



## Valdez: A Wildlife Viewer's Delight

The City of Valdez lies at the head of Port Valdez, a natural fiord that reaches inland about 11 miles from Prince William Sound. Historically—and to this day—the region has been occupied by the Chugach area Alutiiq and Eyak Native people who fished and traded here. Capt. James Cook arrived in 1778, the first European visitor to the sound. The Russian fur trade and, later, copper and gold mining flourished in the area.

A bustling port for military freight during World War II, the town was destroyed in the 1964 earthquake and rebuilt at its present site. In 1973, Congress authorized construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline with Valdez as its southern terminus. In 1989, the Exxon Valdez struck Bligh Reef, causing one of the largest oil spills in North American history.

Today, Valdez is a popular destination for outdoor exploration, fishing, boating and extreme winter sports.

For information on tours and lodging, consult the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau. Visit [www.valdezalaska.org](http://www.valdezalaska.org), call 907-835-2984 or write an email

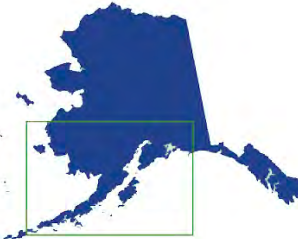
to [info@valdezalaska.org](mailto:info@valdezalaska.org). In Valdez, stop by the visitor center located on the corner of Egan Dr. and Chenega Ave.

# Valdez



## Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail

From the shorebirds of Cordova to the brown bears of Kodiak Island, from the caribou of Cold Bay to the whales of Unalaska, the South Coastal segment of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail highlights dozens of wildlife viewing sites in and around the communities of Cordova, Valdez, Whittier, Kodiak, Sand Point, Chignik, Cold Bay, False Pass and Unalaska. Pick up community brochures along the coastal trail and check for [Alaska's South Coastal Wildlife Viewing Guide](#) in stores and online.



For more information on wildlife viewing across Alaska, visit [www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov](http://www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov).



### Photos

Sea lion cover ©Gerry Sanger • Brown bear w/gulls ©Richard Albright • Eagle & two moose ©Janice Reynolds • Black bear ©Jeannie Kirkland  
All other photos ©ADF&G.

# VALDEZ


# Wildlife Viewing Guide





[www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov](http://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 and try not 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. With whales, avoid causing them to change their behavior; approach no closer than 100 yards.

 **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 tide pools and a wealth of food for birds and mammals.

 **Look for Clues.** Tracks, droppings, trails and twigs tell stories of wildlife: 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 learn.

 **Help Keep Wildlife Wild.** Never feed wild animals. Doing so can cause them to associate people with food, which can cause trouble (it's illegal too). Human food can also make animals 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.



A cow moose and her calf swim to the far shore.



## Wildlife Viewing Fun Facts

**Winter Cheer:** Winter birds provide color, music and cheer to an otherwise white silent landscape, but how do they manage when temperatures dip below freezing? Over 100 species, including redpolls, black-capped chickadees and pine grosbeaks (right), winter in Valdez. Cold weather adaptations include fluffing feathers for additional insulation, shivering to raise their metabolic rate and roosting in large flocks at night to share body heat. These songbirds also have physiological adaptations. Chickadees may overwinter in a state of torpor by lowering their body temperature, thus conserving energy.



**Pups on Ice:** Harbor seals will haul out on rocks or beaches to rest, give birth, nurse and molt their furry coats, but only in Alaska do some also use ice floes calved from tidewater glaciers. Take a spring or summer boat trip to one of many glaciers that flow into Prince William Sound and you will often see them lounging on their floating platforms. The ice haulouts have some advantages over land haulouts. Unlike a beach, which is covered twice daily by the tide, the ice is always available. That means



a seal can spend more time conserving energy while staying safe from its main predator, the killer whale. The haulout also puts the seal closer to its prey of crustaceans, squid, fish and mollusks. And finally, the ice offers the soft light-gray pups a dry, camouflaged nursery during their first few weeks of life.

