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# WATCHING WILDLIFE FROM A VEHICLE

BEST PRACTICE





# INTRODUCTION

Wild Scotland is the Scottish Wildlife and Nature Tourism Operators Association. We represent wildlife tourism companies across Scotland, all of whom are passionate about Scotland's wildlife. These guidelines provide advice on best practice for wildlife tourism companies whose aims are to provide an enjoyable and memorable wildlife watching experience whilst minimising the impact on the nature and wildlife.

This document is part of the Wild Scotland Best Practice Guideline Series. More details about other guidelines in the series can be found at [www.wild-scotland.co.uk](http://www.wild-scotland.co.uk)

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## 1. GENERAL

- All necessary licences and insurances should be up-to-date and driver/vehicle regulations adhered to.
- Consideration should be given to obtaining specialist off-road driver training if appropriate. A separate guide should be carried where driver regulations require this.
- All relevant insurances, policy statements (e.g. Health and Safety, Child Protection) and staff disclosures and qualifications should be available for inspection by competent authorities.
- The driver should not only be competent with the vehicle but also have a sound knowledge of wildlife and natural history, unless a separate guide is carried.
- You must have express permission from the landowner before driving a vehicle off the public road. Motorised activities are excluded from the public's access rights (except for vehicles built or adapted for use by a person with a disability and being used by that person).
- Be aware of local codes of conduct or sensitive areas and adjust your activities accordingly.
- Guests should be reminded not to leave any litter.
- Guides are encouraged to gain appropriate professional qualifications.

- Guests should have the opportunity to provide feedback on their tour. This feedback should be recorded.
- You are encouraged to join the VisitScotland Wildlife Experience Quality Assurance Scheme.
- You are encouraged to display your Wild Scotland sticker on the vehicle.

## 2. RESPONSIBLE PROFESSIONAL WILDLIFE WATCHING

In order to provide a safe, professional and responsible wildlife watching experience, Wild Scotland recommends that all members follow the guidelines below, in addition to the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) with which they should be thoroughly familiar.

### Wild Scotland recommends:

- Above all, you should set a good example. If you disturb wildlife, your guests and others watching you will think it is acceptable to do the same. If in doubt, back off (and explain your actions to your guests).
- Do not be tempted to get too close because your guests ask you too. The most genuine wildlife encounters are those where the animals are behaving naturally, so keep your distance.

- Contact the landowner or manage to obtain permission for any off-road vehicular access, and for advice on minimising your impact on land management activities, the environment and other people. They may well be able to enrich the experience you can give your guests. Adjust your plans where necessary to avoid damage or disturbance.
- Where possible, vehicles should remain on surfaced roads to avoid disturbance and habitat destruction, however if off-road is necessary, all means possible should be taken to follow existing tracks.
- Drive at a comfortable and appropriate speed for the benefit of your guests and to avoid disturbance.
- Consider turning off the engine if stationary for more than a few minutes.
- Always park your vehicle responsibly in relation to wildlife and other users.
- Be aware of what constitutes normal behaviour compared to signs of disturbance for the species around you. Move vehicle and/or guests away at the first sign of disturbance, preferably before.
- Brief guests on how to behave before they move away from the vehicle.
- Do not deliberately identify nest sites of rare or protected species; avoid them if possible.
- For any wild bird species listed on [Schedule 1](#), it's an offence to disturb:
  - any bird while it is building a nest
  - any bird while is in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young
  - any bird while lekking
  - the dependent young of any bird
- Sightings of key or unusual species should be recorded and submitted to a recognised sightings database (see Wild Scotland website for further information).
- If you see anyone intentionally disturbing or harassing wildlife make written notes and report the incident to the local Police Wildlife Liaison Officer with details such as vehicle type and registration as well as any photos or video footage.
- Sightings of key or unusual species should be recorded and submitted to a recognised sightings database (see WildScotland website for further information).
- If you see anyone intentionally disturbing or harassing wildlife make written notes and report the incident to the local Police Wildlife Liaison Officer with details such as vehicle type and registration.



Box 1

## GETTING THINGS OFF TO A GOOD START

Guests should feel welcome and involved in the trip. A briefing should be provided at the start of each trip to let guests know what to expect. Key information should include:

- A welcome and introduction of team if appropriate.
- Details of the trip and itinerary.
- Basic housekeeping (comfort stop, where to store bags etc).
- Safety instructions.
- Information on what you are likely to see during the trip (do not build up unreasonable expectations).
- Any other issues relevant to the trip relating to conservation, safety, behaviour, codes etc.
- The opportunity to ask questions.

### 3. GOOD GUIDING AND SAFETY

- When guests arrive, the vehicle should be ready and clean.
- A brief and friendly introduction should be given at the start of a trip (see Box 1).
- The driver/guide should be approachable, helpful and willing to speak to people and answer questions.
- The driver/guide should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject.
- When speaking to the group, ensure that everyone can hear. The best way to check is to ask.
- Do not address the whole group whilst driving unless your licence allows this and all the group can hear. Consider a lapel microphone and a speaker.
- Encourage people to get involved with looking for species. It helps keep guests engaged during the trip.
- Where appropriate, stop the vehicle and allow people out to see the wildlife.
- If guests are leaving the vehicle near wildlife, ask them to get out of the vehicle quietly, and not to speak too loudly or slam doors.
- If wildlife is spotted from the vehicle, ensure that everyone has the opportunity to view it, bearing in mind that not everyone may be able to see out.
- Guests should be told about, or have information available on the natural history and behaviour of species which are likely to be seen (see Box 2). It is not acceptable to merely point out species.

### 4. THE LAW AND WILDLIFE

It is your responsibility as a tour operator to be familiar with the law relating to wildlife. A summary of some of the key elements relating to wildlife law are shown below, but this are not exhaustive, both in terms of actions and species. Reference should always be made to the legislation itself.

#### It is an offence:

- to take or keep any egg of a wild bird;
- to take, damage, destroy or otherwise interfere with any nest habitually used by any wild bird included in Schedule 1 of the 1981 Act as amended;
- to obstruct or prevent any wild bird from using its nest;
- to intentionally or recklessly harass any wild bird included in Schedule 1 of the 1981 Act;
- to take, damage or destroy or otherwise interfere with the nest or nest sites of birds included on schedule A1 of the 2004 Act (presently this only applies to the white-tailed sea eagle);
- to harass birds listed on schedule 1A of the 2004 Act (presently this only applies to the white-tailed sea eagle); to uproot any wild plant, unless this is accidental or permission has been given by the owner of occupier of the land;
- to pick or destroy a specially protected plant ;
- to kill, injure, capture or disturb a specially protected animal or to commit a cruel act to any wild mammal;

- specific laws also apply to badgers, bats, seals and deer;
- for further information about Protected Species: Bird, refer to [NatureScot](#);
- for further information about wildlife and the law, refer to Scottish Natural Heritage at [here](#) (Note: the site currently being amended and only serves as an introduction. Any decision relating to wildlife law should be based upon appropriate advice).

### 5. FURTHER INFORMATION

See the [Wild Scotland website](#) on for current information.



Box 2

## INSPIRING PEOPLE TO FIND OUT MORE

Where possible, have available:

- Map of the area.
- Identification charts or field guides.
- Species charts in other languages.
- Spare binoculars.
- Wild Scotland members' listing.
- Recent relevant research.

# QUESTIONS & CONTACT

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document, or require clarification on any points, please contact us.

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