

# NOAA's OCEAN ETIQUETTE : MARINE WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDELINES



**Learn before you go.** Many marine wildlife species have specific habitat needs and sensitive lifecycle requirements. Use the Internet, guidebooks, and knowledgeable people to learn how to observe them responsibly, where you plan to visit them.



**Keep your distance.** Getting too close to animals can be harmful to them and to you. Take precaution and use binoculars that let you view animals from a distance where they won't be disturbed.



**Hands off.** Touching wildlife, or attempting to do so, can injure the animal, put you at risk, and may be illegal for most protected species.



**Do not feed or attract marine wildlife.** Feeding or attempting to attract wildlife may harm animals by causing sickness, death, and habituation to people. Animals that are accustomed to humans become vulnerable to injuries and can be dangerous to people.



**Never chase or harass wildlife.** Do not surround, trap or separate animals, approach them head on, or approach them directly from behind. Make sure they know you are there before they see you.



**Stay away from wildlife that appears abandoned or sick.** Animals that appear sick may not be. They may be resting or are young awaiting the return of a parent. If animals are approached, their behavior may become aggressive. If you think an animal is sick or injured, contact local authorities.



**Wildlife and pets don't mix.** Wild animals can injure and spread diseases to pets, and pets can harm and disturb wildlife. If you are traveling with pets, keep them leashed and away from marine wildlife.



**Lend a hand with trash removal.** Human garbage and fishing debris are some of the greatest threats to marine wildlife. Carry a trash bag with you and pick up litter found along the shore.



**Help others to become responsible wildlife watchers and tour operators.** Lead by example. It's up to you! Obtain and carry a few copies of these guidelines on your travels and share them with others. Patronize businesses that follow these guidelines. Protecting and conserving is everyone's responsibility.

## How You Can Help;

- *Become Ocean Literate.*
- *Volunteer with an organization that works to protect the ocean.*
- *Be mindful of your own environment. Litter and pollutants can end up in the ocean and harm marine wildlife.*
- *Treat our coasts, oceans, and the animals that live there with care.*
- *Actively participate in local, state and federal efforts to protect and manage coastal and ocean resources.*

For marine mammal strandings and violations call:

**NOAA Enforcement Hotline**  
**1-800-853-1964**

## Federal Laws Protecting Wildlife

### Marine Mammal Protection Act

The MMPA prohibits the “take of marine mammals. “Take” includes actions such as hunting, harassing, killing, capturing, injuring, and disturbing a marine mammal. For more information please consult the text of the MMPA at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr)

### Endangered Species Act

The ESA prohibits the “take” of a threatened or endangered species in U.S. territorial waters. “Take” under the ESA means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. For more information, please consult the text of the ESA at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr).

### National Marine Sanctuaries Act

The NMSA provides authority for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of national marine sanctuaries, and activities affecting them, in a manner which complements existing regulatory authorities. NOAA develops regulations for each sanctuary that are responsive to their specific issues, needs and goals. For more information visit [www.sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/protect/regulations/welcome.html](http://www.sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/protect/regulations/welcome.html).

### The Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The MBTA prohibits the pursuit, take, capture, kill, sale, purchase, or transport of migratory birds and their parts (including eggs, nests, and feathers) or attempt to engage in such conduct. For more information, please consult the text of the MBTA at [www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/intrnltr/treatlaw.html](http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/intrnltr/treatlaw.html)

**The following guidelines** are intended to help you enjoy watching marine wildlife without causing them harm or placing your personal safety at risk.

Please note that these are general guidelines, and it is best to follow location or species-specific guidelines if they are available.



## It's as easy as knowing basic Ocean Etiquette

For more information on the simple things you can do to protect our marine life visit [sanctuaries.noaa.gov/protect/oceanetiquette.html](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/protect/oceanetiquette.html) and [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/viewing.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/viewing.htm)

### Contributors

to these guidelines include NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, NOAA Fisheries Service Office of Protected Resources, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Watchable Wildlife, Inc., International Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, Wildlife Conservation Society, and a number of state and regional agencies, organizations, and institutions.



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