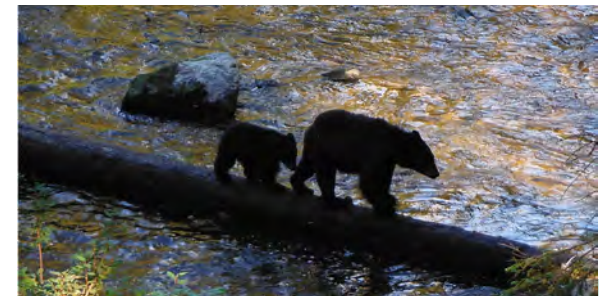
## Traveling Safely in Bear Country

**Make noise** (sing, clap, talk) while you travel to reduce your chances of surprising a bear. Be especially 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-resistant storage.

If you see a bear, **stay calm**. If the bear does not notice you, leave quietly, 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**, you may provoke a chase. Also, if a bear is surprised at close distance, it may feel threatened and act defensively, especially if it has cubs or food.

**If a bear strikes**, play dead or fight back. The choice depends on whether the bear is acting defensively or considering you as prey. For a defensive bear, lie on your front, keep your backpack on, protect your face and neck, and remain still. In the rare instance of a predatory bear, fight back. To learn more, visit [www.alaskabears.alaska.gov](http://www.alaskabears.alaska.gov).



### 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 bring 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](http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/safety).

# Wildlife Viewing Sites



**Dock Point Trail 1** makes a quick, 3/4 mile loop across a narrow peninsula of grassy meadows and spruce forest. Two boardwalks lead to East and West Overlook platforms and offer views of Valdez Bay. Look for the large bald eagle stick nest in the woods along the peninsula's north side. Eagles generally lay two or three eggs, incubate them for 35 days and tend fledglings in the nest another 11 weeks. Black oystercatchers may forage at low tide along with many species of ducks. Songbirds like varied thrush, fox sparrow, yellow warbler and robin arrive in spring to feed on clouds of newly hatched insects. Little brown bats—a mere two inches in length—come out at night to hunt insects. The trailhead is located a quarter mile down Kobuk Drive on the left.

From late April to late May and again in October, great flocks of migrating waterfowl touch down on **Duck Flats 2**. One of the largest salt marshes in Prince William Sound, Duck Flats encompasses about 1,000 acres, of which 460 acres are tidal mudflats. This is a complex, highly productive ecosystem that provides staging habitat for a variety of migrating birds, nesting grounds for ducks and geese, and a nursery for juvenile Dolly Varden and pink and chum salmon fry. Mallards, Canada geese, northern pintails, green-winged teals, harlequin ducks and trumpeter swans dabble in grass and beach rye. Look for red-breasted mergansers diving and Arctic terns hovering overhead before plunging. Great blue heron step languidly through the intertidal zone while small sandpipers run back and forth along water's edge. You may see a river otter fishing or a female black bear and cubs feeding on spring sedges.

The **Crooked Creek Information Site, 3** across Richardson Highway from Duck Flats, is an excellent place to stop for information about wildlife, plants and geologic formations in Prince William Sound and Chugach National Forest. Hike the short path to the waterfall where American dippers nest, or spend time at the viewing platform overlooking a clear water stream where pink and chum return each year to spawn. Black bears sometimes come here to fish.

A 5.5 mile gravel road up **Mineral Creek Valley 4** passes through one of the most scenic areas in Valdez. Mountains tower up to 5,000 feet over the valley with waterfalls cascading down their flanks. From the gate at the end of the road, a short (1.75 miles r/t) trail leads to an old Stamp Mill. The woods harbor Steller's jay, chestnut-backed chickadees, winter wrens, and Townsend's warblers. After the snow flies and migrating birds have left, flocks of chickadees continue to inhabit the forest picking at seeds, and common redpoles hang upside down to glean seeds from tiny cone-like alder fruits. Listen for the chatter of red squirrels. Coyote and red fox prey on hares, voles and shrews. Lynx are also seen in this area and sometimes come into town to hunt feral rabbits.

