

SHOOT TO CARE

Principles of Wildlife Photography Ethics Teton Photography Group - Joint Statement

The prime goal of wildlife viewing and photography is to experience an animal in the wild without disrupting its behavior. This is true for mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Whether you're out hiking in the backcountry or sightseeing from your car, a chance encounter with wildlife is a treasured moment. Be aware that the ecosystem you visit is fragile, so tread gently and practice "leave no trace" principles. No wildlife photograph is ever worth causing any harm to your subjects or their habitat. Following a few simple, common-sense principles will help protect you and our wildlife.

Location / Habitat:

- Cars, crowds, and equipment should never obstruct traffic. Park as far off the roadway as possible, without damaging fragile plant life, with the flow of traffic and where there is ample room and good visibility.
- Observe area closure signs and stay on roads, trails, boardwalks, and raised platforms where they exist. Keep habitat disturbance to a minimum and do not go onto private property without permission of the owner.
- Respect the land and all plant life, do not blaze new trails, cut or remove parts of a plant to get a better background, or unnecessarily damage the area in any way. Leave no trace that you were there.
- Don't make sudden loud noises around wild animals. Keep all conversation to a minimum – you are an observer.
- In the absence of management authority, use good judgment – be respectful and treat the wildlife, plants, and habitat as if you were a guest. Protecting the environment and habitat for the wildlife is paramount.

Wildlife:

- Welfare of the wildlife always comes first. Harassment of any wildlife is illegal.
- View wildlife from a safe, respectful distance for both you and them. If the animal shows any signs of stress (interrupting its behavior, rest, feeding, etc.) or approaches, you are too close and should move back. Minimum distance limits exist for approaching wildlife in the National Parks, these distances should also be observed elsewhere (100 yards for bears and wolves; 25 yards for all other wildlife.) It is our responsibility to maintain these distances as an animal moves. This is true even if an authority is not present or we lose the photographic opportunity.
- Exercise restraint when observing or photographing wildlife by respecting the basic needs of animals to eat, rest, raise young, seek shelter, nest, or escape.
- Refrain from imitating or using animal/bird calls or electronic devices, which disrupt the natural activity of the animal.
- Never:
 - Feed or leave food (bait) for wildlife. This includes birds and small critters.
 - Sneak up on or otherwise surprise a wild animal.
 - Surround, crowd, corner, chase, or follow wildlife.
 - Block an animal's path or ability to cross a road or trail
 - Harass, disturb, chase, or attempt to move wildlife or nests.
 - Approach or disturb adult wildlife with young, newborn or young, nests, or dens.
 - Approach a carcass or other food source.

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Other Visitors:

- Be a role model as a photographer and citizen--educate and enhance understanding of others by your actions.
- When there is a crowd of people, stay with them and do not break away for a closer shot.
- Show respect and courtesy for fellow photographers and other visitors.
- Tactfully and courteously inform visitors about inappropriate or potentially harmful behavior – educate the public to be safe and protect our wildlife.

Other Thoughts:

- Use appropriate lenses to photograph wild animals--if an animal shows stress, move back and use a longer lens.
- Pause for a moment and consider:
 - Are my actions in pursuing this animal for photographs putting the animal under stress?
 - Is the cumulative impact of those of us taking photographs of this animal habituating a wild animal to human presence, possibly leading to problems for the animal or people down the road?
 - No species should suffer as a result of our photography.
- Know your surroundings and what safety precautions are needed, such as the proper use of bear spray.
- Use natural barriers. Your vehicle, small ridges, bushes, trees and water features may provide added security to your subject provided an adequate distance from the animal is maintained.
- Be honest. Is the image presented truly wildlife in their natural habitat or is it from a reserve or rehabilitation facility? If the animal was photographed in any form of captivity there should be a statement to that fact with the image. Respect anyone's wish to keep a location private.
- Enjoy your photography but remain responsible, safe and aware!

This statement of ethical principles for wildlife viewing and photography was produced through the efforts of the Ethical Wildlife Photography Liaison Group. Members include: **Teton Photography Group**, Jackson Hole Bird and Nature Club, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, Art Association of Jackson Hole, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, National Elk Refuge, and the Shoot To Care campaign.

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