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Alberta  
Backyard



# Waterton Biosphere Reserve





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## What is a Biosphere Reserve?

A Biosphere Reserve is an area where biodiversity meets sustainable development. This means that the region is home to many different kinds of animals and plants, as well as people who live, work, and play there. It's not what you might think of as a nature preserve, although there are protected areas within the biosphere region. The idea is to show how industries can work and people can live alongside these ecologically important places while conserving the environment — keeping the plants, animals, air, water, and land healthy.

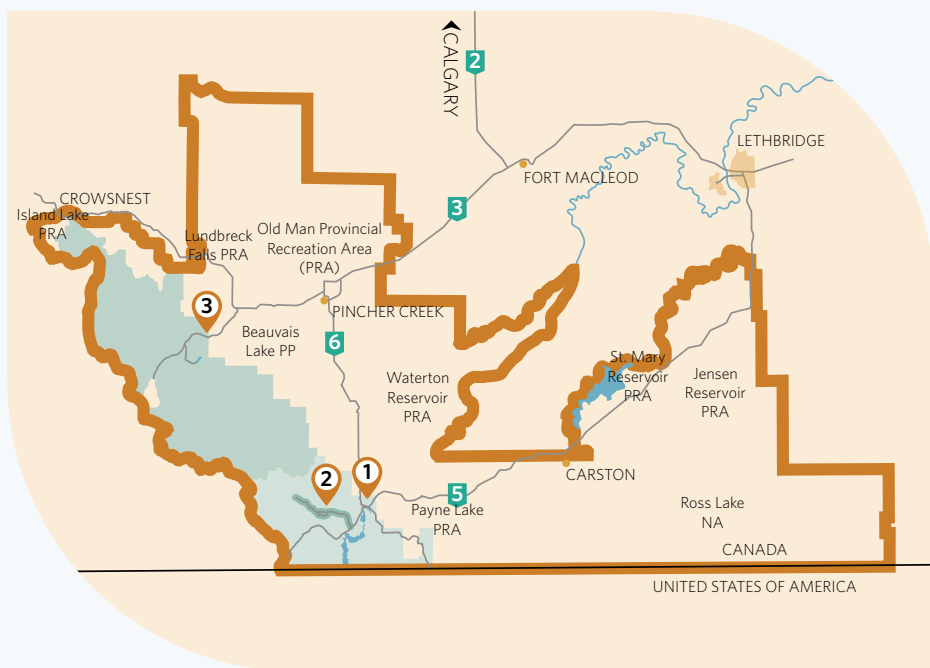


Biosphere Reserves are made up of three land-use elements:

1. Core protected area: legislatively (meaning under the law) protected areas such as national and provincial parks, focused on conserving biodiversity with minimal ecosystem disturbance.
2. Buffer zone: usually surrounding the core protected areas, there's an emphasis on conservation while environmentally sound human activity takes place.
3. Transition area: areas where people live and work.

There are Biosphere Reserves all over the world. They are designated by UNESCO: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. There are 18 of them in Canada, and two in Alberta. In this book, we're going to explore the Waterton Biosphere Reserve.





### Waterton Biosphere Reserve Map

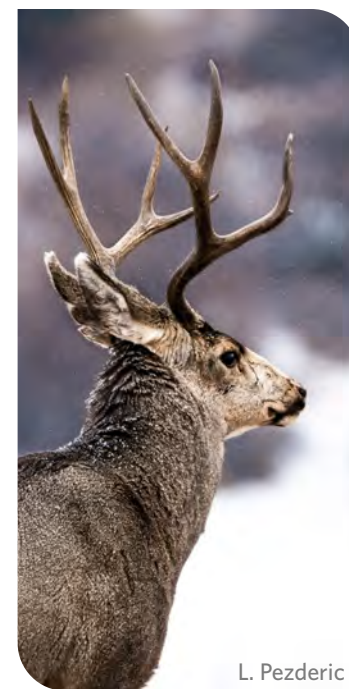
On the map, you'll see the outline of the Waterton Biosphere Reserve where there are many places the public can visit to explore and appreciate natural spaces. In this book, we'll talk about things to see and do at:

