TONGASS
Family Field Guide
Discover common plants and animals in the Tongass National Forest
EXPLORE TOGETHER!
Are you ready to explore the Tongass National Forest?

Fun Facts
The Tongass...
... is the largest national forest
... has two icefields
... has 5,000 miles of rivers and streams that support wild salmon

Safety First
...so plan and prepare before you go.
• Be prepared for changing weather conditions.
• Help may be very far away so prepare before you go.
• Always be aware of your surroundings and give wildlife plenty of space.

As you explore the Tongass National Forest, try to figure out how different plants and animals might be connected. Plants and animals depend on each other and the places they live. Look for this symbol to discover these connections.

Find a plant or animal not included in the book? Check out the back page to add your own notes and drawings.

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Moss & Lichens

- **Stair Step Moss**
  The flat parts (segments) grow off of each other like steps on a staircase. This moss grows one new step each year. How old is the moss that you see?

- **Lung Lichen**
  Lung lichen grows on trees in really wet forests. Gently touch the lichen - does it feel like stiff leather?

- **Common Witch’s Hair**
  There’s no surprise how this lichen got it’s name… it looks like a witch got her hair caught in a tree! Not only is it great for Halloween costumes, Sitka black-tailed deer eat this lichen in the winter to survive.

- **Peat Moss/Sphagnum Moss**
  Feel the moss. Do you notice how soft it is? Peat moss can absorb A LOT of water, like a sponge.
**WILDFLOWERS**

- **Nootka Lupine**
  Lupines take nutrients in the air and put them in the soil, which helps other plants grow.
  - Pea-shaped flowers are purple with white accents.
  - Clusters of 5-8 narrow oval leaves.

- **Fireweed**
  Flowers bloom at different times on the stem, starting at the bottom and ending at the top. Locals know the end of summer is coming when the fireweed finishes blooming.
  - Dark pink to purple flowers.
  - Flowers grow in clusters up the red stem.

- **Skunk Cabbage**
  Pee-yew! It smells bad like a skunk! Why the gross smell? The flower attracts pollinators, like flies, and keeps some animals from eating it.
  - Yellow hood.
  - Tiny greenish-yellow flowers on a spike.
  - Giant green leaves.

- **Goatsbeard**
  It can grow up to 6 feet tall! If you see goatsbeard, is it shorter or taller than you are?
  - Clusters of tiny white flowers.
  - Large pointed leaves.
**Berries**

**Salmonberry**
Look familiar? They are related to raspberries but come in red and golden orange.

**Red Elderberry**
While elderberries are only edible for humans if they’ve been cooked, crows and other birds love eating them raw.

**Blueberries**
Berries from different bushes can taste differently, so sample a few bushes before you choose your picking area. Watch for bears, who love blueberries, too!

**Baneberry**
These berries are POISONOUS. Berries, leaves, and roots can make you throw up and die!
DECIDUOUS TREES

**Willow**
Willows are a good place to find wildlife. Look for birds hopping between willow branches searching for bugs to eat.

**Alder (Sitka and Red)**
The Sitka alder is a shrub and the red alder is a tree. Alders need open space to grow, so you often find them along trail edges and road shoulders. Can you find any along a trail?

**Black Cottonwood**
Black cottonwood like to grow near water. Feel the flattened leaf stalks, which catch the wind and make the leaves flutter back and forth on a breezy day.

Q: What does deciduous mean? (Answer at bottom of page.)

A: Deciduous - a tree that loses its leaves each year before the winter.
**Sitka Spruce**

If you shake hands with a spruce, beware of its spiky needles! Despite its prickly reputation, spruce is a good food source for many animals, especially red squirrels who eat the seeds found between the scales of the cones.

**Hemlock (Western and Mountain)**

If you shake hands with a hemlock, you’ll be happy to find its flat needles have rounded ends. Many animals hide in hemlock’s shady branches. These branches make good places for animals like squirrels to build nests.

**Cedar (Alaska Yellow-cedar and Western Redcedar)**

Cedar needles look and feel more like scales. These scaly cedar branches are a winter food source for Sitka black-tailed deer.
**Mammals & Fish**

**Bear Safety**

1. **Be a Noisy Hiker**
   Hike in a group and sing or talk so you don’t surprise a bear. Make up a fun song!

2. **Give Bears Space**
   Don’t approach a bear - watch from a distance.

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**Black Bear**

- Use their short, sharp claws to climb trees.
- Sows also send their cubs up trees as a babysitting strategy.

**Brown Bear**

- Their strong shoulders allow them to dig for bugs, plant roots and other food.

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**Sitka Black-tailed Deer**

- Deer eat many different kinds of plants, including some that other animals don’t like to eat, like skunk cabbage.

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**Black Bear**

- Both black bears and brown bears vary in color from blonde to brown to black.

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**Black-tailed Deer**

- Deer track
- Black tail
- Stocky body

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**Sockeye Salmon**

- Sockeye salmon are one of five types of salmon found on the Tongass. The other four are Chum, King, Silver, & Pink.

- Salmon are born in fresh water, migrate to the ocean, and then return to freshwater to spawn.
**Beaver**

Beavers are the largest rodent in North America and, like all rodents, their teeth never stop growing. Gnawing on trees and branches helps file down their teeth.

- deep brown furry coat
- wide flat tail

Look for trees that beavers have gnaed on.

**Porcupine**

Porcupines are rodents, too! Their quills are modified hairs that are soft when they are born, but then quickly harden. One of their favorite foods is willow leaves.

- spiky looking hair
- quill-covered tail

**Red Squirrel**

Find out where red squirrels have been hanging out by finding one of their middens.

- midden - a large pile of cones squirrels build to store their food

**Steller Sea Lion**

Look for large groups of sea lions lounging on rocky outcrops along the shores of the Tongass. After looking for food underwater, sea lions need these rocky places, called haul-outs, to rest. A haul-out where sea lions mate and give birth to pups is called a rookery.

- thick neck
- large and muscly body
- external ears
- big front flippers
- brown coat
- white belly
- rusty body
**BIRDS**

**Bald Eagle**
Immature (young) eagles are dark brown. A bald eagle doesn’t have bright white head feathers until it is about five years old. There are more bald eagles in Alaska than in anywhere else in the US.

**Raven**
Ravens are scavengers, and will eat just about anything. They love elderberries in late summer! Ravens are playful and very smart. They are able to solve complex problems.

**Common Merganser**
Mergansers have a serrated (toothed) bill to catch aquatic insects and small fish while diving.
**Chestnut-backed Chickadee**
Chickadees are tough little birds! They gather together in flocks to survive cold Alaskan winters. In the spring, they use animal fur to make cozy nests for their young.

**Glaucous-winged Gull**
Glaucous-winged gulls eat just about anything. They will often steal food from other birds and swallow large prey whole, even sea stars!

**Steller’s Jay**
Steller’s jays are smart, noisy birds and great imitators. They can give a perfect imitation of a red-tailed hawk to make other birds scatter. They can even sound like a marmot.

**Red-breasted Sapsucker**
Have you seen any tree trunks with holes drilled in a neat row or grid? Sapsuckers drill holes in tree bark and let the sap ooze out. They love licking the sap and eating insects that are attracted to the sap.
NATURE NOTES

Find a plant or animal not included in the book? Add it on this page. This is your field guide so add notes, thoughts, and sketches.

Interested in discovering even more plants and animals in the Tongass National Forest?
Forest Service rangers are happy to suggest more in-depth field guides for the area.

Produced by the Tongass National Forest and designed by Elise Wahl, Timberdoodle Studio.