

Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Guidelines¹:

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument promotes Responsible Marine Wildlife Viewing and offers the following guidelines. These guidelines do not replace Federal or state law. Pursuit and feeding of marine mammals is **prohibited** by Federal law.

1. Remain at least 100 yards from humpback whales, and at least 50 yards from other marine mammals (dolphins, other whale species, and Hawaiian monk seals).
2. Observe turtles from a distance.
3. Bring binoculars along on viewing excursions to assure a good view from the recommended viewing distances.
4. Do not attempt to touch, ride, or feed turtles.
5. Limit your time observing an animal to 1/2 hour.
6. Marine mammals and sea turtles should not be encircled or trapped between boats or shore.
7. If approached by a marine mammal or turtle while on a boat, put the engine in neutral and allow the animal to pass. Boat movement should be from the rear of the animal.

Background:

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

Before you visit a wildlife location, read about the wildlife, viewing sites and local regulations to get the most from your wildlife viewing experience. Many species live only in specific habitats such as estuaries, coral reefs, sand dunes or the open ocean. Seasonal and daily cycles also influence when and where an animal may be located.

Keep your distance from wildlife by using binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras with zoom lenses to get a closer look. Marine wildlife may be very sensitive to human disturbance, and if cornered, they can harm the viewer or leave the area. If wildlife approaches you, stay calm and slowly back away or place boat engines in neutral. When closer encounters occur, do not make sudden moves or obstruct the travel path of the animals - let them have the unhindered "right of way."

Stay away from wildlife that appears abandoned or sick. Some marine animals such as seals leave the water or are exposed at low tide as part of their natural life cycle -- there may be nothing wrong with them. Young animals that appear to be orphaned may

¹ These guidelines are taken from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service website:
http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_laws_policies_guidelines1.html

actually be under the watchful eye of a nearby parent. An animal that is sick or injured is already vulnerable and may be more likely to bite. If you think an animal is in trouble, contact the local authorities for advice.

Never touch, handle or ride marine wildlife. Touching wildlife, or attempting to do so, can injure the animal, put you at risk and may also be illegal for certain species. The slimy coating on fish and many marine invertebrates protects the animal from infection and is easily rubbed off with a hand, glove or foot. Avoid using gloves when diving or snorkeling to minimize the temptation to touch. Remember, wild animals may bite, body slam or even pull you underwater if startled or threatened.

Do not feed or attract marine wildlife. Feeding or attempting to attract wildlife with food, decoys, sound or light disrupts normal feeding cycles, may cause sickness or death from unnatural or contaminated food items, and habituates animals to people. Habituated animals are vulnerable to vessel strikes or vandalism, and can be dangerous to people.

Never chase or harass wildlife. Following a wild animal that is trying to escape is dangerous. Never completely surround the animal, trap an animal between a vessel and shore, block its escape route, or come between mother and young. When viewing from a boat, operate at slow speed, move parallel to the swimming animals, and avoid approaching head-on or from behind, and separating individuals from a group. If you are operating a non-motorized vessel, emit periodic noise to make wildlife aware of your presence and avoid surprise.

Help others to become responsible wildlife watchers. Speak up if you notice other viewers behaving in a way that disturbs the wildlife or other viewers, or impacts sensitive habitats. Be friendly, respectful and discrete when approaching others. When operating a boat, lead by example and reduce your speed in areas frequented by marine wildlife, anchor properly and encourage others to do the same. Violations of the law should be reported to local authorities.