



## Wildlife Viewing Ethics

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As so many know, venturing out into nature is good for us, physically, mentally and spiritually. As we explore the outdoors, there is always the chance that we may encounter wild animals, an exciting bonus to the day. Observing wildlife is one of life's richest experiences and thanks to the many television shows that are now broadcast about animals, as well as the internet, the appreciation of wildlife has never been greater. Unfortunately, bad behavior on behalf of the observers can sometimes

occur. As winter approaches, and winter migrants such as owls begin their trek down to visit us, it is important to remind wildlife enthusiasts about proper behavior when viewing wildlife - in all seasons. Wild animals must be treated with respect and wildlife watchers need to behave responsibly. There is a code of ethics that we must all follow while observing wildlife, both for the well-being of wildlife and your own safety. Peeking into the secret world of wildlife is tremendously gratifying, but the following guidelines must be adhered to:

### Avoid getting too close

It is natural to want to be as close as possible as you can to an animal, but this is a big no-no. The closer one gets, the more threatened and stressed the animal will feel. Keep your distance; binoculars and/or a spotting scope will enhance your viewing experience, while allowing the animal you are observing to feel more comfortable. A more rewarding viewing experience will occur when the animal is behaving naturally, without being disturbed.



### Learn to recognize signs that the animal is uncomfortable with your presence



Animals are unpredictable and you need to continually be aware of the animal's response to your presence because what it might tolerate one minute could change within seconds. Some general clues to watch for are:

- The animal runs or flies away or toward you (such as a bluff charge).
  - The animal appears nervous and keeps looking at you with head up and ears pointing toward you.
  - The animal doesn't resume its normal activity, or "settle down". Birds may chatter angrily in your presence.
- In the case of a roosting owl, if the owl looks directly at you, it is now aware of you and could be uncomfortable.
  - The animal begins to display in some manner, such as a piping plover's "broken wing" display.

### Observe briefly

If you are looking at baby birds in a nest or an animal foraging for food, etc., remember that they are going about their day; and you are interrupting their normal behavior. Each time an animal is disturbed, it is put at a disadvantage because it has expended precious energy needed for survival. In addition, your presence at a nest or den site could alert a predator to the natal zone, thereby advertising an easy meal.



### Don't pursue an animal

Never chase an animal trying to get better glimpse or photo. Don't follow animals or behave in any way that might be seen as "harassment." In addition, please keep your dogs on a lead and never allow them to "flush" birds and other animals.

### Move quietly, slowly and in plain view

Loud noises, sudden movement or an unannounced approach startle animals, causing a stress response.

### Use a blind if possible

Your car also makes a wonderful blind, but please, for safety sakes, remember to pull completely off the road.

**Use calls, tape recordings of calls, or other device with moderation**

Overuse of such devices can interrupt breeding cycles, drive birds from their territories, or make animals "call shy" so that they may not respond to the real thing.

**Do not feed wildlife**

Have you ever heard the phrase, "A fed bear is a dead bear"? Sounds extreme, but in many cases, it is true. Wildlife can quickly become habituated to humans. It does not take much more than one productive encounter with a human for a wild animal to associate us with food, thereby leading to potentially dangerous or uncomfortable human/animal conflicts. These rarely end well for the animal. In addition, feeding waterfowl bread and other non-nutritious foods is detrimental to their health and disrupts normal behavior. Note: We are not discouraging backyard birdfeeders. Please be sure to fill with nutritious seeds and suet for your feathered friends.

**When in large groups, try to break up into smaller groups**

Small groups of people are less disturbing, usually talk more quietly, and tend to act in a more responsible way than big groups do.

**Do not disturb the habitat you are in**

Always stay on the trail. You could be trampling important food sources or rare vegetation.

**Respect the rights of your fellow viewers**

Other viewers have a right to see the undisturbed wildlife that you are viewing. Don't flush birds or other animals, thereby perhaps ruining the chance for other observers to see it.

In summary, as ethical wildlife watchers, we must place the needs and safety of wildlife first, protect habitats, and respect the rights of others. A rewarding wildlife watching experience is one that consists of animals behaving as naturally as possible in their own environments, not reacting to our presence. Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon promotes responsible recreation and if you follow the simple guidelines provided above, your experience will be enhanced. Please behave in a way that promotes responsible and respectful wildlife viewing!

For specific birding ethics, please see <http://www.aba.org/about/abaethics.pdf>