- ① Waterton Lakes National Park (WLNP)
- ② Red Rock Parkway in WLNP
- ③ Castle Provincial Park

### What Makes Waterton Special?

The Waterton Biosphere Reserve is in the southwestern corner of Alberta where the grasslands of the prairies meet the dramatic rising peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The meeting of these two very different ecosystems — grasslands and mountains — creates a rich mixture of habitats, with plentiful plants and animals.

This biosphere reserve is part of a larger, continental conservation landscape. It is adjacent (next to) the Crown of the Continent (formerly Glacier) Biosphere Reserve across the border in Montana, U.S.A. Together, Waterton Lakes National Park and Glacier National Park in the U.S. form the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



L. Pezderic



L. Pezderic



L. Pezderic

This area is the heart of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, one of the largest remaining intact ecosystems in North America. This tract of intact, connected land covers 72,000 km<sup>2</sup>. That's larger than the entire province of New Brunswick!

As we explore the Waterton Biosphere Reserve, we acknowledge that it is located on Treaty 7 territory, a traditional gathering place and travelling route of the Blackfoot Nations including Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai; the Tsuut'ina First Nation; the Stoney Nakoda First Nation; and the Métis Nation of Alberta among others. Indigenous people stewarded these lands for thousands of years and we recognize with gratitude that we tread in generations of footsteps.



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## DESTINATION 1

# Waterton Lakes National Park

Only a 1.5-hour drive southwest of Lethbridge, or three scenic hours south of Calgary, Waterton Lakes National Park is a very welcoming place for a day trip or overnight stay. Accommodations are available in hotels in the community of Waterton Park as well as the townsite campground. The campground offers tent and RV sites within walking distance of amenities, Cameron Falls, and Upper Waterton Lake. With ample walking and hiking trails and an interpretive theatre, this is a fantastic place for families to explore nature together.

**Before You Go:** Visit [parks.canada.gc.ca/waterton](https://parks.canada.gc.ca/waterton) for updates on park activities, conditions, and events. You can also call 403-859-5133 or 1-888-773-8888 (toll-free) for more information.

There is a fee for park entry. Youth 17 and under are free. Visit the website for the latest rates.

**Driving Directions:** From Lethbridge, travel southwest on Highway 5 for about 1 hour and 30 minutes, following signs for Cardston/Waterton/Alberta 5 W. Turn left to stay on Highway 5 and continue straight onto Evergreen Ave., into the community of Waterton Park.

From Calgary, drive south on Highway 2, following signs for Lethbridge. Keep right to continue on Exit 89, following signs for Highway 3 W/ Crowsnest Highway/Pincher Creek/Crowsnest Pass and merge onto Highway 3 W. Turn



left onto Highway 785, and after 5.3 km turn left again onto Waterton Ave (Highway 6). Follow Highway 6 south, turning right onto Highway 5 and continuing onto Evergreen Ave., into the community of Waterton Park. The whole trip will take just under three hours. (Search Google Maps if you're interested in a slightly longer, more scenic drive.)



### Things To Do

#### Warm-Weather Activities:

Picnicking  
Camping  
Hiking  
Cycling  
Paddling (Canoe/Kayak)  
Bird and Wildlife Watching  
Stargazing

#### Winter Activities:

Cross-country Skiing  
Snowshoeing  
Winter Camping  
Bird and Wildlife Watching



**Tip:** While visiting a national park, or exploring nature at home, you can go on a digital scavenger hunt with Parks Canada mascots Parka and Chirp! Download the free [Photo Missions App](#) and complete challenges to earn Club Parka rewards!

