



Ethical Guidelines

For Wildlife Viewing and Photography



Wildlife viewers and photographers yearn to catch a glimpse of amazing wildlife and capture “the perfect shot.” It is critically important to remember that our irresponsible actions can leave a lasting negative impact on the wildlife we are after. Responsible viewing/photographing is imperative to keeping our wild spaces and animals healthy, stress free and safe. Below you will find our code of ethics that we strive to abide by when we are out viewing and photographing wildlife.

1. Learn as much as you can about the wildlife subject you wish to see. Learn about the species, its habitat and family group. Learn and understand the behavior of your subject. Be aware that some species and some individual animals are more accustomed to humans than others. While some animals may be comfortable around humans, others easily stress at our mere presence.

2. Learn to recognize wildlife alarm signals. Many animals are uncomfortable around humans and will give you plenty of signs to let you know that they are stressed or that you are too close. To avoid causing unnecessary stress or having wildlife subjects run away (or worse, run at you) look and listen for signs of concern or alarm.

3. View wildlife from a safe distance to protect both you and your subject. Respect an animal's spatial needs and never sneak up on any wildlife. If the animal's behavior is interrupted (resting, feeding, etc.), then you are too close. While we are all animal lovers, sometimes our actions may have an unintended reaction from the animal. As an example, an animal may become startled or even panicked and run into oncoming traffic.

4. Be patient! Never force an action. The most beautiful photographs often result from natural action. Never crowd, pursue, corner or make deliberate noises to distract, startle or harass wildlife. Many animals live on the brink of survival and the energy they use to “escape” could very well be the difference between life and death. The impact of these can be cumulative too.

5. Never come between a parent and its offspring. I've heard of bear cubs being treed and separated from their mother by a throng of tourists eager for a closer look. I've also seen photographers snap pictures below a nest of baby hawks, while the worried parents call frantically from a distance. This is unacceptable human behavior. Never encroach on nests or dens as certain species will abandon their young. Never interfere with animals engaged in breeding, nesting, or caring for young. Be a good role model, both as a photographer and a citizen. Educate others by your actions; enhance their understanding.

6. Never manipulate wildlife or their environment for the sake of a photograph. While it may be tempting to pick up and relocate an animal like a reptile to a more scenic spot for a photograph, it is not a good idea. Do not damage or remove any plant, life form or natural object. Do pack out trash. While it may be exciting to capture a wild snake or get a closer look, this action may be detrimental to the animal due to the amount of distress that is caused.

7. Never feed or leave food (baiting) for wildlife. While this seems harmless or even helpful, it can have disastrous consequences for the animal. Habituation due to handouts can result in disease or even death of that animal and injury to you. Many foods we may think are helpful to the animal can actually cause serious illness and/or malnutrition. Some species that are used to handouts may stop hunting or foraging. Once the handouts stop, it is too late for them to be in top condition to find food.

8. Consider your cumulative impact on an animal, a population and its environment. When I am out in nature hiking around wildlife or photographing wildlife, I try and avoid the same area twice in a row. I try to be aware of my surroundings and how popular they may be.

9. Never forget that these animals are NOT tame. No matter how docile or cuddly they appear, they are wild. No one would argue that you should not try to touch a rattlesnake or a bull elk, yet there have been numerous instances where a tourist attempted to have his/her photo taken next to these animals with disastrous consequences. I've even seen bull elk charge vehicles for being too close.

10. Consider the impact you have on the other human subjects as well. Treat others courteously. Ask before joining others already shooting in an area. Tactfully inform others if you observe them engaging in inappropriate or harmful behavior. Many people unknowingly endanger themselves and animals. Be a good role model, both as a photographer and a citizen.

Remember that the welfare of the subject and habitat are irrefutably more important than the photograph. It is our responsibility as stewards of our environment, to take great care whenever witnessing wildlife out in nature.