

# Field Trip Etiquette

## **Promote conservation!**

Conservation is the protection and wise, sustainable use of natural resources. A visit to any natural area can be a very stimulating and exciting experience for students of any age. However, all of us must be careful to remember that natural areas are habitat for wild plants and animals, so we as visitors should act like guests visiting or sharing someone's home.

## **Teach important field skills.**

A field trip is an excellent opportunity to teach students outdoor etiquette skills they can use all their lives and pass on to their own families and children. The site should be left as close to natural as possible so that future visitors will be able to enjoy the area's plants, wildlife, and beauty.

## **Discuss responsible environmental behavior.**

Discuss the Rules for Observing Wildlife handout (found on the next page) with your students. Lead your class in a discussion of the following questions: How can you help take care of animals, plants, and other organisms you encounter in your field and classroom studies? How can you keep from disturbing them and their homes? How can you learn more about your environment by observing it in its natural state? What can you do to ensure that enjoyable camping and other outdoor recreational activities do not harm wildlife or habitats?

## **Establish clear field trip rules.**

Discuss the Rules for Observing Wildlife with your class. Why are they important? Ask the class to develop a list of consequences for breaking these rules. Have them design a field trip contract and ask each student to sign it to signify that he or she understands the rules and promises to abide by them. Pass out a copy of the rules for students to refer to. Include them in their field trip journals.

## **Practice the right way to behave.**

Use the Birding Code of Ethics Activity to role-play before actually going on a field trip. Designate some students as "shorebirds," others as "bird-watchers," and some as observers of the situation. Discuss what the "bird-watchers" did right and what they did wrong from the shorebird's and the observer's perspectives.

## **Practice social etiquette.**

Look out for your buddies! Students can help keep each other safe. Be polite to guest speakers and trip leaders by listening and paying attention.



# Rules for Observing Wildlife

## **Act Like a Guest!**

Step softly and quietly while observing animals. Stay quiet. Yelling, shouting, and “roughhousing” will scare animals away and may cause some to abandon their nests or young or to avoid the area in the future. Also, it is more likely that you will see wildlife if everyone is quiet.

## **Put Things Back Where You Found Them.**

Replace rocks and logs after looking underneath (to keep the roofs on animal homes, and to keep people from stepping in the depressions left by the rocks). Do not take live animals away from their homes. Feathers and nests need to be left where you found them.

## **Avoid Handling Animals.**

Observe wildlife from a distance. If you are sampling invertebrate populations, be very gentle. They have different anatomies than our own, and we may be unaware of ways they can be hurt. There are animals in some areas of the world that secrete toxic liquids or can deliver a painful, sometimes deadly, bite or sting.

## **Leave the Area Cleaner Than You Found It.**

Do not litter and pick up any litter you find. Carry a litter bag in your back pocket. This bag can also be used for any toilet paper you have to use. Bathroom stops should be made just before leaving on the trip and afterwards, but if it is necessary to “use the bushes,” never leave toilet paper scraps behind. Before leaving, ask yourself “Is this area as beautiful now as before my visit?”

## **Respect the Site and Everything That Lives There.**

Minimize trampling of plants and fungi. Stay on designated trails as much as possible. Always watch where you are walking. Even if shorebirds are not nesting in your area, many other forest, meadow, and marsh birds nest on the ground. Keep pets at home or at least on leashes.

## **Observe Wildlife from a Distance.**

Do not chase, repeatedly flush (cause to move away), or harass animals (whether on foot, in a car, boat, plane, all-terrain vehicle, or snow machine). Harassing animals is against the law in many states and may be punishable by a fine or jail sentence. Move slowly, allowing the animal to keep you in view. Avoid sneaking up on or surprising animals. Never touch a nest of eggs or chicks! Move away from the nest in the direction you were originally going. Do not leave a one-way or V-shaped scent trail to a nest that predators can follow easily. Watch for the following signs that you may be too close to birds:

- Head raised, looking at observers
- Skittish
- Excessive preening or pecking at dirt or foot; bill wiping
- Alarm calls--repeated chirping and chipping
- Distraction display--broken wing, tail spread, etc.

## **Respect State or Federal Rules.**

Check the state and federal regulations regarding collecting plants or animals. In general, avoid collecting anything. Instead, make careful observations and detailed sketches in your field journals. Limit the number of bottom and core samples you take when sampling invertebrates. This is very disruptive to the area, especially where large numbers of people visit.