### Waterton Wildlife

No other national park in Canada protects the diversity of wildlife that Waterton Lakes National Park does in such a small area. The park is home to:

- 250 species of birds
- 60 species of mammals
- 24 species of fish
- 10 species of reptiles and amphibians
- and thousands of insects, arthropods, and other invertebrates!

As you drive along the roads, keep an eye out for bighorn sheep licking salt off the road, elk meandering through the meadows, mountain goats perched on rocky outcroppings, and if you're lucky, grizzly bears munching on dandelions in the ditch.

Taking a hike along a trail with mountainous rubble, listen for the high-pitched squeak of a small mammal in the rabbit family called a pika. Search the rocks for the pudgy little brown critter with no visible tail and big, round ears. Found it? Stop and observe. You will see the pika collecting flower heads and grasses to stash them in their den, to prepare for the inevitable winter.

Bring your binoculars and identification guide to learn about the birds along your journey. You may see a bald eagle perched in a tree, witness an osprey catching a fish from the lake, or hear the eerie yodeling call of a common loon.

When in a grassy field, check the barbs on a barbed wire fence for impaled grasshoppers. This is a sign that loggerhead shrikes are nearby. Look for a robin-sized, white and grey bird with black markings, including a mask that extends from its eyes to its raptor-like beak. They hunt for insects and impale their prey on thorns or barbs, to eat later. Loggerhead shrikes are designated "threatened," meaning they are likely to disappear if something isn't done to help protect them now. The Waterton Lakes National Park helps protect many species at risk.







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## Be “Wildlife Wise”

Wildlife encounters can be the most thrilling and memorable moments of exploring nature in a national park. It is important to know the best ways to safely enjoy wildlife, to protect yourself and the wild animals.

It is important to respect a wild animal’s space. For example, the deer in the community of Waterton Park have become habituated to humans. This means they have lost their fear of people and don’t run away when approached. The deer can become aggressive when you walk too close, especially if you are walking a dog. When you see deer in the community, enjoy watching them from a safe distance and take extra precaution to redirect your activities away from the deer.

The national park has been conducting a shepherding deer project in the community to help ensure public safety and protect wildlife. A dog handler uses shepherding dogs to gently herd deer out of the community for fawning season — when the deer are most aggressive towards people. You can watch a video about these extraordinary dogs and their extraordinary job at [youtu.be/sRvRuncKx4U](https://youtu.be/sRvRuncKx4U)

Animals are most active at dawn and dusk, so that’s the best time to watch for them. Dawn and dusk are great times to go for a wildlife viewing drive, and for the same reason, not a good time to go hiking. Avoiding wildlife encounters on a trail is best, particularly with bears. Here are more pointers to enjoy viewing wildlife — safely!

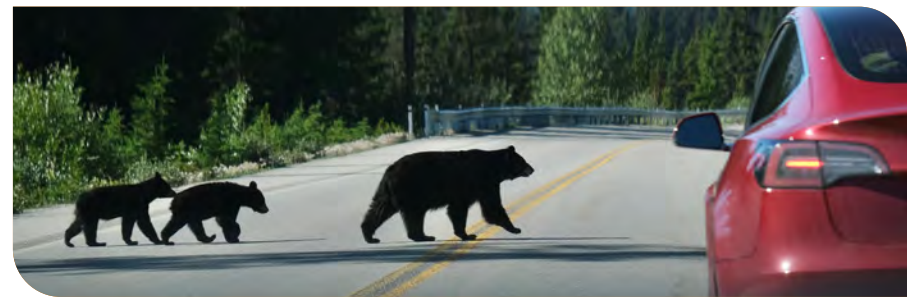
## Give Wildlife Space

Stay three bus lengths (30 metres/100 feet) away from ungulates such as elk, deer, moose, and bighorn sheep.

Keep ten bus lengths (100 metres/325 feet) away from predators such as bears, cougars, and wolves. Report sightings of predators to park staff.



