Birdwatching Ethics

Birdwatching is a lifestyle. Nothing is better than wandering in the nature and observing the world’s nicest creatures the birds. Unfortunately many birds are threatened nowadays and it is our common responsibility to protect them and their habitats. Hungarianbirdwatching.com actively takes part in this mission by supporting Birdlife Hungary and RSPB through individual memberships. Further on 5% of our revenue is spent on donations for bird and land protection initiatives.

Being an organiser of birding trips and birdwatching holidays, we are aware that the most wanted birds for our customers are usually rare species that are globally threatened and very sensitive. That’s why we set very strict ethical rules for our birding tours. We use only experienced guides and our tour manager guarantees that our birding tours are conducted in an ethical manner. We strictly adhere ourselves to the Birdwatcher’s Code of Conduct and to the American Birding Association’s Principles of Birding Ethics.

We also await that our customers accept these ethical clauses and do not make any pressure on our guides to breach these rules.

Birdwatcher’s Code of Conduct

Today’s birdwatchers are a powerful force for nature conservation. The number of those of us interested in birds rises continually and it is vital that we take seriously our responsibility to avoid any harm to birds. We must also present a responsible image to non-birdwatchers who may be affected by our activities and particularly those on whose sympathy and support the future of birds may rest. There are 10 points to bear in mind.

1. Welfare of birds must come first. Whether your particular interest is photography, ringing, sound recording, scientific study or just birdwatching, remember that the welfare of the bird must always come first.
2. **Habitat protection.** Its habitat is vital to a bird and therefore we must ensure that our activities do not cause damage.

3. **Keep disturbance to a minimum.** Birds' tolerance of disturbance varies between species and seasons. Therefore, it is safer to keep all disturbance to a minimum. No birds should be disturbed from the nest in case opportunities for predators to take eggs or young are increased. In very cold weather disturbance to birds may cause them to use vital energy at a time when food is difficult to find. Wildfowlers already impose bans during cold weather: birdwatchers should exercise similar discretion.

4. **Rare breeding birds.** If you discover a rare bird breeding and feel that protection is necessary, inform the appropriate RSPB Regional Office, or the Species Protection Department at the Lodge. Otherwise it is best in almost all circumstances to keep the record strictly secret in order to avoid disturbance by other birdwatchers and attacks by egg-collectors. Never visit known sites of rare breeding birds unless they are adequately protected. Even presence may give away the site to others and cause so many other visitors that the birds may fail to breed successfully. Disturbance at or near the nest of species listed on the First Schedule of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is a criminal offence.

5. **Rare migrants.** Rare migrants or vagrants must not be harassed. If you discover one, consider the circumstances carefully before telling anyone. Will an influx of birdwatchers disturb the bird or others in the area? Will the habitat be damaged? Will problems be caused with the landowner?

6. **The Law.** The bird protection laws, as now embodied in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, are the result of hard campaigning by previous generations of birdwatchers. As birdwatchers we must abide by them at all times and not allow them to fall into disrepute.

7. **Respect the rights of landowners.** The wishes of landowners and occupiers of land must be respected. Do not enter land without permission. Comply with permit schemes. If you are leading a group, do give advance notice of the visit, even if a formal permit scheme is not in operation. Always obey the Country Code.

8. **Respect the rights of other people.** Have proper consideration for other birdwatchers. Try not to disrupt their activities or scare the birds they are watching. There are many other people who also use the countryside. Do not interfere with their activities and, if it seems that what they are doing is causing unnecessary disturbance to birds, do try to take a balanced view. Flushing gulls when walking a dog on a beach may do little harm, while the same dog might be a serious disturbance at a tern colony. When pointing this out to a non-birdwatcher be courteous, but firm. The non-birdwatchers' goodwill towards birds must not be destroyed by the attitudes of birdwatchers.

9. **Keeping records.** Much of today's knowledge about birds is the result of meticulous record keeping by our predecessors. Make sure you help to add to tomorrow's knowledge by sending records to your county bird recorder.

   - Please, send your observations of rare birds to Hungarian Rarities Committee or upload to Birding.hu.

10. **Birdwatching abroad.** Behave abroad as you would at home. This code should be firmly adhered to when abroad (whatever the local laws). Well behaved birdwatchers can be important ambassadors for bird protection.

   (This code has been drafted after consultation between the British Ornithologists Union, the British Trust for Ornithology, the RSPB, the Scottish Ornithologists Club, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the editors of British Birds.)
Principles of Birding Ethics

Everyone who enjoys birds and birding must always respect wildlife, its environment, and the rights of others. In any conflict of interest between birds and birders, the welfare of the birds and their environment comes first.

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.

