



2008 Wildlife Observations Summary Report

The Kenai Fjords National Park (KEFJ) Resource Management Team encourages all park staff and visitors to report unusual or otherwise notable wildlife sightings for documentation in the Wildlife Observations database. Opportunistic observations of notable wildlife yield valuable anecdotal data on species occurrence, relative abundance and distribution, and contribute to our overall understanding of the natural history of the park.

Seventy-nine wildlife observation reports (involving 31 species) were received in 2008. All bear observations ($n=31$) are summarized in a separate report (2008 Summary of Brown and Black Bear Activity). We greatly appreciate everyone who took the time to document and contribute their wildlife sightings this year.

Summary:

- Fifty-six observations (71%) were submitted by 23 KEFJ staff and volunteers and 23 observations (29%) were submitted by visitors.
- Fifty-three observations (67%) occurred in the Exit Glacier area and 26 observations (33%) occurred in coastal areas.



Ice worm



Warbler nest observed in Northwestern Fjord

Notable Observations:

Birds

- In August, a juvenile Kittlitz's murrelet was observed in Holgate Arm by USGS researchers researching the decline of this species. This is the first sighting of a juvenile Kittlitz's murrelet in the park since 1980.
- Several species of birds were seen in locations where they are not normally observed. Of special note: great blue heron, black brant, Bonaparte's gull, pink-footed shearwater, Wilson's snipe, golden eagle, and grey-cheeked thrush.
- Several birds' nests were reported along trails in the Exit Glacier area including: common redpoll, hermit thrush, orange-crowned warbler, and Wilson's warbler.
- A fun sighting for the summer was a bald eagle observed swimming in Coleman Bay for approximately 500 feet to the shore. Once on-shore, the large fish in its talons was visible.
- Three glaucous-winged gull carcasses were found on beaches throughout Aialik in August. All appeared to have been killed by a raptor.
- Resource Management and Law Enforcement staff conducted 13 beached bird surveys (COASST) on Bulldog, North Verdant, Pedersen, Northwestern Spit, James, and Yalik Glacier beaches. The only bird carcass encountered was that of a juvenile glaucous-winged gull (apparently killed by a large raptor) at Pedersen beach in August.



Horned Puffin



Willow Ptarmigan (male)

Mammals

- There were seven sightings of wolverines in the Exit Glacier area this summer. Individual wolverines were observed twice on or near the Overlook Loop Trail (Glacier's Edge Trail), three times on the Harding Icefield Trail above Marmot Meadows and the Cliffs, and once on the glacier. On one occasion, three wolverines were observed playing together on a snow patch above Marmot Meadows.
- Wolverine sightings were reported twice from the coast. One was observed along the Nuka River, and another was observed running along the beach, being harassed by two eagles, in front of Bear Glacier.
- Three observations of coyotes were reported. Resource management staff heard coyotes howling in Beauty Bay, one coyote was observed near the Harding Icefield emergency shelter and one was seen in Marmot Meadows.
- A visitor reported a possible lynx crossing the paved trail near the Exit Glacier Nature Center. Although lynx tracks have been observed on three occasions in the past decade, a lynx has not been seen in the park since 1991.
- For the second year in a row, snow shoe hares in the Exit Glacier area were more abundant than in the past.
- During early summer, red-backed voles were frequently seen scurrying across the trails at Exit Glacier. According to veteran employees, the number of voles observed was unusually high.
- A moose cow/calf pair was observed in Beauty Bay. This was the only sighting of a moose on the coast this year.
- Two observations of a dead Stellar sea lion were reported in Aialik Bay. It is possible that the same animal was observed twice.
- One mountain goat carcass was found on the southern beach of Quicksand Cove.

Other

- Millions of ice worms were observed on a snowfield behind the emergency shelter on the Harding Icefield Trail. Yes, they do exist, and during this summer of persistent snow, they were observed in an area usually devoid of snow by mid-summer.
- Thousands of moon jellies were observed in Abra Cove late one evening in August.

Wildlife Observation Summary
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Wolverines bounding across watermelon snow on the Harding Icefield Trail.
Photo by: Charles Bryant