in September. They become territorial and protect their haypiles from other pikas, frequently scolding and chasing each other. Look for them in alpine tundra at Eagle Summit, and near Tangle Lakes on the Denali Highway. Arctic ground squirrels fatten up in preparation for winter hibernation.

Raptor migration is underway. Watch for hawks along ridges and alpine passes. Some good viewing can be found on the ridges between Delta and Tok.

Large flocks of American robins and Bohemian waxwings gather in berry-producing trees, especially mountain ash and chokecherry. Watch for flocks of migrating shorebirds and passerines.

Trumpeter and tundra swans begin staging. Watch for family groups and flocks in lakes and ponds in tall-shrub

thickets and lowland forest areas.

Thousands of sandhill cranes migrate south through Big Delta and Tok en route to the Gulf of Mexico. Sharp-tailed grouse form large flocks in muskeg and lowland spruce forests with berry-producing shrubs.

October

Dall sheep rams are in pre-rut. Watch alpine slopes and rocky cliffs for herds and for aggressive behavior by rams. Caribou begin rut and migrate to wintering areas. Watch for caribou along the Taylor Highway.

Ptarmigan move down from alpine areas into subalpine and brushy lowlands. Spruce grouse frequent roadsides to pick up sand and gravel for grit.

Chum salmon spawn in the mouth of the Delta River. Silver salmon spawn in the Delta Clearwater River and Clearwater Lake.

November

Dall sheep are now in rut. Watch for large herds in alpine areas and on rocky cliffs. Bison occur in the Delta Bison Range. They may be easy to photograph now.

Bald eagles, gulls, and other scavengers concentrate around streams where salmon are still spawning.

Only resident winter birds remain in numbers.

Chickadees, gray jays, and woodpeckers frequent birdfeeders. Late chum and silver salmon runs occur in some areas of the region.

December

Bison occur in the Delta Bison Range and adjacent areas. Northern flying squirrels may visit established birdfeeders.

Resident winter birds are most abundant in forested areas. Redpolls and pine grosbeaks may visit birdfeeders in larger numbers than in previous months.

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

