



National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska

Watchable Wildlife

Distance has a different meaning in the 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A), where you can look across the treeless tundra for miles and miles. Caribou dot the landscape, and rivers meander through the coastal plain until they reach the sea. Millions of migratory birds fly here each year from around the world to nest and feed in the region’s freshwater lakes, wetlands, and open tundra.



Craig McCaa, BLM

Habitats Arctic tundra | Alpine tundra | Shrubland | Coastal waters | Riverine/riparian | Freshwater lakes/ponds

Species to See



Tom Koerner, USFWS

Snowy owl - White feathers and yellow eyes distinguish the snowy owl. They hunt small rodents using their eyes and ears to locate them in vegetation and under deep snow. In years where prey is scarce, they may migrate far outside of their normal Arctic range, sometimes even traveling to the lower 48 states.



Bob Wick, BLM

Arctic fox - These animals’ long and fluffy winter fur drops off into a short brown coat each spring, only to grow back in the fall. In the coastal plain of the Arctic, they excavate six to twelve-foot deep underground dens. In these dens, a monogamous adult pair raise and feed their young. Arctic foxes may roam long distances in search of food, even far out onto the sea ice.



Bob Wick, BLM

Caribou - The Western Arctic, Central Arctic, and Teshekpuk Lake caribou herds range through the NPR-A. Combined, these herds currently total over 300,000 animals. Unlike most antlered species, both the male and female caribou are crowned with these rapid-growing bones. These herds migrate across large portions of Alaska to search for food, reach their calving sites, and find protection from insects.



USGS

Spectacled eider - Named for the circular white “spectacles” around its eyes, the threatened spectacled eider breeds during the summer in the wet tundra. Nobody knew where this eider spent the winter months until 1995, when researchers discovered the species spends winters hunting in gaps in the sea ice called polynya. The NPR-A is one of the only places in the world where you can complete the “Eider Slam” by seeing all four eider species.

Other Resources

[Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Bird List](#)

[National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska Digital Public Information Map](#)



- Brown bear
- Polar bear
- Gray wolf
- Ringed seal
- Dunlin
- Eider
(spectacled, Steller's, common, king)
- Greater white-fronted goose
- Gyrfalcon
- Jaeger
(pomarine, parasitic, long-tailed)
- Peregrine falcon
- Red-throated loon
- Tundra swan
- Whitefish
(round, broad, humpback)
- Arctic bumblebee



Wildlife Viewing Tips

Travel to this remote area takes thorough planning. Your work will be rewarded with the trip of a lifetime, to a place of abundant wildlife where few visit.



Wildlife Viewing Sites

- 1 Kasegaluk Lagoon** - These sheltered waters are calving grounds for beluga whale, supporting approximately 3,000 animals each summer. It is also a favorite haul-out spot for ringed and bearded seals and Pacific walrus. Look up to see birds that have migrated from across the world.
- 2 Teshekpuk Lake** - The largest lake in Arctic Alaska, Teshekpuk Lake is adjacent to the calving grounds for the 60,000 animals of the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd. This shallow freshwater lake is habitat for tens of thousands of brant and greater white-fronted geese and an important refuge for them as they molt before flying south again. It is also the breeding area for spectacled and king eiders, red-throated loons, dunlin, and many other birds.



- 3 Colville River** - Float the river and view peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, golden eagles, and rough-legged hawks nesting on the rocky cliffs. Follow the loops and bends through high-density wolf habitat as the river winds 391 miles to the Arctic Ocean.

Other Notable Locations

■ **Utqiagvik.** This is the largest city in the Alaskan Arctic and the farthest north city in the United States. With commercial flights and a small road system, visiting Utqiagvik is an easier way to access Arctic habitats. Wildlife are plentiful in and near town, where you can see polar bears, beluga, bowhead whales, seals, and migratory birds.