

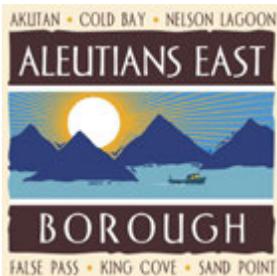


Izembek and Cold Bay: Unique, even for Alaska.

A small dark sea goose called the Pacific black brant is a discriminating eater as it prepares for an arduous non-stop flight to Mexico. Nothing but Izembek Lagoon eelgrass will do. Every fall some 130,000 brant, almost its entire world population, descend on the lagoon's shallow, brackish waters for an eight week feast.

What's good for the goose is good for the millions of waterfowl, shorebirds and seabirds that spend time in this wet, richly productive and diverse environment. Songbirds and raptors nest in the area, brown bear are prolific along the myriad salmon-rich streams and lakes, and caribou migrate through seasonally.

Together the Izembek State Game Refuge and the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge encompass nearly half a million acres. The adjacent community of Cold Bay (pop. 95), a regional transportation hub, was originally settled in 1941 as a U.S. military air base.



For information on lodging and accommodations in Cold Bay, contact the Aleutians East Borough Clerk at 907-383-2699 or visit the borough website at www.aleutianseast.org.



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.



Visit www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov for more information on wildlife viewing across Alaska. For information about the 32 refuge areas managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, visit www.refuges.adfg.alaska.gov



Photos

Caribou ©Kenneth A Peterson • Black brant ©Jim Williams.
Otters ©Bob Armstrong • Eel grass ©Tom Collopy or Mary Frische-USFWS
All other photos ©ADF&G.

COLD BAY IZEMBEK REFUGES

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 but 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. Also, avoid causing whales 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 tidepools 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.

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



A pigeon guillemot is perched on the Cold Bay dock.

Wildlife Viewing Fun Facts

Marine Meadows: Like underwater fields of luxuriant unmown grass, the eelgrass beds of Izembek Lagoon are among the largest (over 34,000 acres) and most productive in the world. A safe haven for crab, salmon and many species of invertebrates, this flowering perennial provides myriad creatures with habitat, nursery grounds, food and buffer from storms. Its verdant blades are covered with tiny marine plants and animals. For vast numbers of migrating waterfowl in the fall, the eelgrass beds provide the diet they need to replace resources depleted by nesting and molting and to prepare for the long trip ahead. Approximately 130,000 Pacific black brant, 50,000 Taverner's Canada geese, 62,000 emperor geese, 300,000 ducks and 80,000 shorebirds stop over during migration and as many as 50,000 Steller's eiders winter in the area. As eelgrass grows, it produces oxygen, which is released into the system, and takes up nutrients. As it dies back, the nutrient-laden detritus is carried into the Bering Sea to feed what is one of the most productive seas on the planet.



Caution! River Otters at Play: River otters, young and old, are fond of play. Look for them dunking and wrestling each other, and sliding on mud or snow. They are also graceful swimmers and efficient hunters and will ambush their prey swimming underwater at more than 6 miles per hour (compare that to Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps' average speed of about 4.5 mph).



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-proof 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. 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 or bites you, lie on your front, protect your face and neck, and remain still. In rare instances, bears may be predatory. Fight back if the attack is prolonged.



STAY SAFE!

Before travel, check for road closures with USFWS refuge headquarters. Many side roads require 4WD and not all are open to the public. Beware of soft shoulders, it's easy to get stuck in soft soils on narrow roads. Dress for the weather, a typical summer day is gray, cloudy and windy. Take a companion, let someone know your plans and be prepared for emergencies with spare clothes, first aid kit and means of communication. For safety tips, visit: www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/safety.

COLD BAY/IZEMBEK REFUGES

Wildlife Viewing Sites



Consider making your first stop the **Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters** **1** to check road and weather information and view wildlife displays.

Bird life is abundant in waters around the **Cold Bay dock** **2**. Long-tailed and harlequin ducks, Steller's eiders, common loons and pelagic cormorants frequent the bay in winter. Emperor geese flock south of the pier and just beyond at Nurse Lagoon where they can be seen using their bills to sieve invertebrates out of the mud. Look for pigeon guillemots, horned puffins, black-legged kittiwakes, Arctic terns and glaucous-winged and mew gulls perched on the pier in summer. Look for songbirds like golden-crowned and Savannah sparrows in summer and snow buntings and gray crowned rosy finches in winter. Sea otters frequent bay waters.

Before it reaches the bay, **Russell Creek** **3** cuts a deep gorge where eagles perched on bluffs scan the river for fish. When salmon are running, brown bears share the river with people also fishing for salmon and Dolly Varden. Wolves and caribou are present year round, as are many varieties of ducks, passerines, mink and river otters. Large flocks of emperor geese gather at the mouth between October and March. Harbor seals are frequently seen swimming the lower creek at high tide.

