

# **THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY TRAVEL ETHIC FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL**

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Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today. In some countries, so far little-known to travellers, where there are huge problems of unemployment and weak national economies, tourism is being regarded as a new primary industry. It creates employment and often brings in foreign currency to economically marginal areas. Sightseers from more affluent nations are ever searching for new places to explore. The trend seems to be growing away from sun, sea, and sand holidays toward adventure, the outdoors, wildlife watching, and cultural interests. Close encounters with members of the animal kingdom are at very high interest levels. This coincides with a rapidly developing public awareness of environmental matters. Such a combination of conditions could lead to an influx of excursionists into environmentally sensitive areas which, if not carefully managed, could exert pressure on and do possibly irrevocable damage to the natural resources it seeks.

The National Audubon Society realizes that the maintenance of these sensitive resources will ensure the continuation of tourism in such areas. The resource in question is the entire natural world, from coastal Alaska and the high Arctic and Greenland, to the wilderness of Antarctica and all that lies between. The National Audubon Society has become increasingly aware of both the potential and actual conflict between tourism development and the natural environment. We are completely convinced that more can be done to create a positive balance between the two and to create an atmosphere where commercial operators and environmentalists can interact positively.

We recognize that tourism can be a powerful tool favouring environmental conservation particularly through enhancement of public awareness of environmentally sensitive areas and their resources and the stimulation of action and mobilization of support to prevent the erosion of such environments.

Toward these goals, the National Audubon Society urges all tour operators promoting exploration in wilderness areas to adopt the guidelines here stated.

## **1. WILDLIFE AND THEIR HABITATS MUST NOT BE DISTURBED**

Fragile habitats must not be stressed. Trails will be followed. Plants will be left to grow. In delicate habitats, vegetation destruction and rock slides can easily be caused by the trampling of too many people. Mosses, lichens, and certain wildflowers and grasses, may take as much as 100 years or more to regenerate, and must not be walked upon. It is the obligation of the tour company and the naturalist leaders to promote a "stay on the trail" policy. No responsible tour operator or naturalist should allow the removal or picking of plant specimens or other ground cover. Introduction of exotic plant species must be avoided. Coral reefs take anywhere from several years to several decades to regenerate.

Therefore, the National Audubon Society insists that all of its tour operators provide the broadest protection possible for this underwater life form. Destruction of any part of any coral reef calls for the greatest censure. Animal behavior will not be inhibited. Because many of the most well-subscribed tours are operated during various animals' breeding seasons, tour operators and leaders should establish and always maintain at least minimum distances from these animals.

Scientific studies predict that a specific animal behavioural function, such as courtship, nesting, or feeding young, demands a specific amount of energy on the part of the breeding animal. Approaching animals too closely causes them to expend energy needlessly in a fury of defensive territorial display. This can cause an energy deficit that reduces the animals' productivity in the same way as does a food shortage. If disturbances are caused by visitors early enough in the breeding cycle, the parents may abandon the breeding site.

Additionally, while the adults are warding off intruders, eggs and young are vulnerable to chilling and unguarded young are more susceptible to predation. Animals will not be harassed or approached too closely. Our recommendation is that all tour participants keep a minimum distance of 20-to-30 feet from seals, walruses, otters, giant tortoises, lava lizards, sea turtles, koalas, all marsupials, and unwary plains herd animals. We recommend that all visitors stay on the periphery of animal assemblages (e.g., penguin colonies, seabird colonies, terneries, albatrosses on nest, courting groups).

This means: Visitors should never be allowed to surround an animal or group of animals. Visitors and leaders must remain alert never to get between animal parents and their young. Visitors must never be allowed to get between marine mammals and the water's edge. Nesting raptors should be viewed only through binoculars or telescopes at considerable distances from the nest. Crowd control ethics include keeping the decibel level as low as possible, there by minimizing the potential threat to animals.

The advent of sophisticated photographic technology means that even amateur photographers can get professional-looking photographs while keeping a respectable distance from the subject. Photography of birds and animals should never include the removal of nestlings or young from the nest or removal of foliage or camouflage from close to the breeding site. Removal of animals from burrows, dens, caves, or tree cavities must be prohibited at all times. Relentlessly following or harassing birds or animals for the sake of a photograph should never be allowed. Lingering obtrusively in close proximity to a nesting site, preventing the animal from returning to the site, should never be allowed. Touching animals must never be allowed. Every effort will be made to minimize a visit's impact, and if that effort is inadequate, the visit will be curtailed.

## **2. AUDUBON TOURISM TO NATURAL AREAS WILL BE SUSTAINABLE.**

Audubon will encourage local guides, landowners, and conservation representatives to develop and implement long-term visitor plans to ensure the sustainable use of their wildlife habitats. Audubon also encourages patronage of locally benign concessionaires.

