

Wildlife Viewing Seasonal Calendar

Southeast Alaska

January

Mink, river otter, marten, and vole tracks are easy to find in the snow. Wolf, wolverine, and weasel tracks may also be found. Along rocky shores and coastal bays, look for common, red-throated, and yellow-billed loons, harlequin ducks, horned, red-necked, and western grebes, scoters, goldeneyes, and long-tailed ducks. Rock sandpipers and dunlins occur on rocky coasts throughout winter in Southeast. Watch for Pacific loons, common murrelets, and marbled murrelets in offshore waters. Murrelets, and pigeon guillemots also occur in inshore waters and may be seen near Petersburg.

February

Some killer and humpback whales remain in the sounds and straits of Southeast during the winter. Watch for them, and Dall's and harbor porpoise, along the Alaska Marine Highway and coastal vantage points.

During winter, flocks of chestnut-backed chickadees, brown creepers, red-breasted nuthatches, and golden-crowned kinglets can often be found in old-growth forests. Watch for large flocks of red and white-winged crossbills and pine siskins feeding or flying among the tops of spruce trees. Common

redpolls, chestnut-backed chickadees, Steller's jays, and downy woodpeckers can be easily attracted to birdfeeders in this region. Bald eagles can be seen anywhere along the coast, throughout the year.

March

Steller sea lions feed on herring in inshore waters and can be seen around coastal towns, including Juneau. Occasionally, killer whales that follow sea lions into shallow water may be observed from shore.

Chestnut-backed chickadees, winter wrens, Steller's jays, red-breasted nuthatches, golden-crowned kinglets, and other winter resident birds begin courtship singing in March. In late March, listen for the courtship drumming of sooty grouse in forested areas. Herring move into shallow areas to spawn on kelp beds. Sea ducks begin their northward migrations. Loons, grebes, mergansers, and a variety of sea ducks may be abundant around herring spawning areas.

Owls establish nesting territories by hooting and calling during March. Listen for great horned owls calling late in the night. Northern saw-whet, western screech, and great gray owls also call in

this season, but are rarely seen.

April

Mountain goats move to lower elevations to feed on the first green plants of spring. Look for them on south-facing slopes. Brown and black bears emerge from winter dens. Bears are often visible in avalanche areas on steep mountain slopes. Watch for signs of deer and bears eating emerging skunk cabbage flowers and leaves.

Ruby-crowned kinglets arrive and begin singing. Hermit and varied thrushes and American robins appear in large numbers. Lapland longspurs, snow buntings, and golden-crowned sparrows begin moving through Southeast.

Eulachon (a small oil-rich fish also known as hooligan) move into rivers to spawn. Spawning herring reach maximum concentrations in sheltered waters. Dolly Varden char begin their seaward migration from wintering areas in freshwater lakes. Harbor seals congregate at river mouths during the eulachon run. They can often be seen hauled out on sandbars and icebergs. Sea otter pups may be born any time of year, but most are born in spring. Sea otters

occur along the outer coast of southeast and in Icy Strait.

In early April, trumpeter swans, Canada geese, and a variety of dabbling ducks move northward from southern areas. Northern pintails, blue-winged teal, and American wigeons arrive in early April. Blue grouse can be heard hooting in spring courtship. In late April, watch for migrant sea ducks and shorebirds. Barrow's goldeneyes, surf scoters, black turnstones, and surfbirds move through in large numbers. Watch for uncommon migrants, including red-necked grebes, sandhill cranes, red-tailed and rough-legged hawks, and other birds of prey.

Late April is a good time to visit the Stikine River Flats near Petersburg. Bald eagles, gulls, and mergansers are attracted to river mouths where eulachon run. Bald eagles pairs may be observed in old-growth forest along the coast and river valleys.

May

Bears are feeding on newly emerging vegetation. Black bears frequent grassy tidal flats to feed on sedges and intertidal plants. Brown bears may be seen in alpine tundra or on tidal flats during May.

Sitka black-tailed deer fawns are born during late May through June. During this period, deer may be seen along forest fringes adjacent to a beach or muskeg.

Beaver and muskrat can be observed in early morning and late evening along streams and ponds. Moose begin calving. Cow moose with young may be encountered in muskegs and tall-shrub thickets along rivers and in the Gustavus area. Snowshoe hare litters are born during April and May. Watch for females with young in late evening and early morning in tall-shrub thickets of mainland southeast.

Tufted puffins, common murre, pigeon guillemots, glaucous-winged gulls, and other seabirds begin gathering at nesting colonies on small islands along the outer coast. Seabird colonies are established at North Marble Island at Glacier Bay, at Forester Island near Dixon Entrance, and St. Lazaria Island near Sitka. Murres and puffins can be observed at sea along the outer coast and in open passages. Marbled murrelets, pigeon guillemots, and some other alcids can be seen in nearshore waters throughout this region.

Migrant songbirds arrive and begin their courtship songs. Look and listen for ruby-crowned kinglets, northern yellowthroat, yellow-rumped

warbler, northern waterthrush, and varied, Swainson's, and hermit thrushes.

Steelhead trout move into freshwater streams.

Salamanders and boreal toads may be found in muskeg ponds throughout the summer.