Heading north from Cold Bay, pause at Trout Creek just outside town and check for fox, mink, salmon, kingfisher, dipper or brown bear. At Mile 4 is **Blinn Lake** **4** and the junction of Grant Point and Outer Marker Roads. U.S. servicemen came here to recreate during World War

II and planted Sitka spruce along the shores. The scraggly survivors in this windswept otherwise treeless land draw resident and migratory songbirds. Look for tundra swans, northern shovelers and green-winged teal on the lake. In the fall, geese feed on shiny black crowberries on nearby hillsides. A rough road circling the lake is not recommended for vehicles but does make for a good hike. Brown bears are prolific in the region but most visible in places like Blinn Lake, where they often sleep

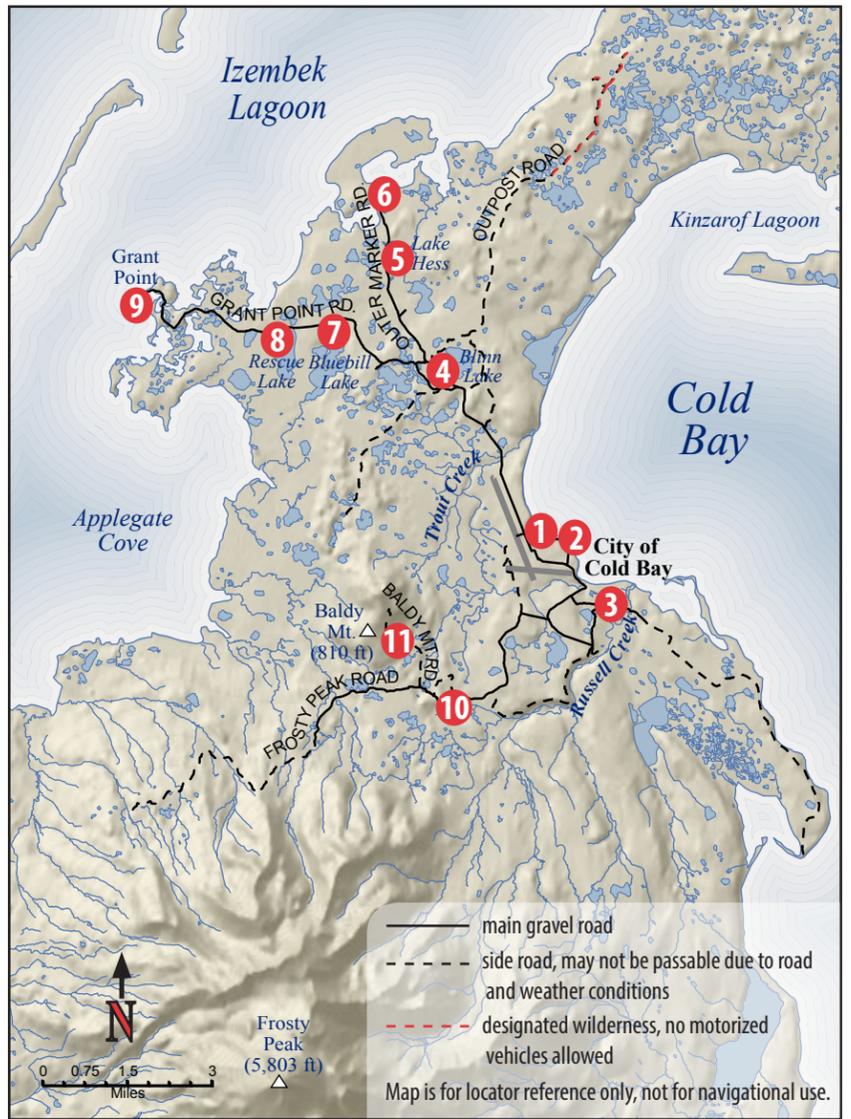
in the alder thickets and graze on sedges and berries near the lake. Wolves also frequent the area but are difficult to spot; look for tracks in soft soils. They are most easily seen in winter against a snow white landscape. Caribou may be present between October and May before they head to summer calving grounds further north on the peninsula. Both roads are good places to see caribou in winter, easily visible feeding on lichens on the hillsides and sedges in low areas.

Veer right onto Outer Marker Road and **Lake Hess** **5** (also known appropriately as Red Salmon Lake) is about 3 miles on. Like other lakes and small ponds along the way, it's a likely place to spot river otters at play or loping across the road and in low wetlands. These ponds/wetlands are also valuable nesting and brood-rearing habitat for shorebirds in spring and early summer. Look for yellowlegs, dunlin and rock, least and western sandpipers displaying their breeding plumage; and listen for their distinct calls. Mew gulls often nest on rocks in small lakes. In June and July, look for green-winged teal, snipe, red-necked phalaropes, mallards, shovelers, pintails, greater scaup and tundra swans. In fall, Taverner's cackling and emperor geese may be seen feeding on ripe crowberries on these and many other hillsides. Red and cross foxes also frequent the area. Any of five species of Pacific salmon can be found seasonally in the lake and other area waters. Ground squirrels are ubiquitous throughout the area in summer.

