

A YEAR OF WATCHING WILDLIFE

A GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S BEST ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

01.

02.

03.



04.

05.


06.

DAVID LUKAS

MELBOURNE | LONDON | OAKLAND

 **WILDLIFE WATCHING MAP** 6

 **TOP LOCATIONS** 8

 **JANUARY**

WEEK.01
Keoladeo Ghana National Park (India) 18
Marine Iguanas (Galápagos Islands) 20
Harpy Eagles (Panama) 21
Bats & Swiftlets (Philippines) 21

WEEK.02
Yellowstone National Park (USA) 22
Jellyfish Lake (Palau) 24
James' Flamingos (Bolivia) 25
Chameleons (Madagascar) 25

WEEK.03
Asa Wright Nature Centre (Trinidad) 26
Red-Crowned Cranes (Japan) 28
Little Bent-Wing Bats (Australia) 29
Coatis (USA) 29

WEEK.04
Banc D'Arguin National Park (Mauritania) 30
Boa Constrictors (Costa Rica) 32
Kea (New Zealand) 33
Bactrian Camels (China) 33

 **FEBRUARY**

WEEK.01
Gunung Leuser National Park (Indonesia) 34
Cheetahs (Tanzania) 36
Reef Sharks (Marshall Islands) 37
Red-Billed Queleas (South Africa) 37

WEEK.02
Everglades National Park (USA) 38
Adélie Penguins (Antarctica) 40
Gelada Baboons (Ethiopia) 41
Platypuses (Australia) 41

WEEK.03
Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (Africa) 42
Monarch Butterflies (Mexico) 44
Grey Whales (Baja California) 45
Dholes (India) 45

WEEK.04
Raja Ampat Islands (Indonesia) 46
Steller's Sea Eagles (Japan) 48
Pink River Dolphins (Peru) 49
Tasmanian Devils (Australia) 49

 **MARCH**

WEEK.01
Ciénaga de Zapata National Park (Cuba) 50
Harp Seals (Canada) 52
Resplendent Quetzals (Costa Rica) 53
Blue Whales (Chile) 53

WEEK.02
Danum Valley Conservation Area (Malaysian Borneo) 54
Sandhill Cranes (USA) 56
Reef Fish & Dancing Scallops (Mozambique) 57
Leatherback Turtles (Trinidad) 57

WEEK.03
Anavilhanas Archipelago (Brazil) 58
Killer Whales (Argentina) 60
Uganda Kob (Uganda) 61
Great Bustards (Spain) 61

WEEK.04
Ningaloo Marine Park (Australia) 62
Meerkats (South Africa) 64
Gharials (Nepal) 65
Flying Foxes (Australia) 65

 **APRIL**

WEEK.01
Sinharaja National Park (Sri Lanka) 66
Sea Otters (USA) 68
Horned Guans (Mexico) 69
Spectral Tarsiers (Indonesia) 69

WEEK.02
Belize 70
Chimpanzees (Uganda) 72
Andean Condors (Peru) 73
Red Squirrels (Scotland) 73

WEEK.03
Bialowieza National Park (Poland) 74
Suberb Lyrebirds (Australia) 76
Giant Pandas (China) 77
Coquis (Puerto Rico) 77

WEEK.04
High Island (USA) 78
Pacific Herring Spawn (USA) 80
Gila Monsters (USA) 81
Sooty Terns (Seychelles) 81

 **MAY**

WEEK.01
Bhutan 82
Red-Sided Garter Snakes (Canada) 84

Giraffes (Zambia) 85
Orange Fruit Doves (Fiji) 85

WEEK.02
Galápagos Islands (Ecuador) 86
Eurasian Otters (England) 88
Oilbirds (Venezuela) 89
American Bison (USA) 89

WEEK.03
Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve (Kazakhstan) 90
Komodo Dragons (Indonesia) 92
Californian Condors (USA) 93
Queensland Groupers (Australia) 93

WEEK.04
Birdwatching (Finland) 94
Horseshoe Crabs (USA) 96
Black Howler Monkeys (Belize) 97
Aldabra Tortoises (Seychelles) 97

 **JUNE**

WEEK.01
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (USA) 98
Hippopotamuses (Gabon) 100
Red Pandas (China) 101
Long-Tailed Mayflies (Hungary) 101

WEEK.02
Sardine Run (South Africa) 102
Barren Ground Caribou (Canada) 104
Caucasus Black Grouse (Turkey) 105
Fireflies (USA) 105

