

Guidelines for good practice wildlife viewing

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Introduction

Good practice involves respect for:

- Fauna, flora and the rest of biodiversity
- People in the tourism industry (including one's own company and others)
- Local communities
- Tourists

Training and certification elsewhere

At the Galapagos Islands, the National Parks Service and the Research Station run intensive courses for operators, which are pre-conditions for obtaining licenses.

Wildlife Guides in South Africa generally get good training in wildlife ecology and behaviour, which enhances visitor safety as well as education, and adds to understanding of potential impacts on wildlife.

In Australia, Ecotourism Australia includes guidelines for wildlife watching in its eco-accreditation for tour companies, and Wildlife Tourism Australia includes guidelines on its website plus links to much literature.

General

- No direct killing of wildlife should be allowed except where:
 - Human life in imminent danger
 - Mercy killing is called for (seriously injured or ill animal suffering from its condition and no hope of survival)
 - There is occasional use of abundant local species (especially fish) where it does not infringe on biodiversity conservation and is harvested sustainably and in a humane way (I.e. fish killed immediately upon capture, not left to die slowly)
- It should be explained to visitors that
 - although the guide will try to give them the best possible experience, the welfare of individual animals and conservation of the species must take priority over sightings and photos, also that if animals are substantially disturbed in a popular viewing area they may desert it, making it difficult for subsequent visitors to find them.
 - this is a wilderness area, not a zoo, and it is important the animals are allowed to behave normally, fulfilling their ecological roles and continuing natural foraging and their behaviour, not enticed to provisioned food or influenced in other ways to make a appearance.
 - since this is a wilderness area, expectations of frequent encounters with large and exciting animals may be unrealistic, but the small and inconspicuous creatures have their role to play and just as worthy of attention and respect (acknowledgment of this can increase tourist satisfaction with their experience and decrease tendencies to harass guides or wildlife)
 - disturbance of wildlife can lead to both welfare and conservation problems, and visitors must allow the guidelines of the guide as to how close and by what method to approach animals, the use of lights, controlling noise levels and sudden movements, and whatever else is applicable to a given situation
- Guides should become sufficiently knowledgeable of local animal behaviour to detect if an animal is becoming aggressive, and how best to deal with the situation if so. In general, running from an aggressive animal is to be avoided, as it often excites them and induces them to give chase, so slowly backing off is usually the best approach. Whether to "make yourself

bigger” by raising arms or doing the opposite to show submission, whether to make eye contact with the animal or avoid doing so, remain silent or make a noise, etc. depends very much on the species.

- Wild animals should not be fed except under exceptional circumstances (e.g. providing fruits to frugivorous animals after a cyclone has destroyed most fruiting trees)
- Lights and noise at ecolodges and homestay should be controlled at night. Lights used for human safety on boardwalks etc should be low-intensity and shining where needed without spreading light into the surrounding forest.
- No vertebrate animal should be handled as part of the tour except for humane reasons (to remove from a painful or dangerous situation other than natural processes such as predation) or a brief handling by an experienced guide for identification - e.g. of a small frog or lizard, with due regard to hygiene for human and animal, and to welfare of the animal.
- No collecting of fauna or flora or their parts is permitted except in a very controlled situation of citizen science tours under the direction of experts and with permits from relevant departments

Approach

- Animals must be approached quietly by all, and with no sudden movements by anyone in the group
- Animals must be allowed to continue their natural behaviour, and should be left at the end of an observation period doing the same as they were when first encountered (with some obvious exceptions such as waiting for bats to fly at night, or waiting at a fruiting tree to observe what animals visit)
- If an animal - whether an egret, a monkey or an elephant - shows signs of disturbance at the approach (e.g. “on alert” staring at the approaching group or becoming more agitated, the group should retreat until it settles down and resumes normal behaviour
- When possible, animals should be approached not in a direct line towards them but at an angle as though about to head past them, watching all the time for signs of disturbance
- If a boat is already close to an animal or group of animals, a second boat joining them must not rush in to join them but follow the same cautious approach
- Bird nests should not be approached sufficiently closely to drive the parent from the nest (actual distances will vary with different species)
- Special care should be taken not to separate mothers and young of any species
- Boats should not impede the movement of river animals
- Predators should not be hindered from catching their prey (they or their young may be depending on the nutrition from whatever they are stalking)
- Deliberate flushing of birds and other animals from shelter should not be allowed
- Use of recorded bird calls, if used at all should be strictly limited to very occasional use, and are best used as aids of identification than to induce wild birds to present themselves while using important amounts of energy to defend their territories from phantom intruders.

Spotlighting and photography

- Animals should not be chased or deliberately distracted for photographs. Photographers and their guides must wait patiently for photos without disturbing the animals
- Spotlights/flashlights must not be shone directly into animal's eyes unless fitted with a red or other filter that substantially reduces the brightness. A bright light may be used to initially find the animal, but should then either be covered with a filter or the light re-directed so that the animal is in the periphery of the light rather than the direct beam
- Flashlight photos should not be allowed of nocturnal animals looking directly at the camera and less than 10m away. This is especially important for large-eyed animals such as tarsier or owls, or for any flying or gliding animal.
- If tourists wish to take photos of a nocturnal animal, the group should prepare while the animal is faintly illuminated, then at a signal the light may be some more brightly (but still not directly into the eyes) while all quickly take photos.
- Sleeping diurnal birds should not be unduly disturbed at night, if at all. The same procedure as for nocturnal animals should be observed for photos, with light being used for a few seconds

only, and the opportunity for photos or even sightings abandoned if the bird shows signs of agitation. Preferably they should be viewed only with infra-red goggles, binoculars or cameras (and visitors usually enjoy the opportunity to use these).