

Ethical Wildlife Photography Practices

Details below are pulled from WDFW Ethical Wildlife Photography blog:

wdfw.medium.com/ethical-wildlife-photography-practices-7e3ce6a65259



Audience: everyone with a camera (including a phone camera) can be considered a photographer.

Why is ethical wildlife photography an important practice?

Ethical photography can:

- be an accessible hobby done anywhere with tools as simple as cell phones.
- inspire others to help protect the wildlife and their habitats through conservation education.
- keep wildlife and their habitats safe from fear or harm.
- be a segway hobby or profession into enjoying other outdoor activities responsibly.
- encourage others to get involved responsibly with outdoor hobbies.
- get people outside and increase human well-being for a lifetime.

What does ethical wildlife photography *not* look like?

- Forcing animals to flee or flush; imitating wildlife; approaching baby animals, roosts or haul-outs, eggs, or hibernation sites; trying to get animals to look at the camera; or generally attempting to alter wildlife's natural behaviors.
- Approaching animals too closely (see "*rule of thumb*" below).
- Causing environmental damage, such as creating new pathways in vegetation or tearing down habitat.
- Causing wildlife distress. Stressed wildlife may flee, make eye contact, or demonstrate aggression through hissing, puffing up, raising hairs, pulling ears back, stomping, chattering teeth or beaks, etc.
- Trespassing on lands that are not open to the public.
- Leaving trash or pet waste behind.

Ethical photography practices

- Follow the "rule of thumb." Hold up your thumb in a hitchhiker fashion. Hold out your arm in front of you and place your thumb in line with your vision over the animal you are watching. If the pad of your thumb covers the animal, you are at a safe viewing distance. If not, back away until you are at a safer distance. If the animal still seems disturbed and is altering its natural behaviors, continue to distance yourself from the animal.
- Use of a long telephoto lens is helpful and encouraged, although it is not required for ethical photography.
- Avoid using a flash that causes an animal to become disturbed. Infrared lighting is best for night or low-light photography.
- Remain quiet and give wildlife a comfortable place to be. When animals feel comfortable, they may engage in behaviors photographers are attempting to capture on camera.
- Respect others, their space, and their hobbies.
- Know where you park. Leave lanes of traffic clear and safe for others and yourself. Shut car doors calmly and quietly. Honor "no parking" areas.
- Respect property boundaries. Do your photography on public land whenever possible. It is your responsibility to know if you are on private property. If it is necessary to cross private property, always ask permission of the landowners before doing so. Leave gates, fences, and land as you found them. Obey signs.

- Remain respectful of shared spaces and others' values. People enjoy wildlife in many ways, including hunting, birding, fishing, and others. Understand that some lands and wildlife may have cultural value for others. Honor those values.
- If bringing a pet, ensure that the pet is leashed and is not harassing wildlife by barking or chasing. Remember, pets must be leashed in all WDFW Wildlife Areas unless engaging in hunting activities.
- Pick up all trash and pet waste.

Sharing photos

- Keep wildlife safe by avoiding "geotagging" specific sites where you took photographs. General locations are acceptable, but pinning the specific locations of nesting sites, endangered species, or other special sightings may endanger the wildlife. For example, if you spotted and photographed a rare small mammal in Rainier National Park, "tag" the park, but refrain from listing a specific trail or site tag.
- Sharing photos on social media or the general public can be purposefully delayed until the animal has left the site to avoid attracting large numbers of visitors to see the species.
- Sharing photos is encouraged! Photographs can spread the word about conservation. Members of the public can share photos with WDFW online:



wdfw.wa.gov/share

Drones

- Be aware of laws for operating unmanned aircraft systems (UAS/drones) before entering an area. It is illegal to fly drones in designated Wilderness areas, national parks, and many other public lands. Please check rules and regulations before you head out. This includes following regulations set by the Federal Aviation Administration, which regulates all airspace.
- Drone operators should avoid flying drones near wildlife, especially those that are nesting, raising young, or breeding, as this can stress the animals and cause damaging behavior changes.
- Certain animals are protected under special laws and regulations at the state and/or federal level, including those that prohibit the harassment or disturbance of wildlife. Disregarding these restrictions can lead to hefty fines.
- Most drone footage of wildlife is captured with special research permits that outline specific limitations for using the drone to limit negative interactions with wildlife being studied.
- Drones are legal to operate on many public lands, but always be mindful of applicable laws and regulations — even those that aren't explicitly about using drones (i.e. laws prohibiting wildlife harassment). Always be respectful of wildlife, nature, and other public land users while operating your equipment.

Drones and Marine Mammals (from NOAA)

- The noise and close proximity of drones can disturb marine wildlife. When viewing marine mammals from the air using a drone:
 - Avoid buzzing, hovering, landing, taking off, or taxiing near marine mammals (on land or in the water), as these actions may alter animal behavior.
 - Avoid flying drones, or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), near animals. The noise and close proximity of drones can harass the animals and cause stress.
 - A note on drone/UAS guidance:
 - NOAA Fisheries is currently developing national guidance for drone (or UAS) operations targeting marine mammals. Until then, NOAA Fisheries reminds the public that dolphins, whales, seals, and sea lions are protected species and harming or disturbing them can be a violation of federal law.