



Ready for their close-up

Live-streaming webcams let you watch wildlife around the world

As I write this, I'm watching a couple young, bull elephants playfully spar in Tembe Elephant Park in South Africa. It's happening live, on the other side of the world, but I'm witnessing it from the comfort of my desk. Yesterday, from my same vantage point, I watched a large brown bear catching salmon in its mouth as they attempted to jump up and over Brooks Falls in Katmai National Park, Alaska. My



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InSites

nature voyeurism over the last couple days has also included watching pandas playing in China, a wolf napping in Minnesota, alligators basking in Florida and bald eagles perched on Catalina Island, California.

I'm able to travel virtually around the world to watch wildlife thanks to Explore.org. The website features numerous live-streaming webcams placed around the globe so you can witness Mother Nature in all her glory. You can also download the Explore app from the site for mobile devices.

The live streams are mesmerizing. My fear when I first went on

the site was that it would be boring videos of empty woods, and you do encounter some of that. But I'm surprised by how many animals you get to see. The site has picked good places to put its cameras and it's easy to get sucked in as you watch the animals go about their lives.

Because of time differences it might be night where you want to watch when it's daytime here. But some of the cameras work at night and you can watch infrared video of animals at a waterhole in Africa or the surf pounding on beaches in Hawaii. Many natural events are seasonal, so a location may be intense during part of the year and quiet at others. For instance, there's a camera set up to watch the Northern Lights in Manitoba, Canada, but nothing is happening now. If you watch it in late winter or early spring you will see a good show. Right now, the cameras in Katmai trained on the bears fish-

ing are full of activity as they fatten up for hibernation. Watch this space on Sunday, Oct. 2, for more on the fat bears of Katmai.

The home page of the site has a large frame at the top showing the featured live stream, which is currently the Alaskan bears. Below that is a grid of 100 smaller frames, each with a thumbnail image from its live feed. Clicking on a thumbnail brings that feed to the main frame. If you scroll down past the grid you'll find information about the one currently playing, including maps, weather, details about the animals and more. There's also a schedule of events on the site and a section for viewer comments. Back up on the main frame there's a button that lets you take a snapshot from the video. There's also a gallery of snapshots and a link to social media sites.

Not all of the cameras show wildlife. Some of them are set up at sanctuaries that care for

wild or domestic animals, including dogs, cats and horses. Some cameras are in large aquariums that feature sharks, jellyfish or penguins. You can watch bats, manatees, falcons, osprey and much more.

While the live-streaming cameras make up the bulk of the site, there's also a section that features short films. The films cover a much broader range of subjects, including human rights, music, culture and nonprofits. Some of the films are just highlights from the camera feeds while others are scripted documentaries.

This site will steal your time. I found myself jumping from camera to camera to see what was happening in the various sites that interested me for much longer than I should have.

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