



# IAATO MARINE WILDLIFE WATCHING GUIDELINES PART 1

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The aim of these guidelines is to protect cetaceans, seals and seabirds by avoiding any harmful disturbance to normal behaviors, while ensuring a high quality wildlife-watching experience through responsible observation.

*Competent, careful boat handling and visitor management avoids harming wildlife and leads to better wildlife watching.*

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR VIEWING WILDLIFE

The animal/s should dictate all encounters: they will choose whether to stay with the vessel or move away. Respect their decision and never chase or pursue animals.

Experienced ship's officers and naturalists are often able to evaluate animal/s behavior and can best judge if it is possible to carefully approach the animal/s or not.

In line with Recommendation XVIII-1 and IAATO general codes of conduct never attempt to touch or feed birds or animals.

### Whales, Dolphins, Porpoises & Seals

When in an area known for marine mammals, vessel operators should keep a good lookout forward and always take care to avoid collisions: this may include stopping, slowing down, and/or steering away from the animal/s.

#### Awareness of the Animal/s' Behavioral Patterns:

Animals may alter their behavior if they are disturbed by your activities. If the cetacean is agitated or no longer interested in staying near the vessel, behavioral changes may be observed. When in doubt give animals their time and space.

#### General Code of Conduct Around Marine Mammals:

- Do not stay with the animal/s too long, with a suggested maximum time of one hour. If signs of disturbance occur retreat slowly and quietly.
- Never herd (circle), separate, scatter, or pursue a group of marine mammals, particularly mothers and young.
- If a cetacean approaches a vessel to bow-ride, maintain a relatively constant course and speed. Do not enter a group of dolphins to encourage them to bow-ride.
- Do not play back underwater sounds. This includes recorded whale or dolphin sounds.
- During any close encounters follow the guidelines below.

#### Approaching Cetaceans:

There should be no intentional approach within:

- 30 meters or 100 feet for small boats (including kayaks);
- 100 meters or 300 feet for small boats (including kayaks) if cetaceans communally feeding;
- 100 meters or 300 feet for ships;
- 150m/500 ft. if ship over 20,000 tons;
- 200m/600 ft. if two ships present.

Helicopters or any aircraft should not approach closer than 300 meters or 1000 feet vertical distance. Aircraft should cease contact if the animals repeatedly dive or increase speed.

#### Approaching from a distance:

*Approximately 1500 to 3000 meters / one to two miles away*

- Reduce speed to 10 knots or less.
- Post a dedicated lookout to assist the vessel operator in monitoring the location of all marine mammals.

*1500 to 750 meters / one to one-half mile away*

- Reduce speed to 5 knots.

*Approximately 750 meters / half a mile or closer*

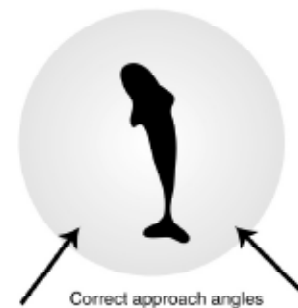
- Reduce speed to less than 5 knots.
- Maneuver vessel to avoid a head-on approach.
- Avoid sudden gear changes (e.g. into reverse).

#### When in the final stage of approach (approximately 200 meters/600 feet or closer):

- Approach at no faster than 'no-wake' speed or at idle, whichever is slower.
- Approach the animal/s from parallel to and slightly to the rear (see Figure 1).
- Once traveling with the animal, travel parallel with it/them.
- Stay clear of feeding baleen whales.

*For the purposes of this information small boat is defined as a Zodiac, RIB, Naiad, Avon, Polarcirkle or similar small landing craft.*

Figure 1



- Try to position the vessel downwind of the animals.
- Ensure good communication and co-ordination between vessels, small boats or Zodiacs in multi-vessel approaches.
- It is suggested not to have more than a maximum of two ships or four small craft watching each animal/s at a time.
- Ensure approaches are closely co-ordinated to avoid 'boxing-in' cetaceans, creating a 'tunnel' of small boats or kayaks, or crossing of their travel routes.
- Be aware of local geography – never 'trap' animals between the vessel and shore.

- Avoid sudden or repeated changes in direction, speed or changing gears when close to marine mammals.

#### When in the Optimal Viewing Area:

*(Note: Ideally this should be no more than one vessel at a time)*

*Approximately 30 meters/100 feet for Zodiacs/ 100 meters/300 feet for ships.*

- Should a vessel approach closer than the recommended minimum distance, withdraw at a constant, slow, no-wake speed, to at least the recommended minimum distance.
- When stopping to watch cetaceans, allow the motor to idle for several minutes before considering turning off.
- Avoid excess engine use, gear changes, maneuvering or backing up to the animals.
- Ships should avoid the use of bow or stern lateral thrusters to maintain position.
- Be aware that whales may surface in unexpected locations.
- Breaching, tail-lobbing or flipper slapping whales may be socializing and may not be aware of boats. Keep your distance.
- Feeding humpback whales often emit sub-surface bubbles before rising to feed at the surface. Avoid these light green bubble patches.
- Emitting periodic noise may help to let whales know your location and avoid whale and boat collisions.
- On some occasions animals may approach a vessel: in that instance put engines in neutral and do not re-engage propulsion until they are observed well clear of your vessel.
- Stay quiet and minimize passenger movement in small boats or Zodiacs during close encounters.
- Enjoy the experience.

*(Note: Allowing a vessel to drift within accepted recommended distances could constitute an intentional approach.)*

#### When leaving the Optimal Viewing Area:

- Move off at a slow 'no-wake' speed to the minimum distance of the optimal viewing area. Avoid engaging propellers within the minimum approach distance, if possible.
- Always move away from the animals to their rear, i.e., not in front of them.

