

Your Guide to Spotting Wildlife in the Rockies This Spring

The snow has melted, and nature is awakening from its long winter slumber. The Rocky Mountains come alive with activity as wildlife begins to emerge from hibernation or return from their seasonal migrations. If you are a nature enthusiast, there is no better time to visit the Rocky Mountains than in the spring.

Why is Spring an Ideal Time for Wildlife Viewing?

Spring is arguably the best time to catch a glimpse of the incredible wildlife that calls the Canadian Rockies home, especially in places like Canmore, Jasper and Invermere. The chances of spotting wildlife increase dramatically, as the trees haven't fully leafed out and the grasses haven't grown tall yet, and animals can be spotted from the trails or even along the roadside.

What You Can Expect in the Spring

- Black bears and grizzly bears emerge from hibernation and begin foraging near valley trails and roadsides in search of early season food, often with their cubs in tow.
- Elk and deer become more visible and can often be seen grazing in open meadows and along riverbanks. Jasper is famous for its elk population, and spring is calving season.
- Migratory birds return to the region, filling the skies and forests with color and sound. Species like warblers and tanagers thrive and in the wetlands near Invermere, you might spot ospreys, herons, or even a nesting bald eagle.
- Marmots emerge from their burrows and can often be found sunbathing on rocks. Other small mammals like beavers, pikas, and ground squirrels, that are often hidden in other seasons, are active again.

Tips for Successful Wildlife Spotting

- **Go Early or Stay Late**
Dawn and dusk are prime times as wildlife is most active during the cooler parts of the day. These are the best times to catch animals grazing, moving about, or returning to shelter, especially larger mammals.
- **Bring the Right Gear**
Bring binoculars or a camera with a zoom lens to observe animals without disturbing their space. Bring a good field guide or wildlife app to enhance your experience and help you learn to identify species. Wear layers and bring waterproof boots as spring weather can be unpredictable.

- **Stay Quiet and Move Slowly**

Sudden movements and loud noises can scare animals away. The quieter and more still you are, the more likely animals will stay. Be patient and speak softly.

- **Stay on Designated Trails**

Not only is this for your own safety, but to minimize detrimental disturbance and to protect sensitive environments. Find out about trail closures or restrictions from Parks Canada in advance and be prepared to adjust your travel plans, if necessary. If you're wildlife watching from your vehicle, use designated pullouts.

- **Keep your Distance and Be Prepared**

Never approach wildlife. Always remember to respect their space and keep a safe distance. Follow wildlife safety guidelines and never feed animals. Carry bear spray and travel in groups if hiking.

Best Spots in the Rockies for Spring Wildlife Viewing

Canmore and surrounding areas:

- **Policeman's Creek Boardwalk**

Known for birdwatching opportunities. Offers frequent sightings of waterfowl, muskrats, owls, woodpeckers and the occasional deer or fox.

- **Three Sister's Parkway / Spray Lakes Road (Smith-Dorrien Trail)**

Excellent for spotting bighorn sheep, elk and moose. Bears, including both black bears and grizzlies, are known to be active along this route.

- **Bow Valley Provincial Park (near Exshaw/Dead Man's Flats)**

A quieter area known for being a great spot to see bighorn sheep. Other animals, such as grizzly bears, mountain goats, elk and deer can also be spotted.

Jasper and surrounding areas:

- **Maligne Lake Road**

One of Jasper's top spring wildlife corridors. A variety of animals can be seen, including bears, mountain goats, moose, deer, elk and eagles.

- **Pyramid Lake Road and Pyramid Bench Trails**

Home to a variety of wildlife, including elk, deer and bears. Birdlife, including waterfowl, osprey and various songbirds are abundant during spring migration.

- **Highway 16 (East of Jasper toward Miette Hot Springs)**

This road is renowned for black bear sightings as they graze the roadside and known for mountain goats and bighorn sheep clinging to the cliffs.

Invermere and Columbia Valley:

- **Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area**

An ideal location for birdwatching. Known for its diverse avian population, including herons, ospreys, bald eagles, as well as migratory waterfowl such as tundra swans.

- **James Chabot Provincial Park**

A popular destination for bird watching. Other wildlife can also be seen such as deer, moose and beavers.

- **Mount Swansea**

Opportunities to observe diverse wildlife, such as deer, elk, grizzly and black bears, mountain goats, and bighorn sheep. Birds like ospreys, grouse and various waterfowl can be spotted.

Spring in the Rocky Mountains offers a unique and serene opportunity to witness nature in full bloom. With fewer tourists on the roads and trails, it's easier to explore at your own pace, enjoy the scenery, and spot wildlife — making it a quieter and more peaceful experience before the summer crowds arrive. Whether you're strolling the trails of Canmore, road tripping through Jasper, or enjoying the peaceful beauty of Invermere, spring offers a front row seat to one of nature's most exciting seasons.