

IAATO Birdwatching Guidelines

Viewing birds on shore

On approach of boats to shore, birds such as penguins may be subject to disturbance by small boat¹ operations close to landing sites or colonies.

- Approach or depart a landing site or colony slowly to minimize any disturbance.
- Staff/crew should assess the best landing point – ideally as far from groups of birds as possible. This is particularly important if birds are moulting near the shore.
- Avoid boat operations in waters where birds enter and exit, are bathing, or are feeding close to colonies. Be aware of birds in the water; slow down and/or alter course to avoid collision.
- When viewing birds on cliffs or on land from small boats, approach, cruise and depart the area slowly.



Recommended approach distances to birds

- Keep at least 5 meters/15 feet from nesting seabirds.
- Pay particular attention to individuals or groups of penguins in moult; stay at least 5 meters/15 feet away;
- Keep at least 10 meters/30 feet from nesting, and 25 meters/75 feet from displaying albatrosses.
- Southern giant petrels seem particularly prone to disturbance whilst nesting; stay at least 25 meters/75 feet away.
- If there is an observed change in the bird behaviour then move away.



Once on shore

- Walk slowly, encouraging visitors to pause and watch the animals. Avoid blocking 'walkways' in colonies and water entry and exit points.
- If parent birds are blocked from returning to their nests, increased predation of eggs and chicks by skuas and gulls may occur. In addition, parent birds will waste precious energy by avoiding human obstacles on their way to their nests or being displaced from the shortest access route.
- Take care in tussock grass where birds may be nesting. Seabird burrow habitat under bare earth can be very fragile and should not be walked on.
- If skuas (jaegers) or terns start dive-bombing, they may be protecting young or nests. Gulls are also prone to disturbance. Retreat in the direction you approached from without walking backwards. Be aware that eggs and young are well camouflaged and might be hidden from your view.
- Under no circumstances should 'chumming' (depositing fish guts or oil) be done to attract birds. Never feed wild birds.
- Later in the season inquisitive chicks may approach people. Remain a passive observer and do not encourage interactions or place yourself in the path of mobile chicks. Do not touch chicks.

¹ For the purposes of this document, 'small boats' are defined as zodiac-style Inflatable boats, such as rigid or semi-rigid hull Inflatable boats or any similar small landing craft used for shore interaction.

Viewing birds on water

Sometimes spectacular concentrations of seabirds may be found out at sea e.g., rafts of birds either feeding on the surface, diving from it, or simply resting and bathing. Many of these birds may have flown or swam hundreds or thousands of miles, often to find food for their young.

- Stay on the fringes of these concentrations and avoid disturbance.
- Ships and small vessels should stay at least 100 meters/300 feet.
- Small boats and human powered watercraft should stay at least 30 meters/90 feet away.

Very rarely, swimming penguins can find themselves in a small boat when they 'porpoise', landing on the deck.

Occupants should remain quiet and wait for the penguin to find its own way over the side and return to the water. It is normally not necessary to assist.

