Denali Highway Region

Watchable Wildlife

This rugged 135-mile stretch of primarily gravel highway offers a taste of wild Alaska with its wide-open vistas of mountains, glaciers, tundra, forests, lakes, and rivers. Visitors may see grizzly bear and moose throughout the journey between Cantwell and Paxson. In August, large numbers of migrating caribou may be visible from the many waysides and pullouts.

Habitats  Arctic tundra | Alpine tundra | Boreal forest | Shrubland | Riverine/riparian | Freshwater lakes/ponds

Species to See

Northern flying squirrel - In the nighttime hours, this small, quarter-pound mammal glides from tree to tree using lateral skin folds called patagia. Alaskan subspecies of flying squirrel prefer to live in old growth forests where they find cover from predators, nest in tree cavities, and raise their young. They survive the winter months by entering torpor, a state similar to hibernation.

Arctic warbler - Listen for the loud trill of an Arctic warbler singing from willows near streams. This warbler is one of the few birds that flies to North America from Asia. Most of the individuals of this species breed in northern Asia and Europe, but a small population flies from Asia to breed in Alaska each summer. Watch for them flitting from bush to bush along the Denali Highway.

North American beaver - Look for this distinct reddish-brown rodent swimming through streams and ponds. Beavers are the largest rodents in North America and are known as "ecosystem engineers" for their environment-altering lifestyle. Beavers use their large teeth to cut down trees and place them to build lodges and dam rivers, creating new still-water pools that provide habitat for many other species.

Trumpeter swan - This graceful white bird is the largest waterfowl species in the world, with a typical weight of 21-30 pounds and a wingspan of up to six feet. Their huge mass requires a long, approximately 300-feet, "runway" for them to take off from water. Mating pairs of swans pluck aquatic plants to build nests in the marshes adjacent to freshwater lakes. These nests can be up to 12 feet in diameter and two feet above the water.

Other Resources

- Denali Highway Georeferenced Map
- Denali Highway Brochure
- Gulkana Wild and Scenic River Guide
- Tangle Lakes Archaeological District Brochure
- Delta Wild and Scenic River Guide

https://www.blm.gov/alaska/wildlife
Wrangell St. Elias National Park, National Park Service.
The largest national park in the United States offers the opportunity to see many different animals, including caribou, moose, mountain goats, and Dall sheep.

Copper River, multiple land managers. Flowing from interior to the Gulf of Alaska, the Copper River is famous for its salmon runs and the bears that feed on the fish.

Susitna River, multiple land managers. Moose, beavers, waterfowl, and all five species of salmon thrive in this large glacially fed river.

Lake Louise, Department of Natural Resources. The 37 square miles of this state recreation area provide the opportunity to see bear, fox, Dall sheep, trumpeter swan, and gulls.