



## Bear Viewing at Brooks Camp



Brooks Camp is world famous for its bear viewing opportunities. It is one of the most accessible and popular bear watching sites in Katmai National Park. Watching bears at Brooks Camp is an unforgettable experience, but timing your trip properly is critical because the overall number of bears as well as their general behavior varies with the seasons.

### When can bears be seen at Brooks Camp?

Bear viewing at Brooks Camp is best in July and September. At other times of the year, like June and August, less food is available along the Brooks River so bears aren't seen as frequently.

Springtime is a lean season for bears who live in the interior of Katmai National Park. Little food is typically available to bears in the spring so bears are dispersed throughout the area and are only infrequently seen at Brooks Camp in May and June.

When the salmon begin to arrive in late June, bears migrate to the Brooks River. Bears can be seen fishing at Brooks Falls and in the lower Brooks River throughout the month of July. Mid-July is typically when the largest number of bears can be seen along the river. In late July, bears begin to disperse to feed in other areas.

In August, salmon are beginning to spawn in the Brooks River, but they are less concentrated, remain energetic, and are no longer migrating.

This creates difficult fishing conditions for bears and almost all of the bears will leave the area. Like June, there are typically days in August when no bears are seen at Brooks Camp.

By late August, many salmon have already spawned and will begin to die. As the fish weaken and die, bears will again migrate to the Brooks River to feed. In September, bears are usually present in high numbers as they search for dead and dying salmon.

The behavior and appearance of the bears also varies with the season. In July, more aggressive interactions between bears are observed, especially at the beginning of the month. Bears are also thinner and many will shed their fur at this time. In September, bears at Brooks Camp are typically less aggressive towards each other. In contrast to early summer, bears in September and later in the fall are usually fat and covered with a new coat of fur.

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## Where can bears be seen at Brooks Camp?

The brown bears of Katmai are eating machines. A Katmai bear must eat a full year's worth of food in 6-8 months to ensure its survival. Katmai's bears predictably congregate around rich and concentrated sources of food. At Brooks Camp this means salmon.

During the peak of the salmon migration in July, bears will fish for salmon all along the Brooks River, but bears will be especially concentrated at Brooks Falls. The falls creates a temporary barrier to migrating salmon which gives some bears the opportunity to catch many fish with little effort. Typically, the largest and most dominant bears along the river fish at Brooks Falls.

In July, many of the bears that cannot compete for fishing spots at Brooks Falls will fish the lower half of the Brooks River. At this time of

the year, females with cubs are usually easiest to see near the mouth of the Brooks River.

After the salmon begin to spawn and die in late summer, bear activity is concentrated in the lower half of the Brooks River. In some years a few bears may still fish at Brooks Falls and the upper Brooks River in September and October, but most will patrol the slower moving waters of the lower Brooks River as they search for dead and dying salmon that collect in the slow moving currents and eddies near the river mouth and bridge.

Three wildlife viewing platforms can be found along the river--one at Brooks Falls, one downstream of the falls, and one at the mouth of Brooks River. Each one can offer unique bear watching experiences in season.

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## Other Considerations

Brooks Camp is a unique place with special regulations designed to protect bears and people. Everyone who arrives at Brooks Camp is required to begin their stay by checking in at the Brooks Camp Visitor Center for a brief "Bear Etiquette" talk outlining park regulations and proper behavior at Brooks Camp.

Be sure to dress and pack in anticipation of diverse and changing weather conditions. Whether staying for just a few hours or for several days, you should expect to encounter windy, cool, and wet weather as well as biting insects like mosquitos and black flies.

Weather and bear encounters can sometimes delay the arrival and departure of float planes, so it is usually best to incorporate some extra time into your itinerary in case of any delays.

The floating bridge across Brooks River can temporarily close because of bear activity. To minimize the chance of missing an outgoing flight or a meal at Brooks Lodge, give yourself some extra time to cross the bridge in July and September.

More people visit Brooks Camp in July than any other month. If you come at this time, expect crowded conditions at the Brooks Falls Platform.