**Tip:** To keep a safe distance, use the “rule of thumb.” Hold your fist straight in front of you with your thumb up. Cover the animal in your view with your thumb. If it’s completely covered (when standing sideways), you’re probably about 100 metres away. If your thumb doesn’t completely cover the animal, you should slowly move further away.



## Roadside Wildlife

- Pull over, only where it is safe to do so, and alert other drivers with your hazard lights.
- Stay in your vehicle.
- Stop only for a couple of minutes, take a great photo, and then move on to help prevent a traffic jam.
- Move on immediately if the animal looks agitated or upset, for example, its ears are flattened, or it’s stamping or pawing the ground with its feet.
- Don’t stop if there is already a traffic jam. It is unsafe for people and wildlife.

- Never feed a wild animal. Feeding wildlife leads to habituation, which is dangerous to all people visiting or living in the park and it is against the law.

### Bare Campsites

- Keep a “bare” campsite to avoid attracting bears. When not in use, store all food and food-related items in a hard-sided vehicle, trailer, motor home, or in the campground food storage lockers.

### Encountering Wildlife on the Trail

- Carry bear spray, keep it within reach, and learn how to use it.
- Be aware and watch for signs of wildlife. If a wild animal is on the trail, don't approach it. Turn around and head back, warning other hikers along the way.
- Make noise by talking and shouting occasionally, especially when approaching slopes, blind corners, and water.

### Pets in the Park

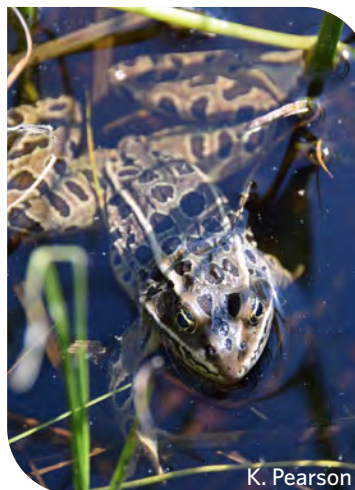
- Pets are welcome in the park, but must be kept on a leash at all times, and you have to clean up after them.
- Do not leave pets unattended. They may attract wildlife and could be attacked.
- Dogs can provoke aggressive behaviour from wildlife, so be careful to give wildlife extra space when walking Fido.



### Biodiversity Busters

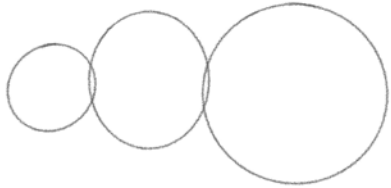
Check off any of the flora or fauna you see (or hear) while exploring nature:

- ☐ Orange wildflower
- ☐ Singing songbird
- ☐ Honking Canada goose
- ☐ Browsing deer
- ☐ Grazing grizzly bear
- ☐ Jumping fish
- ☐ Hopping frog
- ☐ Slithering snake
- ☐ Fluttering butterfly

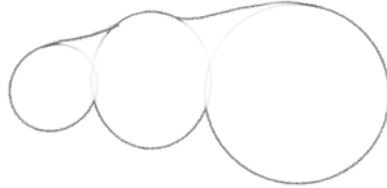




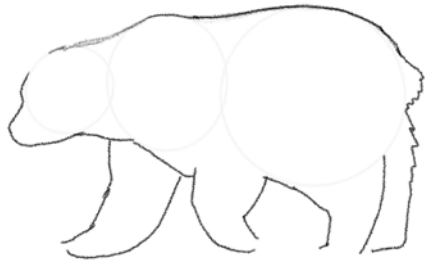
### Draw a Grizzly Bear



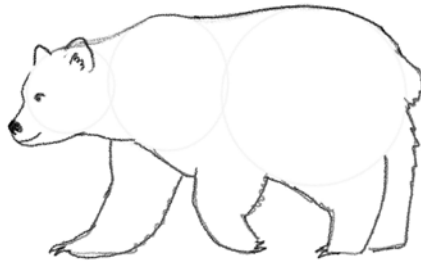
**Step 1:** Get the proportions right.



