

Tips for viewing

This guide will help you find some of the best places for viewing wildlife in the Skeena Region. Follow some of the viewing tips below to increase your chances of seeing wildlife during your travels through the region.

- **Check the season** - most sites have a time of year when more birds or animals may be seen
- **Time of day is important** - early morning and evening are often good times
- **Use cover, move slowly and be quiet** to avoid startling wildlife and improve your viewing success
- **Be patient** - many animals will observe their surroundings for long periods before moving
- **Look for signs** - many animals leave tracks, droppings, nests, sleeping beds and dens if you look carefully
- **Field Guides** - provide clues to help you find and identify wildlife. Guides often include descriptions of habitat where wildlife can be found
- **Binoculars and spotting scopes** - help you view wildlife and other scenery. They allow you to effectively search larger areas

Staying Safe

Wild animals are often unpredictable; follow the tips below to stay safe.

- **Keep your distance** - many wild animals can be dangerous, respect their space
- **Stay alert** - many incidents between people and wildlife occur when they meet by accident, be particularly careful when viewing spawning fish as both Black and Grizzly Bears are often found nearby
- **Caution around young wildlife** - mothers are often very protective and can be quite aggressive, especially bears and moose



Common Loon, Tyhee Lake (D.K. Harris)



Sitka Deer, Queen Charlotte Islands (D. Horwood)

Responsible viewing

We all have a responsibility to minimize the effects we have on wildlife and their habitat. Please follow the guidelines below.

- **Keep vehicles on roads** - off-road traffic damages vegetation, causes soil erosion, disturbs wildlife and may reduce habitat usefulness for wildlife
- **Stay on trails** - many animals experience less stress and can better adapt when human use is predictable, for example when hikers stay on trails
- **Don't approach or chase animals** - unnecessary movement uses energy that may be needed for their survival
- **Use binoculars** - by staying farther away you can reduce stress on wildlife
- **Control pets** - to avoid wildlife harassment and to give you better viewing opportunities
- **Respect others** - ask owners if you wish to cross private property and leave other viewers the space and quiet they want
- **Leave the environment unchanged** - take your garbage out
- **Don't feed or touch animals** - feeding can create an unhealthy reliance on people, touching young animals may cause mothers to abandon them
- **Report environmental abuse** - We are all responsible for the environment. Report environmental or wildlife abuse to any Conservation Officer. Please record the location, date, time, vehicle description and license plate number of the offender.

The Skeena Region

The Northwest part of British Columbia is known as the Skeena Region. It is a mountainous landscape, broken by large plateaus, hundreds of lakes and several of the province's largest rivers including the Skeena, the Nass and the Stikine. On the coast, dense rain forests border long fiords surrounded by steep sided granite peaks. Off the coast, there is a sea of islands, including the Queen Charlotte Islands west of Prince Rupert.

The most heavily traveled routes in the region are the Yellowhead Highway (Highway 16), running from east to west, and Highway 37, connecting the area with the Yukon. This guide is arranged to help you find opportunities to view wildlife as you travel these highways. Several marine sites with excellent viewing opportunities are also included for those who come to the area to fish and boat on the ocean.

Fraser Lake to Houston

Traveling west along Highway 16 you enter the Skeena Region just west of Fraser Lake. From here until you reach Houston, you are crossing the Nechako Plateau, a hilly landscape with small mountains, rock outcrops and hundreds of small lakes and wetlands. The forests are mixed lodgepole pine, spruce and aspen. Drier south-facing slopes often have grassy openings. During spring and early summer, the lakes and wetlands are ideal places to observe migrating and nesting waterfowl. These wetlands are also excellent Moose habitat from spring to fall. During the winter months, the open south-facing slopes are important habitat for Moose and Mule Deer and they can often be seen browsing at dawn or dusk.

- 1 **Stellako River** - This 10 km river between Francois and Fraser Lakes is accessible at both ends by paved road. In early summer, Cliff Swallows build mud nests under the highway bridge. In August and September, Sockeye Salmon swim up-river. From November to April this ice-free river is used by over-wintering Trumpeter Swans.



Trumpeter Swans, Francois Lake (D.K. Harris)

Wildlife of the Skeena Region

2 Fulton River Spawning Channel - Drive 35 km north of Topley on a paved road and look for the spawning channel just after you cross the Fulton River Bridge. From mid to late September hundreds of thousands of spawning Sockeye Salmon fill the river and spawning channel. A fish counting fence improves viewing opportunities and interpretive signs can be found along the riverbank. Keep an eye out for Osprey, Bald Eagles and Black Bears attracted by the salmon carcasses. Similar viewing opportunities are found at the Pinkut Creek Spawning Channel north of Burns Lake.