WEEK.03
North Atlantic Seabirds (Great Britain) 106
Night Drives (South Africa) 108
Mountain Goats (Canada) 109
Magpie-Geese (Australia) 109

WEEK.04
Wildebeest Migration (Tanzania & Kenya) 110
Pacific Walrus (USA) 112
Maned Wolves (Brazil) 113
Golden Rays (Mexico) 113

 **JULY**

WEEK.01
Kavkazskiy Nature Reserve (Russia) 114
Humpback Whales (Canada) 116
Little Auks (Greenland) 117
Ladybird Beetles (USA) 117

WEEK.02
Wrangel Island Reserve (Russia) 118
Brown Bears (USA) 120



Hummingbirds (Ecuador)	121
Great White Sharks (South Africa)	121

WEEK.03

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (Uganda)	122
Belugas (Canada)	124
Yunnan Snub-Nosed Monkeys (China)	125
Short-Tailed Shearwaters (USA)	125

WEEK.04

Pantanal National Park (Brazil)	126
Wolverines (Finland)	128
Basking Sharks (England)	129
Birds of Paradise (Papua New Guinea)	129

☞ AUGUST

WEEK.01

Air & Ténéré Natural Reserves (Niger)	130
Mexican Free-Tailed Bats (USA)	132
Coconut Crabs (Australia)	133
Carmine Bee-Eaters (Botswana)	133

WEEK.02

Kronotsky Nature Reserve (Russia)	134
Leopards (Sri Lanka)	136
Jersey Tiger Moths (Greece)	137
Humpback Whales (Tonga)	137

WEEK.03

Cape Clear Island (Ireland)	138
Indian Wild Asses (India)	140
Atlantic Puffins (Iceland)	141
Spawning Coral Reefs (Caribbean)	141

WEEK.04

Taman Negara National Park (Malaysia)	142
Hippopotamuses (Tanzania)	144
White Storks (Bulgaria)	145
Killer Whales (Canada)	145

☞ SEPTEMBER

WEEK.01

Chang Tang Nature Reserve (Tibet, China)	146
African Elephants (Botswana)	148
Manta Rays (Maldives)	149
Wallace's Standard-Wings (Indonesia)	149

WEEK.02

Shark Bay World Heritage Site (Australia)	150
Elk (USA)	152
Wrinkle-Lipped bats (Malaysian Borneo)	153
African Wild Dogs (Botswana)	153

WEEK.03

Lapland (Northern Europe)	154
Giant Anteaters (Brazil)	156
Mandrills (Gabon)	157
Waterfowl Migration (Estonia)	157

WEEK.04

Manu National Park (Peru)	158
Hawk Hill (USA)	160
Spotted Hyenas (Ethiopia)	161
Cave of the Sleeping Sharks (Mexico)	161

☞ OCTOBER

WEEK.01

Falkland Islands (South Atlantic Ocean)	162
White Rhinoceroses (South Africa)	164
Demoiselle Cranes (Nepal)	165
Olive Ridley Turtles (Costa Rica)	165

WEEK.02

Ngorongoro Crater (Tanzania)	166
River of Raptors (Mexico)	168
Augrabies Flat Lizards (South Africa)	169
Cave Glow-Worms (New Zealand)	169

WEEK.03

Madagascar	170
Red Deer (Scotland)	172
Giant River Turtles (Brazil)	173
African Buffalo (Kenya)	173

WEEK.04

Kakadu National Park (Australia)	174
Polar Bears (Canada)	176
Spiny Lobsters (USA)	177
Quokkas (Australia)	177

☞ NOVEMBER

WEEK.01

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Australia)	178
Bald Eagles (USA)	180
Bioluminescent Bay (Puerto Rico)	181
Siberian Ibexes (Kazakhstan)	181

WEEK.02

Namibia	182
Jaguars (Brazil)	184
Grey Seals (England)	185
Kagus (New Caledonia)	185

WEEK.03

Kaziranga National Park (India)	186
Red Crabs (Australia)	188
Straw-Coloured Fruit Bats (Zambia)	189
Golden Lion Tamarins (Brazil)	189

WEEK.04

South Georgia Island (South Atlantic Ocean)	190
Bighorn Sheep (USA)	192
Goliath Bullfrogs (Equatorial Guinea)	193
Barn Swallows (South Africa)	193

☞ DECEMBER

WEEK.01

Kangaroo Island (Australia)	194
Lesser Flamingos (Kenya)	196
Scalloped Hammerheads (Costa Rica)	197
Proboscis Monkeys (Malaysian Borneo)	197