1(a) Support the protection of important bird habitat.
1(b) To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming. Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area;

You can find an excellent, unbiased article on call playback here

Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover.

Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.
1(c) Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners.

The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.
1(d) Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

2. Respect the law, and the rights of others.

2(a) Do not enter private property without the owner’s explicit permission.
2(b) Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas, both at home and abroad.
2(c) Practise common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.

3. Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.

3(a) Keep dispensers, water, and food clean, and free of decay or disease. It is important to feed birds continually during harsh weather.
3(b) Maintain and clean nest structures regularly.
3(c) If you are attracting birds to an area, ensure the birds are not exposed to predation from cats and other domestic animals, or dangers posed by artificial hazards.

4. Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care.

Each individual in the group, in addition to the obligations spelled out in Items #1 and #2, has responsibilities as a Group Member.
4(a) Respect the interests, rights, and skills of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other legitimate outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience, except
where code 1(c) applies. Be especially helpful to beginning birders.

4(b) If you witness unethical birding behavior, assess the situation, and intervene if you think it prudent. When interceding, inform the person(s) of the inappropriate action, and attempt, within reason, to have it stopped. If the behavior continues, document it, and notify appropriate individuals or organizations. Group Leader Responsibilities [amateur and professional trips and tours].

4(c) Be an exemplary ethical role model for the group. Teach through word and example.

4(d) Keep groups to a size that limits impact on the environment, and does not interfere with others using the same area.

4(e) Ensure everyone in the group knows of and practises this code.

4(f) Learn and inform the group of any special circumstances applicable to the areas being visited (e.g. no tape recorders allowed).

4(g) Acknowledge that professional tour companies bear a special responsibility to place the welfare of birds and the benefits of public knowledge ahead of the company’s commercial interests. Ideally, leaders should keep track of tour sightings, document unusual occurrences, and submit records to appropriate organizations.

Responsible Tourism

Responsible tourism is about tourists making environmentally friendly, sustainable, ethical and respectful choices when travelling and minimising the negative impact of tourism. The 2002 Cape Town Declaration contains the characteristics of responsible tourism and lays down guiding principles for economic, social and environmental responsibility. Upon planning our tours we fully consider these principles. If you are a responsible tourist, rather you choose a Hungarian tour operator, which "generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities" than a non-Hungarian operator taking out most of its profit from the host country. Beside birding we always put emphasis on showing our cultural heritage, and you will know more about the history and culture of our beautiful country from a local guide than from a foreigner or expat.

Below you find an excerpt from the Cape Town Declaration, you can read the full text here

Having the following characteristics, Responsible Tourism:

- Minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts; generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- Provides access for physically challenged people; and is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence

Guiding Principles for Economic Responsibility

Assess economic impacts before developing tourism and exercise preference for those forms of development that benefit local communities and minimise negative impacts on local livelihoods (for example through loss of access to resources), recognising that tourism may not always be the most appropriate form of local economic development
Birdwatching Ethics and Responsible Tourism

Maximise local economic benefits by increasing linkages and reducing leakages, by ensuring that communities are involved in, and benefit from, tourism. Wherever possible use tourism to assist in poverty reduction by adopting pro-poor strategies.

Develop quality products that reflect, complement, and enhance the destination.

Market tourism in ways which reflect the natural, cultural and social integrity of the destination, and which encourage appropriate forms of tourism.

Adopt equitable business practices, pay and charge fair prices, and build partnerships in ways in which risk is minimised and shared, and recruit and employ staff recognising international labour standards.

Provide appropriate and sufficient support to small, medium and micro enterprises to ensure tourism-related enterprises thrive and are sustainable.

Guiding Principles for Social Responsibility

Actively involve the local community in planning and decision-making and provide capacity building to make this a reality.

Assess social impacts throughout the life cycle of the operation – including the planning and design phases of projects – in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones.

Endeavour to make tourism an inclusive social experience and to ensure that there is access for all, in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and individuals.

Combat the sexual exploitation of human beings, particularly the exploitation of children.

Be sensitive to the host culture, maintaining and encouraging social and cultural diversity.

Endeavour to ensure that tourism contributes to improvements in health and education.

Guiding Principles for Environmental Responsibility

Assess environmental impacts throughout the life cycle of tourist establishments and operations – including the planning and design phase – and ensure that negative impacts are reduced to the minimum and maximising positive ones.

Use resources sustainably, and reduce waste and over-consumption.

Manage natural diversity sustainably, and where appropriate restore it; and consider the volume and type of tourism that the environment can support, and respect the integrity of vulnerable ecosystems and protected areas.

Promote education and awareness for sustainable development – for all stakeholders.

Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that best practice is followed, for this purpose consult with environmental and conservation experts.