When salmon are running, you are almost sure to see bears along **Dayville Road. 5** Pink salmon, aka 'humpies,' show up by the millions as early as mid-June, and a dozen or more brown and black bears are frequently seen fishing in streams and tidal pools along the roadside and at Solomon Gulch Hatchery. To keep yourself and the bears safe, please follow these important rules. Do not approach, feed or surprise a bear. If you are driving, do not stop or block the road but look for the nearest pullout and view bears from the safety of your car. (Human injuries are most often caused by female bears acting aggressively to protect their young.) Allison Point, a popular fishing spot, is about five miles in. You may see sea otters, Steller sea lions, black bears, black-legged kittiwakes,



A bald eagle gulps down a fish

glaucous-winged gulls, and other seabirds all vying for the catch of the day. Black-capped Bonaparte's gulls, elusive when nesting, linger near salmon hatcheries to eat salmon eggs and fry. Sea otters wrestle or float on their backs munching on fish. Possible waterbird sightings include several species of loon, red-necked grebes, pigeon guillemots and marbled murrelets. Harlequin ducks spend time year round in front of the hatchery. In June, when the hatchery releases the young salmon fry, Dall porpoises and humpback whales are sometimes

spotted feeding in the area. Pink salmon run from mid- to late June to early August while coho salmon (or silvers) run from mid-July through mid-September. **Solomon Gulch Trail 6** begins across the road from the hatchery.

If you continue east on Richardson Highway past the Dayville Road turnoff, **Low River 7** appears on your right. Sixty to a hundred bald eagles overwinter along the river, look for their white heads in the cottonwoods near the water's edge. Bears and river otters and, on rare occasions, moose may be spotted along the river. Mountain goats are more easily seen in winter once they leave their high mountain perches to search for food at lower elevations. Their long shaggy coats have a yellow tinge against the white snow of the mountainsides.

Across the highway just east of the Dayville Road turnoff, a short gravel road ends at **Robe Lake 8** where you might see seaplanes landing, kayakers paddling and anglers wetting a hook. If you're lucky, you could also see a lynx or a moose. Moose are a relatively rare sight around Valdez but have been seen on the far side



A black bear fishing at Crooked Creek

of the lake. Look for trumpeter swans, red-throated loons, canvasbacks and red-necked grebes navigating the lake's sparkling waters. Sockeye salmon spawn here, tree and fox sparrows and gray-crowned rosy finches inhabit the neighboring woods. American kestrels, small falcons that are gracefully buoyant in flight, have been noted around Robe Lake, as have merlin and several species of woodpeckers.

On the Richardson Highway between Mile 13 and 16, you'll enter **Keystone Canyon, 9** noted for its beautiful waterfalls, numerous scenic trails, white water rafting and a hand cut railway tunnel. Be sure to use the pullouts if you stop. Swans nest in areas before and after Keystone Canyon and may be easily viewed from the highway in small pools along the river. Pack Trail, Goat Trail and Wagon Trail are historic routes with trailheads along the canyon. Stop at the Valdez Visitor Center for trail information.

Nine miles west of Valdez at the head of Shoup Bay is Shoup Glacier, a tidewater glacier easily accessible by boat. You can also hike to the glacier from town. The trailhead is at the end of Egan Dr. and the strenuous, approximately 19 mile round-trip **Shoup Glacier Trail 10** leads to Shoup Bay State Marine Park and offers outstanding views of the glacier. The park has camping and park cabins (reserve ahead). If you make the trip to Shoup Bay, you may see harbor seals, sea otters, harbor and Dall's porpoises, sea lions and peregrine falcons. The bay's "kittiwake rock" with a population of 20,000 breeding birds is a noisy spectacle. In June and July, paddlers may observe adults and chicks if they approach quietly.

Water excursions offering various itineraries are a great way to see the region's wildlife. A wildlife viewing cruise will bring you in close to the glaciers and provide a good look at marine mammals. Local companies also offer guided kayak trips or kayak rentals. Half-day or longer tours to the Columbia Glacier area deliver close-up views of Heather Bay, icebergs, and wildlife from whales, seals and sea lions to many species of seabirds, including red-faced cormorants, pigeon guillemots, surf scoters, and horned and tufted puffins.



1. Dock Point Trail	1 hr*
2. Duck Flats	1 hr
3. Crooked Creek Information Site	1 hr
4. Mineral Creek Valley	0.5hr-6 hrs
5. Dayville Road	0.5 hr-full day

6. Solomon Gulch Trail	2.5 hrs
7. Low River	1 hr
8. Robe Lake	1 hr
9. Keystone Canyon	1hr-full day
10. Shoup Glacier	full day +

— paved road  
- - - gravel road  
- - - - - trail

Map is for locator reference only, not for navigational use.

Hiking Trails

Scenic Views

Interpretive signs

Camping

\* Suggested time at location.