WEEK.02

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Congo)	198
Elephant Seals (USA)	200
Great Dusky Swifts (Argentina)	201
Flying Lizards (Malaysian Borneo)	201

WEEK.03

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (USA)	202
Birdwatching (Panama)	204
Markhor Antelopes (Pakistan)	205
Warthogs (Kenya)	205

WEEK.04

Corcovado National Park (Costa Rica)	206
Snow Monkeys (Japan)	208
Kafue Lechwe (Zambia)	209
Morning Flyout (Guatemala)	209

☞ WILDLIFE VOLUNTEERING

210

☞ INDEX

214

Whether you encounter a pride of lions exploding out of the African bush to chase a wildebeest, or find yourself wandering amid a colony of 250,000 penguins on the coast of Antarctica, wildlife-watching is one of the most exciting reasons to travel.

This is a great moment in history to go on a wildlife expedition. Never before have there been more wildlife destinations opening up or as many people travelling in search of wildlife, and in response many countries are developing new access points, accommodation and tours

SEEING THE SPLENDOUR OF NATURE

in areas that were previously difficult to reach. Even better, in response to the growing threats to the earth's ecosystems, many countries are setting aside vast swathes of wilderness faster than they can be explored or documented, providing travellers with numerous opportunities to venture into brand-new national parks or nature reserves that are practically unheard-of and see almost no visitors.

Here, then, are our choices for the world's top wildlife-watching events and destinations as a guide for travellers in search of wildlife. These range from mind-boggling displays of abundance such as the powerful image of 30 million seabirds on South Georgia Island, to subtle displays of remarkable behaviour by a single animal such as the utterly charming spectral tarsier of Sulawesi. Included in this book are trips to see giant colonies of fruit bats, to swim with migrating rays, to seek out untouched tropical islands, and to wander into vast mountain ranges in search of snow leopards.

These events and destinations are arranged chronologically, week-by-week through the year, with four weeks per month. Each week leads off with a profiled destination that offers some of the best, and most unexpected, wildlife gatherings in the world. The profile destination is followed by three special feature animals from other sites around the world.

Obviously, animal behaviours and events don't always fit neatly into a weekly calendar (though a few events are remarkably predictable), so in these cases every attempt has been made to suggest an ideal time to plan your journeys based on weather, best conditions for



travelling, and peak windows of opportunity for trying to catch an animal's behaviour. Each event is also given a difficulty ranking. Because of the explosion in traveller-oriented services and guided tours, very few events received a 'hard' ranking, though if you wanted to arrange your own expeditions instead of joining a tour, many 'easy' or 'medium' sites could become much harder to access.

What you have here is a chronological catalogue, or a wish-book, of amazing places to go and intriguing animals to see. These are places and animals to dream about, to tell your friends about, and to inspire you to come up with your own future travel plans. You will come away with both a renewed sense of the shimmering splendour of nature, and an awareness of the ways in which the growing crush of humanity is deeply impacting wild places and wild animals all over the world. We hope that your travels inspire you to get involved and to tell others about what you've learned.



TOP LOCATIONS

↗ OCEANS

THE MASSIVE BODY OF SALTY WATER THAT COVERS 70% OF THE PLANET'S SURFACE IS ONE OF EARTH'S GREATEST DEFINING FEATURES AND ALSO ONE OF ITS MOST SIGNIFICANT HABITATS. Fortunately for wildlife-watchers, the ocean's many spectacular animals are mainly concentrated along shorelines where upwellings of nutrient-rich waters feed phenomenally productive food chains that include seabird colonies with millions of birds and sardine runs that number in the billions. The most active periods for wildlife generally occur during summer, when the sun's rays are at their peak and fuel massive plankton blooms. During these times, the abundance of food attracts predators big and small, from 12,000kg whale sharks eating tiny krill to 2000kg great white sharks slamming into helpless seals.

The sheer number of animals and open habitats along the ocean's edge makes for some dramatic viewing. Here you can watch birds and seals breeding in noisy colonies on precarious cliff ledges or isolated beaches; you can watch animals lunge, dive and chase after food; and you can witness the sheer exuberance of life in its fullest abundance. You might find yourself snorkelling in a tropical paradise among colourful reef fish or clinging desperately to a ship's railing as it sails between icebergs with albatross hovering effortlessly off the bow. Many such adventures await you in your year of watching wildlife, but we've covered five of the very best choices opposite.



