



A young humpback breaches in the waters of Glacier Bay



Nature & Wildlife of Glacier Bay.



In the glassy waters of a fjord, a humpback whale surfaces to breathe. A misty column lingers in the air as a deep, rumbling exhalation echoes across the bay. A raft of sea otters floats nearby.

Meanwhile on a remote shoreline, a brown bear wanders along the beach turning over rocks with huge paws, in search of a salty snack. These are the sights and sounds of Glacier Bay, one of the world's premium places to see wildlife at its best, wild, unfettered and free to roam at will.

At the entrance to Glacier Bay, strong upwellings and swift currents provide ideal feeding conditions for marine life. Gregarious Steller sea lions inhabit these nutrient-rich waters, diving down hundreds of feet to catch herring, mackerel, octopus or squid. When the tide floods in, humpback whales favour this hotspot too, lunging into huge blooms of krill to satisfy their super-size appetites. A myriad of bird species skim, swoop and dive within swirling eddies and along current lines. Common sightings include black-legged kittiwakes, bald eagles, common murrelets, and even hummingbirds. The most iconic to see are the horned and tufted puffins. Typically more of an open water seabird, puffins are rarely seen in protected waters such as these, but the plentiful food supply likely draws them in. They're easy to spot. Look for their bright beaks, rotund bodies and pretty poor flying skills, especially at take-off and landing.

Passing into the more protected waters of the lower Bay, this region is a relatively new home for a thriving population of sea otters. First seen in the bay in 1995, recent counts suggest sea otters now number over 8000 in these waters. As sea otters feed on sea urchins, which left unchecked would overgraze the kelp forests that support this system, the return of sea otters to the lower Bay is a sure sign of a healthy marine environment. Frequently sea otters rest on their backs, so look for a furry head and a view of the back flippers as they float by. However if the otters are entirely absent, keep an eye out for the distinctive dorsal fin of an orca whale. Transient orca are the wolves of the marine system. They feed on sea otters, seals and even sea lions, and as these smaller marine mammal populations thrive, the open waters of the lower Bay offer promising orca feeding grounds.



While rarely seen in other places along Alaska's Inside Passage, moose may be spotted quite frequently along the shorelines at the entrance to Glacier Bay



Tufted puffins can often be seen around the entrance to Glacier Bay



Sea otters have recently returned to the lower waters of Glacier Bay

Cruising further into the bay, as the fjords narrow, up-close views of the shoreline offer the perfect chance to see the park's land-based wildlife. At Gloomy Knob, look out for mountain goats perched on precarious ledges, atop steep shoreline cliffs. Approaching the glaciers, as shoreline vegetation becomes sparse and the beachfront opens up, this is the time to scan the shoreline for bears. While both black and brown bears may be sighted within the park, remote shorelines up-bay are favoured foraging spots for the park's brown bears. Current estimates suggest more than 300 coastal brown bears roam the park. With the exception of mothers with dependent cubs, coastal browns are typically solitary as adults, but any and all bears will head to the water's edge at low tide, to supplement their diet with seafood

such as clams and seaweed. Along these remote beaches there's even a chance to see one of the park's most elusive occupants, the coastal gray wolf. Several packs of wolves range through the park and the wide-open vistas up-bay offer the best conditions for sightings.

Of course, sightings vary day by day, but whether it's a bear on the beach, an eagle perched on a passing iceberg, or just the blow of a whale along a distant shoreline, sightings such as these are the signature of Glacier Bay, written large on the landscape: This is a place that is wild enough for a bear to roam, for a bald eagle to soar, or for a whale to simply cruise by, undisturbed, along a distant shoreline.