



Watchable Wildlife in Alaska

Viewing and Safety Tips

Observing diverse wildlife species in their natural environment builds lasting memories and fosters appreciation. Wildlife viewing is more than just driving to a point on a map to see animals, it is also about understanding wildlife behavior to watch them safely and respectfully. Learning to recognize suitable habitat for various species will improve your chances of viewing wildlife. Large mammals may not always be present or easy to see. To enrich your experience, think small. Learn more about Alaska’s fascinating birds, fishes, invertebrates, plants, and fungi. Take a closer look at these easier to find species while you are waiting to see a moose or caribou.



Martin Roberts, WCS

How to Respectfully Watch Wildlife

- **Leave no trace.** Be considerate of people, animals, and the environment by minimizing your impact on the land. Pack out all trash, walk on trails in high use areas, and respect wildlife.
- **Leave pets at home.** Having a pet around may either scare animals away or attract an animal you wish to avoid.
- **Keep your distance.** Avoid disturbing animals in their habitat. Getting too close to an animal causes it unnecessary stress. Repeated disturbances may cause harmful changes in behavior.

You are too close to a mammal if it...

- ▶ Raises its head high with ears pointed at you
- ▶ Raises the hairs on the back of its neck and shoulders
- ▶ Exhibits signs of skittishness, like jumping at sounds or movements
- ▶ Lowers its head with ears back in preparation for a charge
- ▶ Displays aggressive or nervous behavior

You are too close to a bird if it...

- ▶ Seems skittish
- ▶ Raises its head to watch you
- ▶ Preens excessively
- ▶ Gives alarm calls
- ▶ Gives distraction displays, such as feigning a broken wing



Moose

Bob Wick, BLM



Emperor Goose

USFWS



Bald Eagle

Jeremy Matlock, BLM

Wildlife Viewing Tips

- **Take your time.** Stop at watchable wildlife viewpoints and spend time exploring. The more time you take, the more likely you are to observe wildlife.
- **Bring binoculars.** View large expanses of terrain with binoculars to increase your chances of spotting animals. Use binoculars to notice small details.
- **Time viewing.** Wildlife are most active at dawn and dusk. Certain tides can be important for viewing marine birds and mammals. Learn which months or seasons you can expect to see different wildlife.
- **Click.** Use a telephoto lens and a tripod to get good closeup photos. You are too close to an animal if you can get a good closeup on a cellphone camera.
- **Find evidence.** Animals leave clues behind that tell you they were there. Look for scat and tracks in the dirt and snow. Watch for bark, branches, or leaves that were munched on by herbivores.
- **Learn more.** Read field guides and other informational booklets. Study how to recognize animals by their tracks, scat, and vocalizations. Research traditional knowledge, subsistence use of wildlife, and habitat management by Alaska native peoples.



Casey Burns, BLM

Safety

- **Give wildlife space.** For your safety, and for the safety of the animals, give them lots of room. Many animals are protective of their young and may be aggressive if they feel threatened.
- **Stay bear aware.** If you are in Alaska, you are in bear country. Make noise, travel in groups, stay vigilant, and carry bear spray. Never run from a bear. Learn more at www.alaskabears.alaska.gov
- **Steer clear of moose.** Give moose plenty of space. Watch for defensive behaviors, especially from cows with calves. If the moose feels threatened, it may feel the need to protect itself. Do not respond aggressively and move away or seek cover as quickly as possible.
- **Prepare for the weather.** Alaska can be bitterly cold or unexpectedly hot. Blue skies can turn into rain or snow. Travel with what you need to be comfortable in changing conditions.
- **Bring the essentials.** Alaska is notoriously remote. Pack anything you may need ahead of time, including a first aid kit, navigation tools, extra gas and food, and emergency plans.
- **Inform.** Do not plan on having cellphone service. Always let someone know where you are going and when you plan to be back.



Brown bear

Steve Hillebrand, USFWS



Hoverfly

Casey Burns, BLM