

Ethical Wildlife Viewing Practices

Details below are pulled from WDFW Wildlife Viewing Webpage:

Audience: Everyone can experience wildlife in a variety of ways, even unintentionally (accidental or unknown encounters).



wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/wildlife-viewing

Why is ethical wildlife viewing an important practice?

Ethical wildlife viewing can:

- keep wildlife and their habitats safe from fear or harm.
- be a segue hobby into enjoying other outdoor activities (fishing, photography, hiking, etc.) responsibly.
- help perpetuate the activity and support Washingtonians economically, culturally, mentally, etc.
- inspire behaviors that support wildlife and environmental conservation for future generations.

What does ethical wildlife viewing *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 you; 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 wildlife viewing practices

RESPECT THE WILDLIFE

wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/wildlife-viewing/ethical-wildlife-viewing

- Keep a safe distance away from animals.
 - Capture or witness the natural behaviors of wildlife without harassing them by throwing objects, making noises, or forcing them to flee. Harassing certain species can be a crime.
 - 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.
 - Always keep your hands to yourself.
- Understand the risks of feeding wildlife. Do not feed wildlife in wild areas. Keep wildlife "wild" by letting them find their own appropriate food. Feeding wildlife can cause them to rely on humans for food, which can lead to unwanted behaviors, euthanasia, or unnatural death.
- Move quietly, slowly, and in plain view. Loud noises, sudden movements, or an unannounced approach can startle animals.
- Let animals move freely. Avoid cornering an animal or chasing it to get a better view. Ensure you are not following animals, placing yourself in their path of travel, or behaving in any way that might be seen as "harassment."
- Be a responsible pet owner. Ensure your pet does not harass wildlife by barking or chasing. Please leash your pet. Always remove pet waste.

- Enjoy wildlife as they are- wild. Watch wildlife's natural behaviors and enjoy their presence. Being around wildlife can be a rewarding and thrilling experience!
- Learn more about the species you watch. The more you know, the more you can appreciate, and the more you will be able to understand their behaviors.
- The more you go, the more you will see! Every day spent watching wildlife leads to new experiences. Be patient. You may be surprised at how a site you visited once may change seasonally and have different wildlife species.

RESPECT THE ENVIRONMENT

- Be clean. Pick up your trash and pet waste.
- Tread softly. Avoid heavy trampling through flowers, shrubs, grasses, water, etc. Some wildlife species are ground nesters or create burrows. Damage to the habitat affects all species in the ecosystem. Where trails are available, use them.
- Avoid making new paths. If no path is available, don't make one. One set of tracks invites another, so if you are in a group, spread out so that you aren't all stepping on the same fragile places repeatedly. Mountain bikes or motorized vehicles should stay on established paths or roads.
- Leave the flowers, seeds, or vegetation. It's a great temptation to pick flowers, gather berries and seeds, or dig up wild plants to move to your garden. Plants are part of the food chain for wild creatures and help make up a part of their habitat.
- If a behavior is not what you'd like to see 1,000 other people do, then avoid doing it yourself.

RESPECT THE PEOPLE

- Respect the rights of your fellow viewers. Other viewers have a right to experience the undisturbed wildlife that you are appreciating.
- Respect the property of others. Do your viewing 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.
- Respect the right of way. Park your car in designated areas and only drive on designated roads, even if you have a vehicle that will go over any terrain.
- Understand that some spaces may hold cultural value to others.

NOAA's Guidelines for Seal and Sea Lion Viewing



fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/viewing-marine-life

- Disturbance signals of seals or sea lions:
 - Increased movements away from the many animals, or herd movement toward the water.
 - Increased vocalization, aggressive behavior by many animals towards the disturbance, and/or several individuals raising their heads simultaneously.
 - A mother leaving her pup.
- Beach viewing marine mammals (seals, sea lions):
 - Avoid making the animal(s) aware of your presence: keep noise down, stay hidden, and stay at least 50 yards downwind of any animals.
 - Pups are often left alone for up to 24 hours while the mother feeds. They are not abandoned and should not be disturbed.
 - Do not offer food to wild animals or discard fish or fish waste on the beach; it is illegal to feed any marine mammal.
 - Do not touch or swim with the animals.
 - Taking "selfies" with seals or sea lions from close distances is illegal.
 - Remember to keep your distance.