## **3. WASTE DISPOSAL MUST HAVE NEITHER ENVIRONMENTAL NOR AESTHETIC IMPACTS.**

All tour operators must take into account the fragility of the areas visited with regard to proper waste disposal. All cruise ships, whether operating in the Arctic or sub-Arctic, the Great Barrier Reef of Australia, the islands of the Southern Ocean, long the Antarctic Peninsula, the Pacific shores of South American and Galapagos, or along the reaches of the Orinoco and Amazon rivers must commit to a shipboard anti-dumping/anti-garbage policy. This policy ensures that the shipboard crew and staff will not foul any waters, particularly with regard to non-biodegradable (plastic) materials. If necessary, all trash must be contained and carried back to apert where proper disposal is available.

Any tour operator offering the opportunity for visiting land wilderness areas overnight or for several days must make provision for carrying out all trash generated while there. The tour operator and

naturalists should promote an attitude of keeping every specific site as clean as possible. No littering of any kind should be tolerated.

The National Audubon Society will neither patronize nor approve any vendor that does not strictly adhere to this guideline.

#### **4. THE EXPERIENCE A TOURIST GAINS IN TRAVELING WITH AUDUBON MUST ENRICH HIS OR HER APPRECIATION OF NATURE, CONSERVATION, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.**

Every trip to a wilderness area must be led by experienced, well-trained, responsible naturalists and guides. These naturalists should have a solid background in the various habitats to be visited, the flora and fauna contained there, and the sensitive nature of those habitats. These naturalists and guides must be able to provide proper supervision of the visitors, prevent disturbances to the area, answer questions of the visitors regarding the flora and fauna of the area, and present the conservation issues relevant to the area. All tour operators should provide adequate space for these naturalists so that the leader-to-group size ratio never exceeds one to 25. The maximum size of a visiting group will depend upon the fragility of the surroundings, in which case the ratio could drop to as little as one to ten. These naturalist/guides serve as the environmental conscience of the group and as such should be an integral part of every tour.

#### **5. AUDUBON TOURS MUST STRENGTHEN THE CONSERVATION EFFORT AND ENHANCE THE NATURAL INTEGRITY OF PLACES VISITED.**

One constant theme in Audubon tours will be the problems facing wildlife and their habitat, and the solutions that may be achieved. On tours, particularly to other countries, contacts will be sought and established with conservation organizations working in the areas visited. Their representatives will be encouraged to speak to our tours and sought, when appropriate, to serve as local naturalist leaders and lecturers to accompany Audubon en route.

#### **6. TRAFFIC IN PRODUCTS THAT THREATEN WILDLIFE AND PLANT POPULATIONS MUST NOT OCCUR.**

The National Audubon Society cannot condone a laissez-faire attitude with regard to purchase of certain types of souvenirs or mementoes. Habitat loss remains the single largest threat to animal species; however, commerce and poaching have also depleted countless animal and plant populations. All our vendors must conscientiously educate their travelers against buying the following items:

- \* All sea turtle products, including jewelry, sea turtle eggs, and skin cream made from turtle meat;
- \* Most reptile skins and leathers, particularly those from Latin America, the Caribbean, China, and Egypt (including all crocodilian products);
- \* Snakeskin products from Latin America and Asian countries, including India;
- \* Lizardskin products from Brazil, Paraguay, India, Nepal, and Pakistan;
- \* Leather products made of pangolin (anteater) from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia;
- \* Ivory from any source, especially worked ivory from elephants and from marine mammals, such as whales, walruses, and narwhals;

- \*Birds, including large parrots from Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Venezuela, and the Caribbean islands;
- \* Wild birds and their feathers and skins, used in or as artwork (including mounted birds);
- \* Coral from the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, Australia;
- \* Furs of spotted cats (e.g., snow leopard, jaguar, ocelot, etc.);
- \* Furs and fur products of seals and other marine mammals and polar bears;
- \* Any orchids and cacti.

## **7. THE SENSIBILITIES OF OTHER CULTURES MUST BE ESPECTED.**

Audubon tours travel in areas of widely varying ethics and practices. On our trips we are the guests of these cultures and tour opportunities are to learn and enrich our own understanding of human nature, not to intrude and criticize. In the long run, our abilities to advance conservation will be strengthened by the bridges that understanding will establish. The effectiveness of the preceding guidelines rests on the performances and cooperation of the tour operator, the naturalist leaders, and the expedition travellers. Each of these parties must possess and promote a sense of propriety if the collective effort is to succeed. Harmless viewing of wildlife and habitats in which wildlife abounds can proliferate while preserving both the activity and the resource.