**Step 2:** Connect the dots. Erase the extra.



**Step 3:** Add legs and head.



**Step 4:** Fill in more details.



**Step 5:** Colour your creation!

### My Bear Drawing



**Grizzly Bear Bio:** Grizzlies are big, muscular bears weighing up to 400 kg (880 lbs). They have a big hump over their shoulders, small round ears on top of their dish-shaped face, and long visible claws on their front paws. They come in a wide variety of colours but get their name from "grizzled" or silver-tipped fur.

Grizzly bears have a long snout with an extremely powerful sense of smell that they use to locate food, which is why it is so important to keep your campsite "bare," with no food left out or left behind when you leave.

Grizzly bears are always looking for something to eat. Less than 10% of their diet is meat. They use their long front claws for digging to eat roots, herbs, berries, and insects. They have to eat 30,000 calories per day. That's equal to 40 hamburgers plus 40 sundaes!





## DESTINATION 2

# Red Rock Parkway

Red Rock Parkway is located in Waterton Lakes National Park. The parkway winds 15 km up the Blakiston valley, ending at Red Rock Canyon. The drive is an experience itself and is the perfect place to explore the prairie-meets-mountain landscape.

Stop at the numerous pullouts along the road to view wildlife, find wildflowers, and learn about the area through interpretive signage. Several family-friendly day hikes can be accessed along the parkway including the popular Red Rock Canyon, Blakiston Falls, and Crandell Lake trails. Dogs are welcome on the trails but must be kept on a leash and cleaned up after.



**Directions to Red Rock Parkway:** From the Waterton Park townsite, head northeast on the Entrance Road (Highway 5). Turn left onto the Red Rock Parkway which is just north of Pass Creek Bridge.



### Red Rock Canyon Trail

**Length:** 700 m loop; 20 minutes.

**Difficulty:** Easy trail with minimal elevation gain.

**Trailhead:** Located at the very end of the Red Rock Parkway in the Red Rock Canyon upper parking lot, starting at the interpretive signage.

**Experience:** Paved trail exploring a river running through a colourful canyon. The area gets its name from the Argillite — an iron rich red rock — running through the layers of rock.

**Amenities:** Washrooms, garbage bins, bike racks, picnic tables and benches.

### Blakiston Falls Trail

**Length:** 2 km return; 45 minutes.

**Difficulty:** Easy trail with minimal elevation gain.

**Trailhead:** Located at the Red Rock Canyon lower parking lot, go past the kitchen shelter, across Red Rock Creek bridge, left across the bridge at Bauerman Creek and turn right.

**Experience:** A short, scenic walk on a well-maintained trail leads to a breathtaking waterfall with viewing platforms.

**Amenities:** Washrooms, garbage bins, bike racks, picnic tables and benches.



### Crandell Lake Trail

**Length:** 4 km return; 1.25 hours.

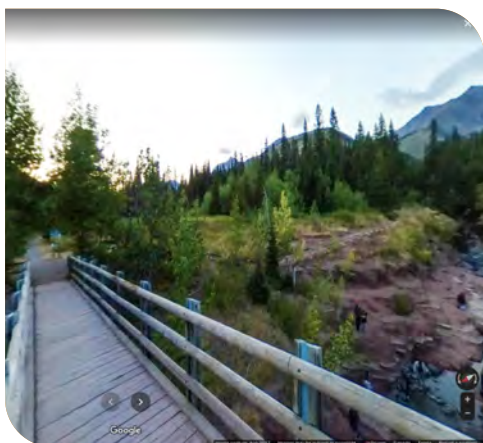
**Difficulty:** Easy trail with 125 m elevation gain.

**Trailhead:** Traveling northwest on the Red Rock Canyon, take your first left, after Crandell Campground, driving 1 km to the parking lot.