At the end of the public road, a raised area topped by **aviation**

1. Refuge Headquarters		< 15 min*
2. Cold Bay Dock		< 15 min
3. Russell Creek		30 min
4. Blinn Lake		40 min
5. Lake Hess		45 min
6. Aviation antennas		50 min
7. Bluebill Lake		50 min
8. Rescue Lake		1 hour
9. Grant Point		1¼ hour
10. Gravel pit		1 hour
11. Baldy Mountain		1¼ hour

Scenic Vistas Hiking Trails Interpretive Signs
Trails are unmaintained and used primarily by hunters.
*Estimated travel times are round-trip between airport and site under optimum road conditions.



An arctic ground squirrel munches on lupine leaves.

antennas **6** overlooks a large part of Izembek Lagoon and the mouth of Red Salmon Creek. This is a good place to scan for wildlife, especially bears, throughout the summer and fall. Eagles perch on the antennas and shorebirds and geese feed in the mudflats after a high tide. Passerines like Lapland longspurs and golden-crowned sparrows are especially abundant in spring.

The 11-mile Grant Point Road offers a good chance of seeing caribou, wolves and ptarmigan. Head north from downtown Cold Bay and veer left at Blinn Lake. Look

for caribou, especially in winter, about half a mile from the junction in the area of the manned radar station known locally as the "golf ball." Winter winds keep these low rolling hills relatively snow-free, exposing the lichens and sedges that caribou feed on. About 1.5 miles in is **Bluebill Lake** **7** where large flocks of waterfowl congregate. Look for tundra swans with young (called cygnets), shovelers, pintails and mallards. Bears may be spotted fishing for spawning salmon.

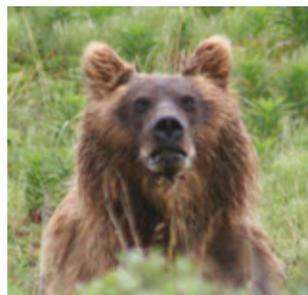
Another 1.2 miles on is **Rescue Lake** **8** a good place to look for shorebirds such as dunlin, red breasted phalaropes, lesser yellowlegs and several species of sandpiper. Predators, such as long-tailed jaegers, gyrfalcons, short-eared owls and merlins, may be seen flying over the tundra looking for prey. Scan hillsides in fall for emperor geese flocking to feed on crowberries.

The road ends at **Grant Point** **9** and a small enclosed observatory with a spotting scope and interpretive panels overlooking Izembek Lagoon. This richly productive marine ecosystem, 30 miles long and 5 miles wide, is the heart of the Izembek State Game Refuge. Healthy eelgrass beds grow just below mean low tide. Nourished by ocean tides and freshwater streams, they provide feeding areas for many invertebrates, fish and marine birds. Several hundred thousand migratory waterfowl and shorebirds headed to and from arctic and subarctic breeding grounds pass through or winter here between

September and May. Fall migration is an outstanding opportunity to see black brant geese close-up when nearly the entire world population converges on the lagoon to feed. Most leave before winter sets in but increasing numbers stay to feed in open areas in the ice along with red-breasted mergansers and Steller's and common eiders. You may see harbor seals, sea otters, occasional orcas and—during April migration—gray whales. The point boasts fairweather views of three distant volcanoes on Unimak Island to the southwest: Roundtop, Isanotski and Shishaldin.

Chances are good you'll see ptarmigan, caribou and song birds along Frosty Peak Road. From a raised area at a private **gravel pit** **10** at Mile 5, glass surroundings for caribou, brown bears and sandhill cranes. Dippers, year-round residents thanks to a thick coat of feathers, low metabolic rate and their blood's extra oxygen-carrying capacity, may be seen in the waters of Frosty Creek near First Bridge. Willow ptarmigan may be spotted on the road at lower elevations but as you climb you may also spot rock ptarmigan, particularly in boulder-strewn areas. Hike up the ridges from the road in spring and scan drainages for bear dens, large dark openings in residual snow banks with packed dirty snow on the downhill side and trails in and out. Snow buntings nest in rocky fields on mountainsides in spring.

Baldy Mountain Road is only passable certain times of year, so check with refuge staff before you go. A hike up **Baldy Mountain** **11** (elev. 1000 ft) offers beautiful views of the lagoon and Frosty Peak but be bear aware! Tremendous concentrations of bears graze in the boggy flats between Baldy Mountain and Applegate Cove. Sandhill cranes nest in the open sedge flats; listen for their soft bugling. Look for snipe and listen for the winnowing noise of their tail feathers in spring. Wolverines, though elusive, have also been spotted in the area. Tundra flats and hills host a variety of plants, including well known flowers like monkshood, lupine, dwarf fireweed and a miniature version of the azalea. Thick sphagnum mosses lend a soft, spongy texture to the ground. Tundra hiking is more difficult than it first appears. It's easy to turn an ankle, get lost or surprise a sleeping bear that may lie hidden in the land's undulations.



A curious brown bear