3 Morice Mountain - Just west of Houston turn south on the Morice River Forest Road and follow this good gravel road for 17 km to the Aspen Forest Recreation Site. Use your binoculars to spot Mountain Goats on the rocky cliffs that can be seen east of the forest road.

8 Deep Creek Hatchery - To find the hatchery, drive 7 km north of Terrace on the Kalum Lake Road. Facilities at the site include walking trails, rearing ponds, and a viewing bridge across Deep Creek. Natural spawning takes place in Deep Creek and you may see Spawning Steelhead as well as Pink, Coho and Chinook Salmon in the creek at various times from March to October. Hatchery tours may be booked in the spring months.

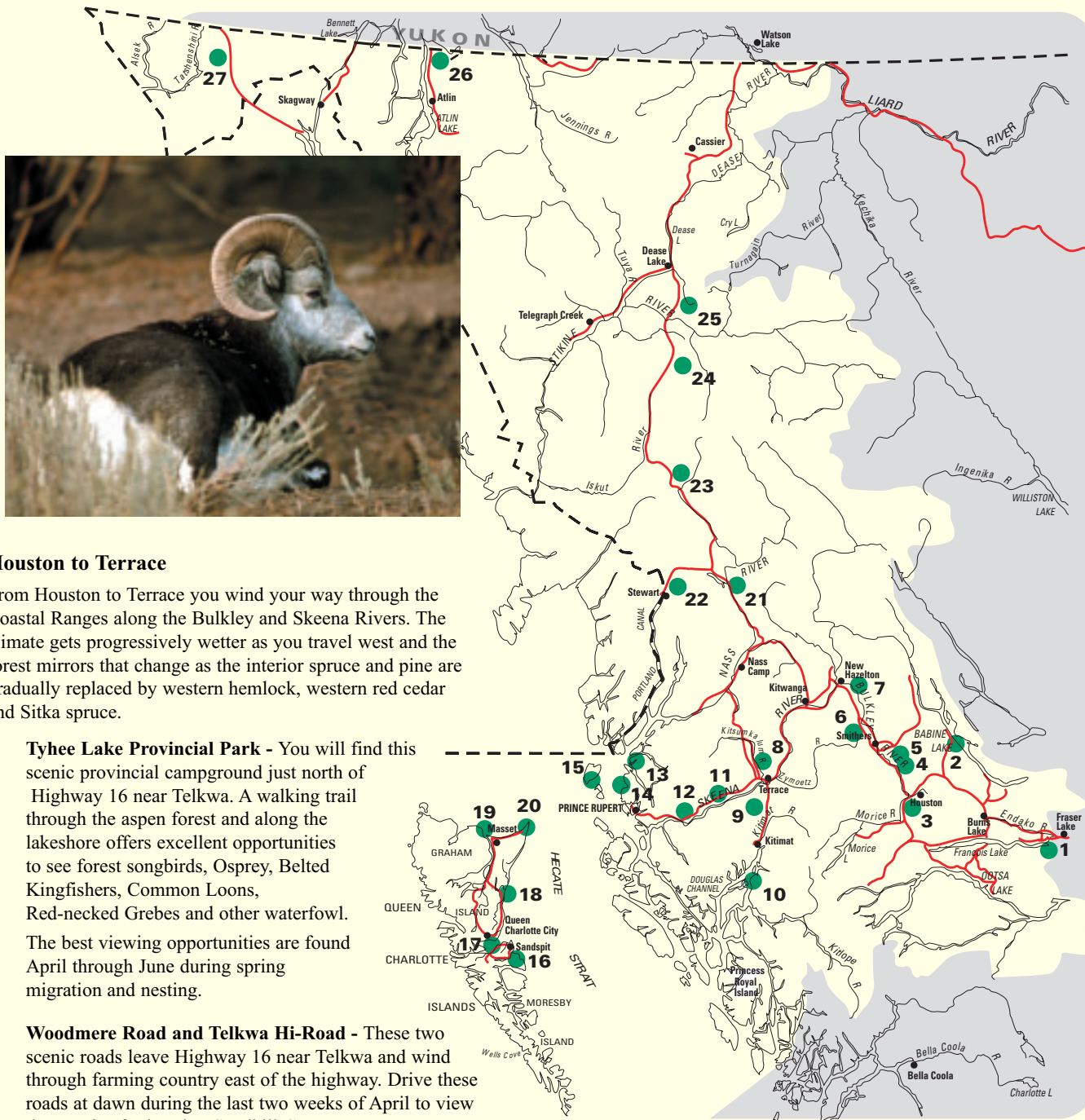


Terrace to Prince Rupert

Highway 16 follows the banks of the Skeena River for most of its route to Prince Rupert at the foot of the massive granite domes of the Coast Range. The dense temperate rainforest is broken by huge avalanche slopes and dozens of waterfalls.

