

IAATO Guidelines for Birdwatching



Viewing Birds on Shore

- 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.
- Avoid boat operations in waters where birds enter and exit, are bathing, or are feeding close to colonies. This is particularly important if birds are moulting near the shore.

Once on Shore



- Walk slowly and encourage passengers to simply pause and watch the animals. Avoid blocking 'highways' in colonies and water entry and exit points. Do not delay the return of parent birds to their nests by blocking access routes. Blocking access can increase predation of eggs and chicks. **Remain vigilant.**



- Take care in tussock grass where birds may be nesting, including in burrows under bare earth.



- If skuas (jaegers) or terns start dive-bombing, retreat in the direction you approached from without walking backwards. They may be protecting nests or young that you cannot see.



- Never feed wild birds.
Never use fish guts or oil (chumming) to attract birds.



Viewing Birds on Water

- **When in the vicinity of seabird concentrations at sea:**
Stay on the fringes of these concentrations; ships and small vessels should keep a distance of at least 100 meters (300 feet), small boats and human powered watercraft at least 30 meters (90 feet).
- Very rarely, swimming penguins will jump accidentally into a small boat. 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.



Recommended Minimal Approach Distances to Birds

- **Albatrosses:** stay at least 10 meters (15 feet) from nesting, and 25 meters (75 feet) from displaying birds.
- **Southern Giant Petrels:** stay at least 25 meters (75 feet) away. Giant Petrels are particularly prone to disturbance when nesting.
- **Other nesting seabirds:** stay at least 5 meters (15 feet) away.

**Be aware of birds in the water:
SLOW DOWN AND/OR ALTER COURSE TO AVOID COLLISION.**

IAATO Guidelines for Seal Watching



General Code of Conduct for Viewing Seals on Land and Ice:



- When viewing seals do not surround or separate them, especially mothers and pups. Stay on the side where they can see you.



- On beaches, avoid getting between seals and the sea. Walk 'above' them.



- Suggested minimum distances from seals ashore are 5–25 meters/15–75 feet. Certain species and behaviors require a specific distance to be kept (see below).

Understanding Seal Behavior

- Seals hauled out on land, rock or ice are sensitive to boats and human presence. Noises, smells and sights may elicit a reaction.
- Leopard seals are particularly inquisitive and can quickly become aggressive.
- Be aware of seal behaviour that indicates a seal has been disturbed. Such behaviours include:
 - An increase in alert or vigilance
 - Head turning
 - Change in posture from lying to erect
 - Hurriedly moving away from an approaching vessel
 - Open mouth threat displays (leopard seals on ice, elephant seals on land)
 - Aggressive displays or bluff charges in your direction
 - Biting zodiac pontoons by leopard seals



Viewing Seals on Land and Ice

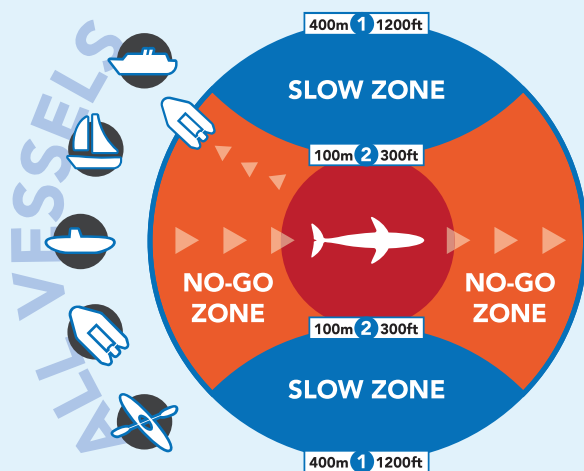
- **STAY LOW** – Try not to break their horizon or tower over hauled-out seals.
- Pups are often left alone when the mother is feeding. **They are not abandoned** and should not be touched.
- Any seal response other than a raised head should be avoided.
- If an individual or herd moves towards water, or a hurried entry into water by many individuals occurs, you should retreat slowly and carefully.
- Be aware that fur seals and sea lions are highly mobile on land and might charge (and potentially bite) if approached too closely - keep at least 15 meters/45 feet from them.
- Be aware of animals in tussock grass. A field guide should lead carrying walking stick or equivalent to keep the seal at a distance.
- Keep a minimum distance from jousting bull elephant seals of 25 meters/75 feet.
- Avoid sudden movements and keep all noises low.

If in doubt: RETREAT SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY.

IAATO Cetacean Watching Guidelines



Approaching Whales in Water



See a Blow? GO SLOW!

Zone 1: 400m/1200ft

- <5 knots AND go no faster than wake speed
- Don't approach <200m feeding whales
- Approach animals parallel or slightly to the rear
- Stay downwind

Zone 2: 100m/300ft for all vessels

- Do not approach any closer
- Idle engine, in neutral
- If turning engine off, first idle engine for 5 mins
- Avoid abrupt changes in engine noise that may startle animal
- Avoid using lateral thrusters for holding position as they produce intensive cavitation

General Guidelines for Viewing All Marine Mammals

- Animals may approach and stay with your vessel. If so, drift vessel passively, however drifting closer than acceptable distance to the animal is considered an intentional approach
- Do not chase or pursue animals
- Animals may alter their behaviour if they are disturbed, when in doubt, give the animals time and space
- Be vigilant for agitated behaviour and, if observed, let the animal depart and move away slowly:
 - Regular changes in direction or speed, moving away from encounter
 - Apparent general agitation
 - Hasty dives
- Breaching, tail lobbing and flipper slapping indicate socialising and animals may not be aware of boats. **Keep your distance**
- If an animal approaches a vessel to bow-ride, maintain a constant course and speed. **Do not enter a group of dolphins to encourage them to bow-ride**
- If an animal surfaces near your vessel, take all precautions to prevent collisions, while avoiding sudden changes in vessel speed or direction
- Be aware of other vessels and obstacles such as shorelines to ensure the animal is never trapped and an exit route is clear
- When watching animals in the water, a maximum of two ships or four small craft are recommended to approach
- Boats watching animals together should be next to each other, to ensure the animals have a clear route to exit
- If Orcas approach kayakers and exhibit 'spy-hopping', ensure that a safety boat is close to kayakers and consider transferring paddlers from kayakers to safety boat

Cetaceans are often very inquisitive and may approach close to vessels or watercraft. It is important that **the animal is in control at all times**

General Code of Conduct Around Marine Mammals:

	Stay with the animal up to a maximum time of 30 minutes. If signs of disturbance or change in behaviour occur at any time during the stay with the animals, retreat slowly and quietly.		Communicate with other boats to minimise disturbance to animals.
	Never herd (surround), separate or scatter a group of marine mammals, particularly mothers and young. Where appropriate, stay where they can see you. Never chase animals.		Avoid sudden movements that might startle the animal.
	When close to marine mammals keep voices low, don't whistle or shout.		Never attempt to touch or feed animals.
	Keep radio volume down.		Playback of underwater sound of any kind should not occur. If hydrophones are used from small boats to listen to the underwater sounds it is preferable to have the engines of the small boats shut down.

Departure from Whale Watching in Water

- Move off at a slow no-wake speed to 400m (1200ft), avoid engaging propellers within the minimum approach distance if possible
- When moving away, avoid moving in front of the animal, always move towards the rear
- Do not chase or pursue departing animals