



## Watching Wildlife



With elk bugling in the fall, bighorn sheep lambing in the spring, coyotes howling, beavers building, and eagles soaring, Rocky Mountain National Park is one of America's great places to see wildlife.

Will you be **assured** of seeing bighorn sheep or an elk? Maybe not. But while looking, you might see a coyote or a hawk. That is the adventure of looking for animals in the wild instead of in a zoo.

Get up at dawn to look for elk or deer in Beaver Meadows, Moraine Park, or Horseshoe Park. Listen for owls and watch for bats at dusk in Moraine Park. Keep an eye out for otters along the Colorado River.

***Success in locating wildlife grows with experience.***

### KEEPING ROCKY WILD

Animals visible in the park are often feeding. When people get too close, animals sense danger and waste energy moving away. Repeated disturbance means animals do not get enough to eat. They may even chase people viewing them.

One purpose of National Parks is to preserve wild places and all that live there. With over three million people coming to Rocky each year, park wildlife is under stress. Each of us can help by learning how to watch wildlife without disturbing them.

#### Guides for Successful Wildlife Viewing

- Watch wildlife from a distance. Sit down and create a low profile. If animals notice you, or if they seem nervous, you are too close. Move away quietly.
- Use binoculars or a telephoto lens to get close views.
- Never approach wildlife. Harassing animals is unlawful.
- Keep pets in vehicles. Pets may scare wildlife, and animals can hurt pets. A deer can crush a dog's skull with its hooves. Pets can also introduce diseases such as distemper.
- Drive slowly. Watch for animals crossing the road. Deer and elk are seldom alone: if one animal crosses the road, look out for others that may follow it. Every year numerous animals are killed by autos.
- Stop to watch animals **only** if the vehicle can be pulled off the road safely. Do not block traffic. Please do not park on vegetation.
- Talk quietly so as not to disturb the animals or people nearby. If watching from a car, turn off the motor and headlights.



## FINDING WILDLIFE

**Bighorn sheep** visit natural mineral licks in Horseshoe Park, especially in May and June.

**Moose** live in the Kawuneeche Valley. **Coyotes, deer,** and **elk** feed in all the open meadows. From Trail Ridge Road, look for **elk, marmots,** and **birds** on the tundra.

Elk and deer are most active at dawn and dusk. Bighorn sheep and moose, however, are active all day as are marmots, squirrels, and chipmunks. Birds are easier to find in early mornings. Beavers work mostly at night.

Ask a ranger about how to find animals. Check the park newspaper for ranger programs that focus on wildlife.

Please report any unusual wildlife sightings, including otter sightings, to visitor centers.



## CLOSED AREAS PROTECT WILDLIFE

To protect wildlife at critical times, parts of the park are sometimes closed to people.

Walking in the meadows in portions of Horseshoe Park and stopping or parking vehicles within the Bighorn Crossing Zone are prohibited from May to late August. This allows bighorn sheep to visit natural mineral licks in the area.

The Crater Trail on Specimen Mountain is closed from May through mid-July during bighorn lambing season. This lets sheep move freely from the lambing area to feeding grounds elsewhere.

During the elk rut in September and October, most large meadows in the park are closed to off-trail travel from 5 pm until 7 am. With people out of the meadows, the elk spend more time in the open where people can see them from the roadsides.

While birds of prey are nesting (mid-April to mid-July), some rock climbing routes are closed on Lumpy Ridge and Sheep Mountain. Closed areas are posted at trailheads.

## MORE THAN MEGA-FAUNA

There is more to wildlife watching than the big and the furry. Watch magpies in a meadow pouncing on grasshoppers. Stop by a stream to study a trout's sleek style. Look closely at wildflowers to discover the butterflies, longhorn beetles and leafhoppers that live around plants. Exploring with a hand lens can open up a dramatic world of small lives.

Listen for wild **sounds**. Marmots whistle and hummingbirds trill by day. By starlight, owls and coyotes hoot and bay.

What is the **best** way to see wildlife at Rocky? Just pick a spot—say, in a meadow or near a stream—and sit quietly. Soon animals nearby will become active again. Meanwhile, as John Muir said, *Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees...while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.*

### Why is it illegal to feed animals in National Parks?

- Animals fed by people become beggars. Beggar animals often stay near roads, where cars hit them.
- Animals can bite, kick, or gore you, causing serious injury.
- Wildlife carry diseases such as rabies or bubonic plague, which can be transmitted to humans.
- Wildlife can become dependent on human food, lose the ability to hunt, and possibly die. Imagine: One peanut from each park visitor would add over three tons of extra food per year. Some animals would overpopulate, crowding out other wildlife. Then many of the extra animals would die in winter when no one feeds them.