11 Exchamsiks Provincial Park - This park is just off Highway 16 on the banks of the Exchamsiks River, 37 km west of Terrace. Here you can use binoculars to spot Mountain Goats on the cliffs south of the Skeena River. The best viewing is April through August.

12 Skeena River - The best wildlife viewing is found downstream from the Kasiks River. The spring Eulachon run and summer salmon runs are followed upriver by Harbour Seals, Northern Sea Lions, Bald Eagles and five species of gulls. The Eulachon run occurs mid March to mid April and salmon runs occur mid July to early September. The mouths of major tributary rivers and mud banks exposed at low tide are very good places to see shorebirds and waterfowl year round. From November through April, Trumpeter Swans over-winter in several of the back channels seen near the highway.



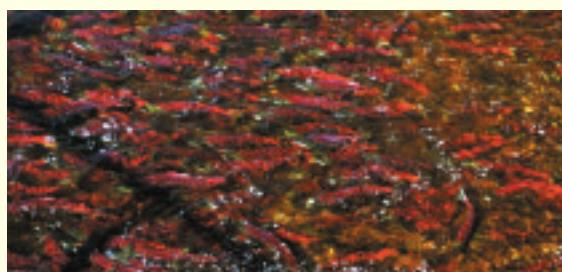
Houston to Terrace

From Houston to Terrace you wind your way through the Coastal Ranges along the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers. The climate gets progressively wetter as you travel west and the forest mirrors that change as the interior spruce and pine are gradually replaced by western hemlock, western red cedar and Sitka spruce.

4 Tyhee Lake Provincial Park - You will find this scenic provincial campground just north of Highway 16 near Telkwa. A walking trail through the aspen forest and along the lakeshore offers excellent opportunities to see forest songbirds, Osprey, Belted Kingfishers, Common Loons, Red-necked Grebes and other waterfowl. The best viewing opportunities are found April through June during spring migration and nesting.

5 Woodmere Road and Telkwa Hi-Road - These two scenic roads leave Highway 16 near Telkwa and wind through farming country east of the highway. Drive these roads at dawn during the last two weeks of April to view thousands of migrating Sandhill Cranes.

6 Toboggan Lake - This small, marshy lake is found 11 km northwest of Smithers in full view of Highway 16. During spring and fall migrations, large flocks of waterfowl rest here. From May through July you will see nesting Canada Geese and Red-necked Grebes as well as other waterfowl. Care is required as no parking is available on Highway 16.



7 Ross Lake Provincial Park - You will find this scenic park southeast of Hazelton, at the end of a short, well maintained, gravel road just off Highway 16. A five km trail around the lake provides excellent bird watching opportunities. The spring migration starts in April and peaks in May. During this time you may see large numbers of Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Red-necked Grebes, Lesser Scaups and Long-tailed Ducks. In May and June common nesting birds include Red-winged Blackbirds, Ring-necked Ducks, Common Loons, Redstarts and numerous warbler species.

9 Lakelse Lake Provincial Park - The park is nestled in the rain forest on the shores of Lakelele Lake, 17 km south of Terrace on Highway 37. Hiking trails and good access to the lakeshore provide very good bird watching opportunities. The peak migration and nesting period is April through June. Look for ten or more species of waterfowl, at least six species of hawks and numerous forest songbirds. Great Blue Herons are often seen spring through fall and Trumpeter Swans over-winter November to March.



10 Coste Rocks - These barren rocky islets are about 29 km southwest of Kitimat near the north end of Devastation Channel. Harbour Seals use them as a pull out and are often seen here from April through September. Boat access only.



Chatham Sound off Prince Rupert attracts a wide variety of sea mammals, waterfowl, shorebirds and seabirds because of large variations in the tide, complex shorelines, herring spawning and high populations of salmon. This is especially true in the spring and early summer when the salmon are schooling prior to migrating up the Nass and Skeena Rivers. However, the best locations, including those listed below, are only accessible by boat.

13 Mouth of Work Channel - Boats may be launched in Prince Rupert or in the more protected waters at the head of the channel. The mouth of the channel provides good fishing and an excellent place to observe feeding Humpback Whales from June to August.

