

# Vantastic Stories

## Vantastic I

By Carolyn Seramur, Visitor Service, Chugach National Forest

The Vantastic program has expanded its efforts on the Seward Ranger District to share information, education, and wildlife viewing opportunities with visitors and residents alike. The Vantastic program offers two programs in different locations when the schedules allow. I host the Vantastic I program, while Julie Buehler hosts Vantastic II. Volunteer Hali Thompson helps us both on Fridays and Saturdays.

The Vantastic program provides valuable wildlife viewing, campground programs, and interpretive displays at events on the Chugach National Forest. Wildlife viewing with the Vantastic I program primarily is located at Tern Lake (along the Y intersection of the Seward/Sterling Highways) with telescopes and binoculars. We set up several tables with skulls, hides, antlers, and visitor/wildlife information. At Tern Lake, we may have contact with 100 people in a day.



Julie Buehler and Hali Thompson welcome a visitor to Vantastic at Mount Eyak.

Campground programs vary from *Leave No Trace* principles to "Silent Hooting Flyers," "Crossing Paths with a Porcupine," "White Mountain Climbers," and "Amazing Birds." Programs are offered throughout the summer at 7:30 pm on Saturdays, alternating between Quartz Creek Campground and Trail River Campground.

Julie, Hali, and I worked with wildlife crew Mary Ann Benoit, Marion Glaser, and Rebecca Zulueta at the Alaska Fish and Game Spring Fling at Potter Marsh to celebrate International Migratory Bird Day May 15-16. Local students braved the wind and wet weather to bird watch. Saturday was well attended by the public.

We were glad for sunny skies when we taught binocular basics and shared bird identifying tips.

Both the Seward and Glacier Ranger Districts sponsored Kid's Fishing Days in June. Hali and I attended the event at Moose Flats Day Use Area. We were ready with our trout fishing poles, wildlife display, and planned activities around fly tying and fish printing. I also attended the Seward event at Lower Summit Lake to help with the craft activity. Kids fished for trout all around the lake, and some got to ride across the lake in a boat. Employee Katy Toth-Stauble helped kids make their own fish with colored pasta noodles.

July 10-11, the Vantastic trio attended Cordova's Salmon Jammin' as part of the Copper River Wild Festival which took place at Mount Eyak Ski Hill. This event was made possible by the Prince William Sound Science Center, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, the Seward and Cordova Ranger Districts, and the entire community.

On both days, the Dept. of Fish & Game set up their aquatic classroom, and we set up the Vantastic I and II displays. On Saturday, the Cordova Ranger District and the science center provided activities ranging from casting, fish printing, coloring, aquatic plant awareness, chalk drawing with Ray Troll, and Salmon Jeopardy.

At the end of the month, our Vantastic crew sailed across Prince William Sound on the ferry to Valdez for the Gold Rush Days held July 31- August 2. We set up at the Crooked Creek Information Site and at the park strip after the parade. We reached a few hundred very appreciative visitors at our sessions.

Overall, the Vantastic program endeavors to contact both visitors and residents alike and provide them with sound education, opportunities to view wildlife, and encouragement to get out and visit their national forest. This program fulfills the Forest Service mission of *caring for the land and serving people*.

## Vantastic II

By Julie Buehler, Chugach NF

New to the Chugach National Forest this year is the Vantastic II program on the Seward Ranger District. As part of Seward's Wildlife program, Vantastic II focuses on environmental education and wildlife viewing. Vantastic II uses the traveling van similar to Vantastic I and focuses on educating visitors on wildlife viewing, identifications skills, identification tools, and viewing signs.

When visiting the Vantastic II display, visitors can take advantage of many resources for learning how to identify wildlife. Various field guides are available along with spotting scopes and binoculars. Bird calls for various sites can be played to help with bird identification. Also there are many things to touch and to examine including pelts, scat, skulls, bird eggs, and antlers. Mixed into the display are informative signs about wildlife including: where to go, how to find wildlife, when to go, and what to bring. Finally, there is an interpreter available to answer questions and offer information.

Depending on the wildlife viewing season, Vantastic II sets up dis-



*Hali Thompson, Carolyn Seramur, and Julie Buehler traveled across the Chugach National Forest with Vantastics I and II.*

plays at different locations along the Seward and Sterling Highway, particularly at sights on the Kenai Peninsula Wildlife Viewing Trail. During the spring and summer, Exit Glacier and the Kenai Lake Outlet offer Dall sheep and mountain goat viewing while Tern Lake provides migratory bird viewing. As the summer continues, schools of salmon take over the streams and provide excellent salmon viewing at Bear Creek, Ptarmigan Creek, and the Russian River. Sometimes wildlife that feeds on salmon can be seen

such as bears, eagles, and other small mammals or birds.

In addition to the Kenai Wildlife Viewing Trail, Vantastic II made appearances throughout the Chugach National Forest this summer. Events included the Mt. Marathon Race/ 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade in Seward, Wagon Wheel Days in Hope, and the Moose Pass Summer Solstice Festival. Vantastic II also joined Vantastic I for an appearance at the Copper River Wild Jamming Salmon festival in Cordova, and the Valdez Gold Rush days.