

# IAATO Overarching Principles for Wildlife Watching

The SCAR Antarctic Wildlife Health Working Group has advised that there is a high risk that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) will arrive in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic regions during the 2023/24 – 2024/25 austral summers. Globally, the virus has caused mass mortality events in wild birds and seals. People working with or close to wildlife should assume HPAI will arrive and maintain the highest biosecurity possible. Report any unusual or high mortality events to IAATO following appropriate procedures via your expedition team.

## Who is this document for?

The IAATO Overarching Principles for Wildlife Watching are for all IAATO Operators and Provisional Operators, including employees, contractors and partners, involved in planning and conducting activities in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic.

## What is this document for?

**This document highlights the overarching principles and general obligations expected of IAATO Operators, and applicable associate members, when encountering and viewing wildlife. It outlines why these are important for avoiding wildlife disturbance and harmful impacts.**

IAATO is a global industry alliance dedicated to safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. Its member Operators create and review operational procedures which, when combined with other national and international requirements, aim to reduce negative impacts of human activities on wildlife. These can include:

- Physical injury;
- Introduction of disease or non-native species;
- Underwater noise;
- Stress;
- Interference with or disruption to normal reproductive, feeding, resting and other socially important behaviours;
- Displacement or changes to regular movements, including migratory routes;
- Increased exposure to predators;
- Increased mortality or decreased productivity/survivorship (and therefore population decline).
- Exposure to increased levels of environmental contaminants (e.g. leaking oil or fuel)

Responsible, well managed operations will help maintain the normal daily and seasonal activity of animals, mitigate potentially harmful impacts in the short and long term, and lead to better wildlife watching. As such, they will help protect wildlife while offering an enriching, educational experience for visitors.



## **What are my general obligations as an IAATO Operator for wildlife watching?**

Abide by all applicable IAATO policy requirements and procedures. Support the mission of IAATO to advocate and promote the practice of safe, environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic.

Adhere to all applicable international and national legal policy requirements, including those of the Antarctic Treaty System, notably the Antarctic Treaty and Environment Protocol, and the International Maritime Organization conventions

Subscribe to the principle that your planned activities will have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment.

Ensure all your activities are authorized or permitted before carrying them out and that you have a copy of your permit/authorization in the field.

Every situation is different. In whatever way you chose to observe wildlife, on land, sea or by air, consider how individual circumstances might have an impact on the vulnerability of wildlife to disturbance. Monitoring animal behaviour throughout any encounter is important. For example, when viewing seals, an animal that raises its head more than once may be stressed by your presence. You should move slowly away.

Adhere to recommended distances from wildlife, but remember these distances assume the animals are not showing any signs of disturbance from your presence. A greater distance may need to be kept.

Be aware that your permit/authorization may require a greater distance to be kept.

Be aware that IAATO wildlife watching and other procedures do not replace any domestic governmental laws, but provide an additional code of conduct to help reduce potential disturbance to the environment. Some nations have guidelines or regulations stricter than IAATO's which may override IAATO procedures.

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 IAATO procedures 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 IAATO Procedures at all times.

Circulate (to all staff, crew and guests) and follow General Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic as adopted by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties under Resolution 4 (2021) and Guidance for Those Organizing and Conducting Tourism and Non-governmental Activities in the Antarctic, as adopted by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties under Recommendation XVIII-1 (1994).