

Where to Have Heart-Pounding Wild Animal Encounters (Part I)

5 July 2012



During their Trans-Americas Journey road trip through The Americas Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl have had face to face encounters with some of the most exciting wild animals on the planet. Here's where you can do the same.



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Antarctica: Circed by killer whales

Sure penguins are cute. They're adorable. But it was a different kind of black and white animal that really got our hearts pounding during a trip through Antarctica. Shortly after leaving our ship in an inflatable zodiac on our way to a shore excursion we were surrounded by killer whales. The group of five orcas, including one male with a huge dorsal fin, approached in formation then splintered around and under our zodiac, emerging on the other side before circling back for another pass.

North Slope, Alaska: Your own private safari park

An 800-kilometre dirt road cuts north from Fairbanks, Alaska through the Brooks Range, over the Atigun Pass then down into the North Slope tundra plains all the way to the oil fields of Deadhorse. It's called the haul road and so few people travel along it that the area's plentiful wild animals have never really developed a fear of humans. We saw enormous hawks perched on roadside poles in the treeless expanse. Pure white arctic foxes hunted for lemmings in the tundra just a few metres off the road. Caribou crossed the road. Musk ox huddled together in the distance. We even managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of the notoriously shy wolverine (picture a huge badger with a bad attitude). Two enormous arctic owls were so unafraid of us that they hovered less than a metre over our heads, swiveling their flat faces around to stare at us with intense black eyes as we stood on the side of the road. We got back in our truck.



Badlands National Park, South Dakota: Buffalo in your bed

The Sage Creek Primitive Campground in **Badlands National Park** is a gorgeous place to spend a night or two. It's also a preferred hangout for a herd of bison which sometimes have to be (gently) shooed away from your tent.

Valle de Bravo, Mexico: A million monarch migration

Between November and March, millions of monarch butterflies navigate thousands of kilometres from Canada and the U.S., where they were born, to mating areas in Central Mexico. Once the butterflies arrive, they rest and eat (they love the fir trees here) then mate like crazy. So many monarchs congregate in particularly favourable sections of the forest that their collective weight bends down tree branches. Their collective wing beats actually make noise. And who knew butterflies had a smell? In numbers like this they do.



Look for **Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl's Just Add Adventure! series** every Wednesday and Friday all summer long on Travel and Escape!

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