



Petersburg: A “Whale” of a Place for Wildlife Viewing

Drive the roads around Mitkof Island, looking for bears and moose along the way. Catch a glimpse of trumpeter swans during their annual migration. Paddle a kayak amid seal-dotted icebergs or humpback whales. Wander the streets of downtown, watching for sea lions and bald eagles, and staying alert for a Sitka black-tailed deer watching you. Plan ahead for dramatic whale watching in Frederick Sound and tours to Leconte Bay.

Tlingit people settled in the Petersburg area because of the rich bounty of the marine waters. In the late nineteenth century, Norwegian immigrants were drawn to the region for the same reason, and the community’s “Little Norway” festival celebrates this Norwegian heritage each May. Fish is still a major part of life in Petersburg, but after spending a few days in town, you’ll come to appreciate the bounty of the wildlife viewing as well.

For information on tours and lodging, consult the Petersburg Visitor Information Center.

Visit www.petersburg.org or call 907-772-4636. In Petersburg, stop by the visitor center on First and Fram Street.



From the bears of Hyder to the bald eagles of Haines, the whales of Frederick Sound to the birds of the Stikine River, the Inside Passage Segment of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail highlights over 70 wildlife viewing sites in and near the communities of Gustavus, Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Prince of Wales Island, Sitka, Skagway and Wrangell.



Alaska Marine Highway

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife Conservation and
Restoration Program

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are equal opportunity
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
about the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail, or to
browse through wildlife viewing sites in other
communities, visit wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov

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Sea lion photo © A. W. Hanger. All other photos © Jamie Karnik, ADF&G*

PETERSBURG


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. Resist the temptation to try 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.

 **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 in the area - 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. 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.



Watch for sea lions in Petersburg's harbors.



Watchable Wildlife "Fun Facts"

Tiny Bubbles: Bubblenet feeding is a cooperative feeding behavior seen in Southeast Alaska, but uncommon elsewhere. A school of fish, such as herring, is corralled into a tight ball. One whale dives beneath the school, circling and blowing bubbles. The bubbles rise through the water column as a kind of disorienting curtain surrounding and confining the school of fish. As this ring of bubbles reaches the surface, the group of whales lunges up through the prey, gulping tons of water and fish.



Alaska's Rainforest Islands: For a diverse complement of wildlife viewing, landscapes (from a tidewater glacier to caves with ancient animal bones), cultures, and old-fashioned Alaska hospitality, combine your Petersburg visit with trips to Wrangell and Prince of Wales Island.



The new Inter-Island ferry offers convenient connections between these three destinations. For more information, visit www.alaskarainforestislands.com.

Traveling Safely in Bear Country

(All of Petersburg is bear country)

Making noise (sing, clap, talk) while you travel will reduce your chances of surprising a bear. Be 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, quietly leave, 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.

Stand your ground! If the 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!

The mountains, trails, islands and waterways of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail are wild lands. For safety, take a guided tour or take a companion, let someone know your plans and be prepared for emergencies with spare clothes, a first aid kit and a means of communication. Visit the Alaska State Parks' Staying Safe web page for details: www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/safety.

Wildlife Viewing Sites



Keep your eyes open for wildlife in **Downtown Petersburg**. **1** Sitka black-tailed deer are used to the presence of humans, and close encounters are common during the spring and summer. Sandy Beach Road, the Hungry Point Trail, and areas around the ballfield are good places to look. Scan the harbors, especially the South Harbor, for Steller sea lions. Bald eagles soar overhead throughout the summer. Watch for Barrow's goldeneyes, harlequin ducks, red-breasted mergansers, long-tailed ducks, common mergansers and surf, common and white winged scoters along the beaches near town in the winter.

Bald eagles congregate in the trees at **Eagle's Roost Park** **2** between late April and the end of June to scan the waters of Wrangell Narrows for fish. Walk down the stairs to the beach for the best view of the treetops. Eagles will occasionally perch on the rocks on the beach, so stay alert and maintain a respectful distance. Outside of May and June, eagle sightings at the park are possible but far less common, as most eagles are elsewhere nesting or looking for food. Eagle's Roost Park is just north of the Petersburg Fisheries building along Nordic Drive.

Outlook Park **3** is about two miles east of downtown, after Nordic Drive changes to Sandy Beach Road. This covered viewing area has three fixed binoculars and is one of the best shore-based places in Petersburg to look for humpback and killer whales. June through September is the best time to search for humpback whales here, with viewing chances a little higher in July and August. The likelihood of seeing killer whales is less predictable and more opportunistic. Look through binoculars for scoters, pigeon guillemots, harlequin ducks and other birds. Interpretive signs in the shelter provide information on bird identification and humpback whales.

While whales are sometimes visible from Outlook Park, a **Whale Watching** **4** trip provides more consistent, and often more spectacular, viewing. Boats head to the area where Frederick Sound meets Stephens Passage, where hundreds of humpback whales feed in the summer months. Along with humpbacks, look for killer whales, Dall's porpoises, harbor seals, Steller sea lions, scoters and marbled murrelets. Whale watching trips start running in May, with whales seen on most trips. The prime months for whale watching near Petersburg are July and August, when most humpbacks have returned from their winter grounds in Hawaii. Boats take six people per trip, and booking months in advance is advised. It is sometimes, though not often, possible to find same- or next-day space on a tour while in town. Check with the Visitor Information Center or look for posted signs around town for information on last-minute bookings. Petersburg's **Marine Mammal Center** has displays and an interactive computer terminal with information about the marine mammals in the area. Check with the Visitor Information Center for information on hours and location of this growing center, or visit their website at www.psgmmc.org. Guided whale watching trips by kayak are also available; check with the Visitor Information Center for information.



