

IAATO General Information for Wildlife Watching

Introduction

IAATO's General Information for Wildlife Watching and related Guidelines aim to provide guidance to IAATO operators for viewing cetaceans, seals, and birds in their marine environment. These guidelines minimize potential environmental impacts to wildlife and suggest ways to comply with Annex II (Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora) of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The guidelines do not replace any domestic governmental laws, but provide an additional code of conduct to help reduce potential disturbance to the marine environment. Some countries have guidelines or regulations stricter than these, which may override IAATO's guidelines. Violation of national regulations may be punishable by fines, imprisonment and, in extreme cases, seizure of vessel. IAATO operators should be aware that compliance with the IAATO guidelines might be insufficient to prevent violation of, and penalties resulting from, national laws and regulations.

Compliance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea has priority over these guidelines at all times.

These guidelines are intended to be used by IAATO members operating:

Any type of vessel e.g. ship, sailboat, yacht, Zodiac, small boats, kayak, or stand up paddle board operated by officers, crew, expedition staff and visitors involved in navigating in wildlife-rich areas during viewing sessions.

Due to the intrinsic nature of wildlife being present in all waters surrounding Antarctica, jet- skis, any type of surf, kite, skim or wind board are not to be used.

The guidelines aim to:

- Minimize wildlife disturbance;
- Protect cetaceans, seals and seabirds while ensuring a high quality wildlife-watching experience through responsible observation. (Many passengers are concerned about the welfare of wildlife and expect high standards of conduct by operators);
- Avoid harmful impacts on marine wildlife populations by ensuring that the normal patterns of daily and seasonal activity of the animals are maintained in the short and long term. Competent, careful boat handling avoids harming wildlife and leads to better wildlife watching.





Reduce possible impacts from vessels

Possible negative impacts from vessel operations include physical injury, interference with or disruption of normal behaviour, stress, underwater noise and possibly increased exposure to predators.

In addition, animals could be exposed to increased levels of environmental contaminants such as oil from leaking outboard engines and discharged bilges.

The recommended guidelines will help minimize the level of potential disturbance and should prevent the following from occurring:

- Displacement from important feeding areas; Disruption of feeding;
- Disruption of reproductive and other socially important behaviours; Changes to regular migratory pathways to avoid human interaction zones; Stress from interaction;
- Injury;
- Increased mortality or decreased productivity/survivorship (and therefore population decline).

Aircraft and helicopter operations

- Aircraft (including helicopters) should follow the guidelines laid out in Antarctic Treaty Resolution 2 (2004) 'Guidelines for the Operation of Aircraft near Concentrations of Birds in Antarctica.'



Entanglement and strandings

- Any animals entangled in fishing equipment etc., should be assisted where possible. Please only use experienced staff/crew for these situations and take the necessary precautions such as protective clothing – seal bites are particularly prone to disease.
- Photographs of the entanglement should be taken. Please complete a report and send it to IAATO.
- Should you not be able to assist, please record details including geographic position (expressed as coordinates in latitude and longitude), species, and type of entanglement.

Please report the event as soon as possible, so assistance may be sought from other vessels with experienced staff onboard.

- Details of dead (floating) animals and 'strandings' (beached) cetaceans should be recorded and reported to IAATO. Where possible, please take photographs recording the front and side of the head of the animal (for species identification). Please include a scale of measurement (e.g., a ruler or Zodiac paddle) in the photographs. If the state of decomposition of the animal allows, please also take photographs of the fluke (tail) and the dorsal fin (if present) to allow recognition of potentially known individuals (i.e. using photo-identification).



Identification and data collection

Identifying and, in many cases, recording species for the voyage log purposes is part of most onboard naturalists' remit. Logs, which include these records coupled with latitude and longitude of sightings, species identification, and any additional information such as identification photographs, are of immense value.

Information on citizen science projects collecting these data can be found through IAATO website or by contacting iaato@iaato.org