Inland ponds and lakes are excellent places for birding. Look for Bonaparte's gull, horned grebe, northern pintail, American wigeon, northern shoveler, yellowlegs, and spotted sandpiper. This is the best time of year to look for some southeast Alaska specialties, including warbling and red-eyed vireos, Tennessee warbler, MacGillivray's warbler, American redstart, western tanager, brown-headed cowbird, and band-tailed pigeon. Most of these can be found in riparian forests along the major river systems on the mainland. Northwestern crows, common in coastal communities, are vocal and highly territorial during nesting.

June

Harbor seals give birth to pups on icebergs around tidewater glaciers in Tracy Arm and Glacier Bay.

Humpback and killer whales are frequently observed in large sounds and straits of Southeast throughout the summer.

Sitka black-tailed deer move from forests to alpine areas for the summer.

Sooty grouse with young may be seen in alpine areas. Most songbirds are nesting and tend to quiet down, but unpaired birds will continue singing their courtship songs. Young from the earlier nesting birds will begin fledging; watch for fledged young. Pairs of marbled murrelets can be seen on coastal waters throughout the region. Most waterbirds are nesting on inland lakes and rivers, so fewer are present along the coast. Watch for rufous hummingbirds around flowerbeds and feeders during June and July. They are attracted to anything that is bright red.

Young Dolly Varden char and silver salmon can be seen along the margins of most streams. Sockeye (red) salmon enter spawning streams in late June.

July

Sockeye (red) salmon migrate into spawning streams in peak numbers. Brown and black bears fish for spawning salmon along rivers and streams.

Sea otters can be seen in kelp beds along the outer coast of Southeast Alaska islands and in Icy Strait. Singing activity of passerines declines

Young begin fledging. Young woodpeckers often call from the nest hole, and parents feeding young are easy to watch. Some waterfowl molt their wing feathers in late summer. Flocks of molting geese occur on some alpine lakes. Most ducks are solitary and stay well hidden during their wing molt.

August

Throughout the summer, mountain goat nannies and their young travel in nursery groups. In contrast, billies usually travel alone or in small groups of two to three animals. Deer can be seen in alpine and subalpine areas at dawn and dusk.

Canada geese begin reappearing in salt marsh areas and remain common through fall. Shorebirds begin passing through on their way south. Watch for pectoral, least, semipalmated, and western sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, red-necked phalaropes, whimbrels, short-billed dowitchers, and golden and black-bellied plovers. Water pipits and rosy finches form large flocks and can be observed in alpine areas.

Chum and pink salmon begin salmon runs. They can be seen at spawning areas near coastal towns. Red salmon are spawning in Steep Creek near Mendenhall Glacier. Viewing

areas are provided along the road.

September

Stellar sea lions haul out on Benjamin Island near Juneau and other sites throughout the region. They can be observed during fall and winter.

Raptor migration is underway in early September. Watch for sharp-shinned hawks, merlins, and golden eagles flying along ridge tops in alpine areas. Gull migration occurs. Glaucous-winged, herring, mew, and Bonaparte's gulls are numerous. Many sandhill cranes stop on the Stikine River flats to rest as they travel south. Shorebird migration continues. Watch for small flocks along the coast, in coastal wetlands, and freshwater areas. Large numbers of passerines including thrushes, crossbills, pine grosbeaks, and warblers migrate south through this region. Flocks of birds often feed on blueberries and mountain ash berries.

Coho (silver) salmon begin spawning and may be seen in rivers along the coast.

October

Beaver are particularly active as they construct winter food caches and renovate their lodges and dams.

Moose are in rut. Bulls with large racks can be seen in river bottoms and tall-shrub

thickets. Sitka black-tailed deer rut from mid-October through November. Bucks with full racks may be seen.

Migrating snow geese, en route to California, rest and feed on the Stikine River Flats along with tundra swans and Canada geese. Tundra swans often stop over on coastal wetlands around Gustavus and Juneau. Long-tailed ducks, goldeneyes, surf, black, and white-winged scoters, harlequin ducks and other diving sea ducks use the protected bays around most coastal towns during late fall and winter.

Late runs of silver and chum salmon occur in some rivers, notably the Chilkat River. These attract bald eagles, gulls, and other predators.

November

Mountain goats are in rut. Billies wander considerable distances in search of females. The largest bald eagle concentration in the world occurs along the Chilkat River near Haines. Peak numbers (thousands) occur in November. Smaller concentrations occur along other spring-fed streams.

December

In years of heavy snow, Sitka black-tailed deer are common in coastal forests and sometimes visit beaches to feed on kelp. Most months,

deer tend to follow snow lines up and down mountainsides from the coastal forest fringe. When snow accumulates, they move into old-growth forest areas. Watch for them while traveling the Alaska Marine Highway.

Moose have become more common in Southeast. Look for them in river basins where willow is abundant. Mountain goats move out of alpine tundra into old-growth forest areas. These lower elevations offer protection from weather during winter.

Many water birds winter in the wetlands and marine waters of Southeast Alaska. In the southern islands, trumpeter swans, hooded mergansers, and American coots often occur in the few freshwater ponds and lakes that remain open in winter. Red-throated loons, horned grebes, Canada geese, mallards, green-winged teal, greater scaup, Barrow's goldeneyes, buffleheads, and surf scoters use coastal wetlands. The Vancouver subspecies of Canada goose are year-round residents. In winter, large flocks gather in coastal wetlands. The Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge is a good place to observe them. Winter wrens sing throughout the year.

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