Harbor seals enter Leconte Bay in May and June to have their pups in safety.



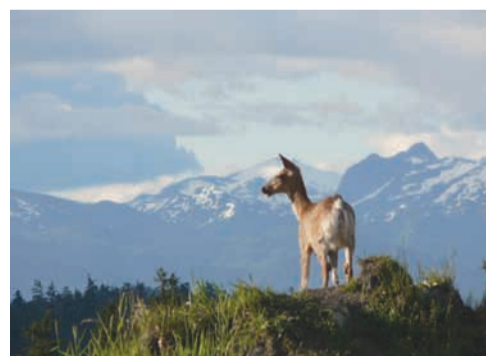
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Harbor seals congregate and pup in **Leconte Bay** **5** where the ice deters their chief predator, the killer whale, from entering. Look for dozens of isolated mother-pup pairs between late May to the middle of June. During these months, a few bald eagles opportunistically hunt the newborn pups. Near the end of July, mothers and pups separate and additional seals enter the bay. It is possible to see hundreds of seals dotting the icebergs during this time. Day boat tours and multi-day kayak trips enter Leconte Bay throughout the summer, providing a chance to look for wildlife and enjoy views of the Leconte Glacier, the southernmost active tidewater glacier in North America.

In addition to spending time in town and on the water, consider taking a drive on the **Roads Around Mitkof Island**. **6** The sides of the road are filled with grasses, low shrubs, wildflowers, and succulents that make good food for many animals. Keep an eye out for Sitka black-tailed deer along the road system at any time of day. The area around Blind Slough is a good place to look for black bears, porcupines and moose. Trailheads and campgrounds along the road system provide intrepid explorers with additional viewing chances. Rental cars are available in town, and local tour operators provide transportation around the island. Check with the Visitor Information Center for details.

At mile 14 of the Mitkof Highway is the **Blind River Rapids Trail**, **7** a flat, 1/4-mile boardwalk through the muskeg to the Blind River rapids. This is a good spot to view salmon runs. Chinooks spawn in June and July, pinks in July and August, and coho between August and October. Look for Sitka black-tailed deer, bald eagles, moose and black bears during the summer, with evening the best time to look. Birds found in the area include red-breasted sapsuckers, Steller's jays, chickadees,



Sitka black-tailed deer are often seen along the roads of Mitkof Island.

Pacific-slope flycatchers, belted kingfishers and winter wren. In the winter, a few migrating trumpeter swans rest at the rapids, although sightings are more common at the Trumpeter Swan Observatory (see next site). The Blind River Rapids Trail is wheelchair accessible right down to the water.

At mile 16 of the Mitkof Highway is the **Trumpeter Swan Observatory**, **8** located along the waters of Blind Slough. Between mid-October and December, hundreds of trumpeter swans pass through to feed and rest here before resuming their southward migration, and up to 75 swans overwinter here. An enclosed wheelchair accessible viewing shelter allows wildlife watchers to observe the swans without disrupting them, which is critical during migration and the difficult winter months. Bring binoculars or a spotting scope for optimal viewing. This is also a good summertime birding spot; look for mergansers, mallards, geese, and bald eagles.

Twenty-one miles from downtown Petersburg, along the Three Lakes Loop road, is the **Three Lakes Trail**, **9** which leads to Sand, Hill and Crane lakes. Look for moose at any time during the year, and black bears in the summer. Tracks, scat and markings on trees let you know bears or moose are in the area. Beavers are also found here, changing the landscape with their dams and lodges. Sandhill cranes occasionally visit these lakes during their annual spring and fall migrations. This 4 1/2-mile trail is mostly boardwalk planks over gradual terrain, but does have steep sections.

There are additional, sometimes remote, wildlife viewing sites near Petersburg. **The Falls Creek Salmon Ladder** near mile 11 of the Mitkof Highway is a popular salmon viewing site. **USDA Forest Service cabins** dot the area, each providing a unique wildlife viewing experience. Boat charters take visitors to **Thomas Bay**, and guided kayak trips visit **Petersburg Creek** on Kupreanof Island. Check with the Visitor Information Center for information on these sites.

1. Downtown Petersburg		1 - 2 hours
2. Eagle's Roost Park		1 - 2 hours
3. Outlook Park		1 - 2 hours
4. Whale Watching		6 - 8 hours +
5. Leconte Bay		4 - 5 hours
6. Roads Around Mitkof Island		4 hours - full day +
7. Blind River Rapids		1 - 4 hours
8. Trumpeter Swan Observatory		2 - 4 hours
9. Three Lakes Trail		3-4 hours

Wheelchair accessible*	Hiking trails
Entry or tour fee	Guided boat tours
Interpretive signs	Camping in area

* Not all boats are accessible, ask when booking.
+Multi-day trips allow for the richest experience.