

Top Reasons for Nature & Wildlife Lovers to Visit the San Juan Islands

Why wildlife watching in the San Juan archipelago should be on every nature lover's bucket list



Whether you're an avid birder, an aspiring oceanographer, or just enjoy having a trail under your feet, extraordinary natural experiences await. Rocky shorelines, old growth forest, and a serene Salish Sea create homes for a motley crew of wildlife species.

1. WHALE OF A TIME

Majestic and mysterious, the whales of the central Salish Sea are a familiar sight throughout most of the year. The striking black-and-white orcas*, or killer whales, delight and awe onlookers with a variety of splashy (sometimes literally!) social behaviors. Humpback whales, distant cousins to orcas, are twice their size but often no less balletic. Minke whales are the Hobbits of the Salish Sea — dwarfed by the zaftig humpbacks and shyer than the spirited orcas, but no less impressive in their own right. One of the best places in the world to spot these magnificent creatures from shore is at Lime Kiln Point State Park (aka Whale Watch Park) on the west side of San Juan Island, but the odds increase on a whale and wildlife tour.

**The Southern Resident Killer Whales of Washington State are a protected endangered species. We encourage visitors to tour with a licensed whale watch operator who follows the NOAA guidelines. Members of the Pacific Whale Watch Association are responsible guides: www.pacificwhalewatchassociation.com.*

2. MEDIUM MARINE MAMMALS

Other denizens of these deep waters include hulking Steller sea lions, inquisitive harbor seals, swift Dall's porpoises, bashful harbor porpoises, and even the occasional elephant seal. Sleek and sure, they're very much at home in the Salish Sea. Whether

sunning on the rocks, gliding through a kelp forest, or darting through the waves, these frisky creatures are a joy to watch. Make sure there's plenty of memory on your phone for photos.

3. TRANSCENDENT TIDE POOLS

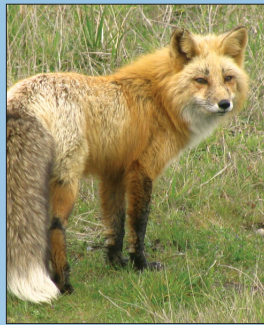
Discover a miniature universe the next time you go for a beach walk. Tucked into rocky crevices, a single tide pool can hold more than a dozen species. Their appearances as varied as their habits, they depend on the whims of the tides for prey. Brightly colored anemones extend dozens of tentacles, snagging unsuspecting plankton with their stinging cells called nematocysts. Shore crabs no larger than your thumbnail use their sharp pincers to get a meal. But that's what makes tide-pooling or looking underneath docks such a fun adventure, you just never know what you might observe. Please look but don't disturb the critters.

4. WORLD-CLASS KAYAKING

Experience Washington's coastal wildlife and scenery from a spectacular sea-level perspective. Paddling your way around the breathtaking shorelines of Lopez Island, Orcas Island, and San Juan Island is a classic Islands adventure. Sheltered coves, kelp forests, and expansive views lure the seasoned and the novice alike. Launch your own kayak or set out with one of the many knowledgeable kayaking outfitters for three-hour to three-day (or longer) expeditions.

Photos from left: Harbor Seal by Stock / Marine Life by Mark Gardner / Orca Whale by Ken Rea / Kayakers by Christy Woodrow / Bottom: Steller Sea Lions by Jeff Friedman





5. HIKING HABITAT

Whether you crave a quiet walk on a secluded beach or a challenging hill climb, you'll find some of the best hiking in Washington State in the San Juan Islands. Trails run along exposed rocky bluffs and driftwood-strewn beaches, through temperate forests carpeted with ferns and mosses, and up to summits with stunning vistas of surrounding islands sprinkling the Salish Sea. San Juan County is a Leave No Trace Area, so hikers should be mindful of the Seven Principles of Leave No Trace as they discover the natural wonders of the Islands: www.visitsanjuans.com/leave-no-trace.

6. GOING TO THE BIRDS

With such a variety of habitats in close proximity and over 200 species to choose from, birding is an appealing pastime in the San Juans. Amateur ornithologists can check off everything from trumpeter swans and western bluebirds to tufted puffins and marbled murrelets. Other feathered friends include rhinoceros auklets, peregrine falcons, and pigeon guillemots. You'll also find the largest concentration of nesting pairs of bald eagles outside of Alaska, so be sure to have a good pair of binoculars handy! The Islands comprise the northern part of the Puget Loop of the Great Washington Birding Trail, so keep an (eagle) eye out for the signs.

7. FURRIER FRIENDS

The four-legged residents of the San Juan Islands would provide plentiful material for wildlife photographers of all skill levels. Subjects include black-tailed deer, red foxes, raccoons, and river otters, plus a plethora of European rabbits. It's not uncommon to stroll through downtown Friday Harbor, Eastsound or Lopez Village and spy a doe or two. The otters aren't quite so metropolitan — they're more often spotted near the shorelines. Red foxes, which also come in an eye-catching black and silver coloration, are more intrepid; sometimes glimpsed in town, but more often in the grassy fields of southern San Juan Island.

8. LOSING OUR MARBLES

After nearly 100 years of presumed extinction, the dainty Island Marble Butterfly was rediscovered in 1998 by researchers conducting a survey at American Camp on San Juan Island. The Island Marble is distinctly white and pale green with a mottled chartreuse pattern under its hind wings. Eager lepidopterists hoping for a photo should search on the edges of protected areas of grassy prairie near wild mustard plants. Scientists believe American Camp, along with scattered locations on San Juan and Lopez islands, to be home to the only viable population of Island Marble butterflies in the world.

Help us keep the San Juan Islands wildlife wild! Be a good steward with these tips:
www.visitsanjuans.com/what-to-do/experiences/responsible-wildlife-watching-san-juans



Barbara Marrett, Communications Manager
360.378.6822 ext. 6 • barbara@visitsanjuans.com
888.468.3701 ext. 6 • www.VisitSanJuans.com
P.O. Box 1330 • Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Look for this and other media resources with hot links on the MEDIA page of the San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau website: www.visitsanjuans.com/media

*Photos from left: Deer Fawn by SJIVB / Island Marbled Butterfly by NPS
Red Fox by SJIVB / Bald Eagle by Ken Rea / Moran State Park by WSP
Bottom: Dolphins by Jim Maya*