TOP LOCATIONS

➤ RAINFORESTS

RAINFORESTS ARE THE RICHEST AND MOST COMPLEX ECOSYSTEMS ON EARTH. With hundreds of thousands of plant species found on every square kilometre, there are countless niches for impossibly diverse ecological webs. But what the visitor notices most is the profusion of life, from screaming and squawking birds hidden in the dense foliage to the ceaseless hum of insects buzzing all around. These are places of mystery, where animals dart furtively among the shadows, where you lose all sense of direction and time, and where any animal you see might be unknown to science.

Located in tropical zones near the equator, rainforests escaped the ravages of the Ice Ages and in some areas have remained unchanged for millions of years, serving as natural laboratories for the evolution of many unique species. Despite their status as some of the world's most ancient and stable habitats, rainforests are also remarkably fragile. We have learned only recently that rainforests dry out and burn easily in a changing climate, and that once cleared they may never grow back. Sadly, our world's diverse and highly evolved rainforests are being cleared at a phenomenal rate, sometimes for exploding human populations but sometimes for pure greed and profit. You can almost forget this legacy when you stand amidst the splendour of a pristine rainforest, but one of the great questions of our time is how we'll protect these areas from extinction.



TOP LOCATIONS



DESERTS & GRASSLANDS

AT THE OTHER END OF THE SCALE FROM RAINFORESTS WE FIND THE CLEAN LINES AND OPEN SPACES OF THE WORLD'S DESERTS AND GRASSLANDS. For anyone who thinks these places are barren and bereft of wildlife, we offer up the following top five picks to change your mind. Admittedly, life in these habitats is a little different because there are few hiding places, and food and water may be in scarce supply, but animals have somehow found unique solutions to these dilemmas, resulting in some remarkable adaptations and lifestyles. In some cases the animals that have solved these problems occur in great numbers; in other cases they are spread thinly across great distances.

One of the joys of visiting these deserts and grasslands is to encounter the sheer openness and lack of human interference in such enormous spaces. Almost without exception, you may pretty much have these places to yourself, which can be immensely satisfying or completely terrifying. Sit quietly here and let your imagination run to the horizon. You may not see large numbers of animals, but every sighting will be as sharply etched in your memory as the lines of shade and sunlight. If you arrive during the brief rainy season you may see a landscape transformed with an abundance you can scarcely comprehend.



TOP LOCATIONS

➤ MOUNTAINS

BY THEIR VERY NATURE, MOUNTAINS ARE RUGGED, HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS THAT HUMANS ONLY RARELY VENTURE INTO. Although they lack the huge numbers of animals that other great habitats attract, the premier mountain ranges of the world have maintained their wild character and continue to safeguard relatively intact wildlife populations. Even in this day and age, it is amazing that there are still mountain ranges that are scarcely known and almost never visited by travellers, despite their stunning mix of jagged mountain peaks, snow fields, lush alpine meadows and crashing streams. You might also stumble across traditional mountain villages where the way of life hasn't changed in centuries and the people are as friendly as ever.

Don't limit yourself to thinking about visiting mountains in certain seasons, because they offer something worth seeing at any time of year. Winters can be cold and brutal but these conditions may also drive hard-to-find wildlife onto lower slopes where they're easier to view. Springtime and early summer in the mountains is a sheer delight, with babbling brooks and fields of flowers. And autumn almost always brings stunning autumn colours. In temperate zones, mountains are also the last hideouts for rare large carnivores such as bears, wolves and big cats, although it takes patience and hard work to track them down.



TOP LOCATIONS

ISLANDS

ISLANDS ARE WORLDS UNTO THEMSELVES. Because they have been isolated from the continents for long periods of time, some strange things happen on them: populations can multiply in out-of-whack ways (such as the 120 million red crabs on Christmas Island); unusual creatures might evolve; or an island can become a beacon for huge numbers of animals living over the adjacent ocean. Sometimes animals evolved into pygmy forms or they developed into giants of their family. On islands with no predators, birds became flightless and animals lost their ability to protect themselves. Many of these unique island environments were lost forever when humans arrived and brought along predatory rats, cats and foxes or introduced other species. Only a lucky few islands escaped this fate or were large enough that the process is still ongoing, but these islands rank among the foremost sites in the world for wildlife-watching.

Strategies for protecting these islands vary widely. Some sites are off-limits, while others require that every visitor be checked for weed seeds or stowaway invaders. Some offer opportunities for volunteers to help restore native ecosystems and animals. Islands can be remote and hard to reach, while others may be close to mainlands or be popular destination resorts. Most of them are specialised destinations that you have to make an effort to reach, but after reading the following suggestions you'll be more than motivated to visit.