14 Big Bay - This wide bay is found northwest of Prince Rupert on the Tsimpsian Peninsula, between Metlakatla and Port Simpson. It has extensive tidal mudflats with eelgrass and is an internationally significant resting area for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Peak use is in April and May and again in the fall.

15 Melville and Dundas Island Group - Five large islands and hundreds of smaller islets form this island group northwest of Prince Rupert. Northern Sea Lions may be seen over the summer months hauled out on rocky islets. Elusive Grey Wolves on these islands have learned to subsist on a diet high in salmon, clams and sand fleas.



The Queen Charlotte Islands

This island archipelago, also known as Haida Gwaii, features some of the most spectacular rainforests in BC, amazing beaches and likely the best variety of wildlife viewing opportunities in the region.

Over 100 smaller islands support seabird colonies. These are susceptible to human disturbance; many are ecological reserves and require a permit to visit.

The Queen Charlotte Islands have some of the best bird watching sites in Canada with over 250 species recorded.

16 Sandspit shoreline - Local beaches host large flocks of over-wintering Pacific Loons and Brant from November to May. Many species of shorebirds are found along these same shorelines during spring migration, which peaks in May and June.

- 17 Skidegate Inlet** - The inlet is an excellent place to spot migrating and feeding Grey Whales in April and May. You can also look for a wide variety of migrating waterfowl and seabirds from April through June.
- 18 Queen Charlotte Island Highway** - Look for a race of very small Black-tailed Deer called Sitka Deer that may be seen at dawn and dusk feeding along the grassy clearings on either side of the highway.
- 19 Delkatla Wildlife Refuge** - Here, you will find a tidal lagoon with trails and viewing platforms that enhance wildlife viewing all year round. Over 130 species of birds have been recorded here including Sandhill Cranes, Least Sandpipers, Great Blue Herons, Common Snipe, shorebirds and waterfowl. Best mid March through May.

- 20 North Beach** - Drive 25 km east of Masset on a mainly gravel road to find North Beach in Naikoon Provincial Park. This 14 km hard sand beach provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities year round. You are likely to see several species of Shearwaters and numerous other seabirds. Beach combing can be good after storms. Remember to check the tide tables to pick the best time to travel on the beach.

Highway 37 leaves Highway 16 at Kitwanga and winds north through forested valleys, often alongside wilderness rivers and lakes. The climate becomes drier and colder as you travel north. Most of the route is wilderness with small outposts of civilization widely spaced along the way. Marshy lakes and wetlands near the road are good places to spot nesting waterfowl and Moose feeding on aquatic vegetation.

- 21 Meziadin Fish Ladder** - Take the first left turn north of the Nass River Bridge (approximately 16 km south of Meziadin Junction) and follow the road until you reach the parking lot near the river. From July to mid September you will often see Sockeye and Chinook Salmon jumping to reach the fish ladder. Be aware, both Black and Grizzly Bears are found in the area.

- 22 Bear River Estuary** - The Bear River enters the Portland Canal near Stewart. A new boardwalk along the estuary provides viewing of Bald Eagles, waterfowl and shorebirds. The viewing season extends from April through July but is best in April and May.

- 23 Ningunsaw Pass** - Highway 37 winds through this narrow pass north of the Bell-Irving River. Look for wildlife on the many avalanche slopes, particularly Grizzly Bears foraging for the first green vegetation in May as the snow melts. If you do sight bears, stay close to your vehicle to avoid danger.

- 24 Todagin Mountain** - Look for opportunities to pull off Highway 37 near the north end of Kinaskin Lake. Then use your binoculars to look for Stone's Sheep on the open mountain slopes east of the highway. The best viewing is in July and August.

- 25 Gnat Pass** - This pass just north of the Stikine River is low and marshy with a number of small lakes. Look for Woodland Caribou in May, nesting waterfowl over the early summer and Moose in the wetlands around lakes from spring to fall.

- 26 Black Mountain** - The mountain is just south of the Yukon boundary on the road to Atlin. Stone's Sheep can often be seen very close to the road from July to September.



North Beach, Naikoon Provincial Park (D.K. Harris)

- 27 Haines Road** - Travelers use this road to cross the very northwest corner of BC between Haines Junction in the Yukon and Haines in Alaska. Much of the road traverses alpine tundra, which aids in sighting wildlife. Dall Sheep and Golden Eagles may be seen in the Blanchard Creek area just south of the BC/Yukon border. Willow, Rock and White-tailed Ptarmigan are all found here as well as numerous other bird species including Gyrfalcon and Snow Buntings. Grizzly Bear may be seen from spring through fall, while Moose are more often seen during the summer months.



Wildlife Viewing

In the Skeena Region



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