**Experience:** Walking uphill steadily along an old cart track, the trail leads you to a peaceful, rocky lake. Take comfort in the fact that the walk back is all downhill!



**Tip:** Explore the Red Rock Canyon Loop trail using Google Maps Street View!







### Flower Finder Scavenger Hunt

In the spring and summertime, the scenery along the Red Rock Parkway comes alive with an array of beautiful wildflowers! How many of these beautiful flowers can you spot?



☐ Mariposa Lily\*



☐ Pricklypear\*\*



☐ Balsamroot\*\*\*



**Remember:** Never to pick flowers you find in the park... leave them for everyone to enjoy!



☐ Gaillardia  
(Blanketflower)\*\*



☐ Western Blue Flag  
(Rocky Mountain  
Iris)\*



☐ Blue Camas\*



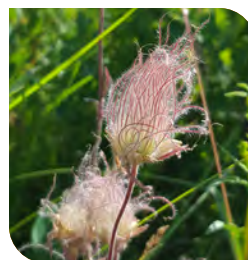
☐ Prairie Crocus



☐ Wild Blue Flax\*\*



☐ Purple Fringe  
(Silky  
Scorpionweed)\*



☐ Prairie Smoke  
(Old Man's  
Whiskers)\*\*\*



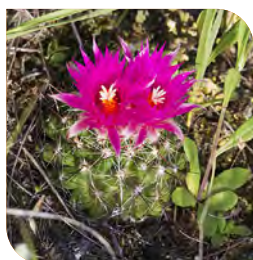
☐ Fireweed\*



☐ Wild Bergamot  
(Bee Balm)\*\*



☐ Purple  
Monkeyflower\*



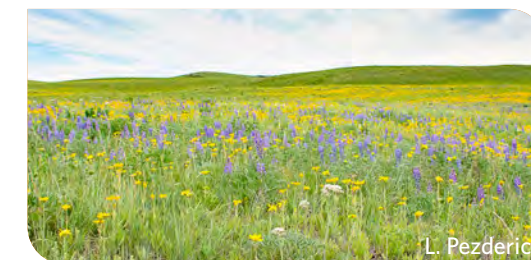
☐ Ball Cactus\*\*



☐ Western  
Wood Lily\*\*



☐ Red  
Paintbrush\*\*



Photos:  
\* L. Pezderic, \*\*G. Romanchuk \*\*\* S. Weizenbach



### DESTINATION 3

## Castle Provincial Park

Castle Provincial Park is located southwest of Calgary and Lethbridge. It's a wonderful spot for camping — set up at Castle Falls, Lynx Creek, Castle River Bridge, or Beaver Mines Lake campgrounds or one of seven designated camping areas. Campsite amenities include power, pit/vault toilets, firepits, and picnic tables, as well as select comfort cabins. Explore the forest and water features along the extensive trail system. Castle Provincial Park is a great destination for a rejuvenating nature escape!

**Before You Go:** Visit [albertaparks.ca/parks/south/castle-pp](https://albertaparks.ca/parks/south/castle-pp) to help plan your visit. You'll find updates on park activities, conditions, and advisories. Call 403-388-1293 for more information.

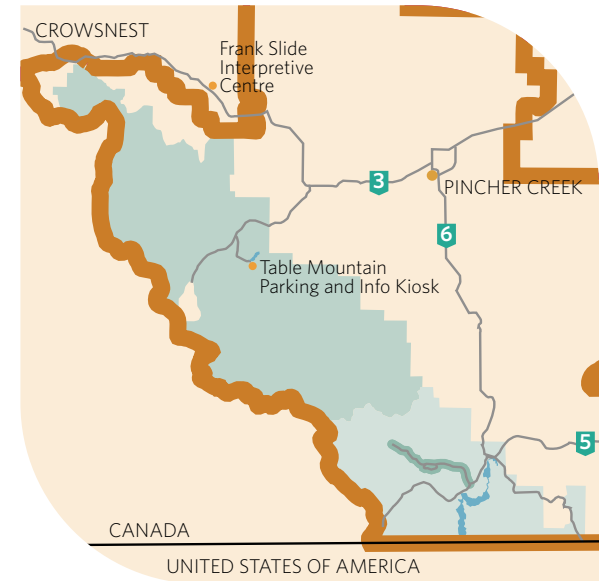
There's no fee for day use, but there are camping fees.



