

Around the World: Alaskan Wildlife



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) is a sanctuary dedicated to preserving Alaska's wildlife through conservation, education, research and quality animal care. AWCC takes in injured and orphaned animals year-round and provides them with spacious enclosures and quality animal care. Most of the animals that arrive at the AWCC become permanent residents and will always have a home here. The Center maintains over 200 acres of spacious habitats for animals to feel at home and display their natural "wild" behavior. Visitors may see brown bears cooling off in the water, a bull moose strutting, wood bison roaming on pastures and more.

After disappearing from Alaska for more than 100 years, wood bison are back! The AWCC herd arrived in November 2003 from the Yukon Territory in Canada as part of a wood bison reintroduction program designed to restore the species to Alaska. AWCC is home to the only wood bison herd in the United States. In spring 2015, a herd of 130 wood bison was released into Interior Alaska. A small herd remains at AWCC. The

first wood bison calves were born at the AWCC in 2005 and since then dozens of more calves have been born.

A short driving or walking loop makes animals accessible to people who might not otherwise see a bear or wolf in its natural habitat. The generous enclosures are home to grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, lynx, coyote, fox, moose, elk, reindeer, bison, black-tailed Sitka deer, musk ox, elk, porcupine, great-horned owl, and bald eagle. I recognized the lead wolf Lothario and his dark gray coat from my visit two years ago. Enormous brown bear J.B. was lazily soaking up rays as is often the case. He and his sister were brought to the center 15 years ago when their mother was shot in defense of property. Two moose calves are recent additions. Pip was found alone near Seward, AK, and Jo's mother was killed in defense of property. Both are doing well and growing fast as they feed and test their gangly legs on the grassy plot.

The AWCC is located at Mile 79 Seward Highway in Portage, Alaska. Check out their website for more information at <https://www.alaskawildlife.org/>