**Driving Directions:** From Lethbridge, travel west on Highway 3 (Crowsnest Highway). Turn right in Fort Macleod to continue following Highway 3. Turn left onto Highway 6 traveling south towards Pincher Creek. At the roundabout, take the first exit west onto Highway 507. Turn left onto Highway 774 and follow to Castle Provincial Park. It's just under an hour-and-a-half-drive.

From Calgary, travel south on Highway 2. Turn right onto Township Road 170 in Cayley.

Continue onto 722 Ave (Range Rd 285). Turn left onto 104 Street E (Range Road 290) and right onto Highway 533. Turn left to continue heading west on Highway 533. Turn left onto Highway 22 and then turn right onto Highway 3 (Crowsnest Highway). Turn left onto Highway 507 and continue straight onto Highway 774, heading west to Castle Provincial Park. It's just over two hours drive.







## Things To Do

### Warm-Weather Activities:

Camping  
Horseback riding  
Hiking  
Cycling  
Geocaching  
Paddling (Canoe/Kayak)  
Swimming  
Fishing  
Bird and Wildlife Watching  
Stargazing

### Winter Activities:

Snowshoeing  
Cross-Country Skiing  
Fat biking  
Winter Camping  
Ice Fishing



**Tip:** Take a 30-minute drive to visit the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre. Experience interactive displays and gripping storytelling to learn about what happened when Turtle Mountain fell — Canada's deadliest rockslide. Visit [frankslide.ca](http://frankslide.ca) to plan your trek.

### Animal Lovers...

The terrain in Castle Provincial Park is a mix of rugged mountains, lush valleys, montane forests and secluded meadows with clear lakes, rivers, and water falls. You may spot moose, deer, elk, big-horned sheep, mountain goats, wolves, coyotes, red foxes, marmots, beavers, otters, and bears... just to name a few! And the park is home to over 250 species of birds!

Pets are allowed in the provincial park, but must be on a leash at all times, and you have to clean up after them.



## Listen for the Birds!

Don't just grab your binoculars and identification guide. Stop, be silent... and listen.

Woo-oo-OOOOO-ooo



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Is that a wolf? If the sound is heard coming from a lake, it is more likely a **common loon**! One of the most recognizable calls all across Canada, the loon's wail sounds like a wolf's howl. Look on the lake for a striking black and white waterbird with a hefty bill. It's bigger than a duck, but smaller than a goose and rides low on the lake. Found it? Oh, it disappeared! Loons dive underwater to hunt for fish with their dagger-like bill. Keep searching to find it again when it resurfaces. Loons wail to find each other across long distances. Listen for this hauntingly eerie call as you drift off to sleep at your campsite.

Kee-eeee-arr



Look up! That hoarse screaming is coming from a **red-tailed hawk** as it soars through the air. Shield your eyes from the sun and search the skies for the hawk, distinguishable by its — you guessed it — red tail. You have probably heard this infamous screeching sound before. The red-tailed hawk's menacing call is commonly used in movies to depict a bald eagle. But the bald eagle's call is actually a high-pitched, squeaky series of piping notes. Search for both birds' calls online to compare the difference.

Cheese bur-ger



Most people recognize the **black-capped chickadee's** iconic *chickadee-dee-dee-dee-dee song*, but less commonly known is their call to locate each other. It is a simple song that sounds like "cheese burger" or "here sweetie." Sit and listen for a while and you will hear a chickadee whistling *cheese bur-ger* and then, another chickadee answer back from a different location. Try whistling your own *cheese bur-ger* and the chickadees will come in to check out the new bird in town.

Oh-sweet-canada-  
canada-canada-  
canada-canada

Hear it? This is a thin, clear, whistle tune, sung by a tiny bird called a **white-throated sparrow**. Keep listening — it will continue to whistle its song over and over again. Search for the bird perched on a shrub or tree branch. You're looking for a tiny brown bird with a bright white throat patch, white head with bold black stripes, and yellow spots above its eyes. Found it? Are you surprised that such a loud whistle came from such a tiny bird?

Kill-deer, kill-deer,  
kill-deer

This shrill cry is coming from a shorebird with skinny legs running around the flats, wailing its own name: **killdeer**. The killdeer is brown on top and white below with two black bands around its chest and a black and white face. The bird was clearly named for its shrill call and won't ever let you forget it! Killdeer nest on the ground, so if you see one acting like it has a broken wing, leave the area, watching your step to be careful not to crush their eggs on your way out.





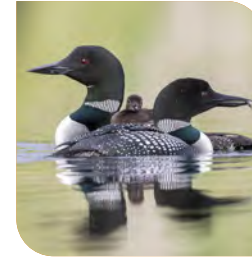
### Bird Watching Scavenger Hunt

Check off these birds when you hear or see them. Note that some species are here year-round, but others migrate through at different times of year, so they may not all be here at the same time. Keep your “eagle eyes” open!


☐ American Dipper

☐ American Kestrel

☐ Black-capped Chickadee

☐ Canada Goose

☐ Common Loon

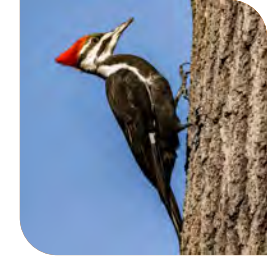
☐ Common Raven

☐ Great Blue Heron

☐ Great Horned Owl

☐ Killdeer

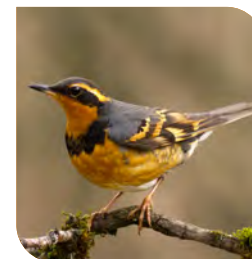
☐ Mourning Dove

☐ Olive-sided Flycatcher

☐ Pileated Woodpecker

☐ Red Crossbill

☐ Red-winged Blackbird

☐ Red-tailed Hawk

☐ Ruffed Grouse

☐ Varied Thrush

☐ White-throated Sparrow

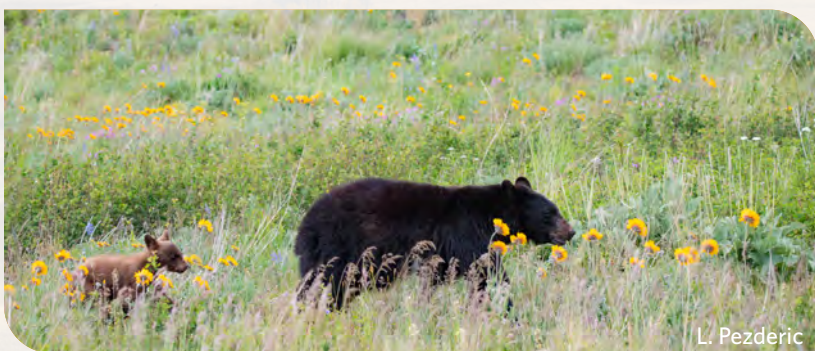


## Watch and Learn!

The *Striking Balance* documentary series features Canadian biospheres. Watch the Waterton Biosphere Reserve episode to learn more about how people are working to preserve the landscape and reduce conflict with wildlife like the iconic grizzly bear.



[tvo.org/video/documentaries/ep-8-waterton](https://tvo.org/video/documentaries/ep-8-waterton)



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