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# ETHICAL NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY IN TASMANIA

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# Ethical nature photography in Tasmania

**Taking photos of nature is an enjoyable and worthwhile pastime; one that can contribute to nature conservation and general appreciation of the environment. Although photography is a relatively harmless pursuit, your actions can still be detrimental to your beloved subjects.**

All nature enthusiasts, professionals and admirers should try to be interested in minimising their footprint in nature as much as possible. These guidelines have been produced to outline the best practice principles of ethical nature photography in Tasmania and to help nature persist in a world where more eyes are watching than ever before.

The following checklist will help you work out which sections of the guidelines might apply to your actions. If your practices or intentions tick a box, consult the corresponding section of the guidelines and note that:

**① Indicates information that can guide your actions to reduce impacts on nature**

**📋 Indicates that actions that could impact or interfere with wildlife or threatened flora, and might require permits or ethics approval granted to a research organisation**

**🚫 Indicates that land tenure and access constraints may need to be considered**

If there are no guidelines for your actions, apply your own moral compass and personal ethics. Create your own best practice principles, consider the impacts of your actions from the perspective of the subject, and think about what would happen if everyone did the same thing as you. You are also encouraged to interpret the guidelines in the context of your exact behaviour and the size of your party – the impacts of a sole photographer may be quite different to a large group. If you are part of an organised group that regularly visits nature, you might like to incorporate these guidelines into your standard procedures or modify them to suit your practices.

# Checklist for ethical nature photography in Tasmania

## 1. DO YOU WANT TO FOLLOW BEST PRACTICE?

### ☐ **Yes – See section A for general principles of ethical nature photography in Tasmania**

- ① The key theme is that taking nature photographs should never be at the expense of the subject and should not override ethical practices and respect for nature

## 2. WHEN YOU ARE PHOTOGRAPHING WILDLIFE:

### ☐ **Could your actions disturb animals? (see section B)**

- ① Any action that influences the behaviour of an animal should be considered as a disturbance and you should modify your actions accordingly – keep your distance and let the animals come to you

### ☐ **Will birds be photographed? (see section B1)**

- ① Birds can be very sensitive to disturbance, particularly disturbance of, or around their nests, which can lead to nest abandonment and brood failure (death of chicks). Don't search for bird nests – instead learn their behaviours that indicate distress and disturbance

### ☐ **Will shorebirds be photographed? (see section B2)**

- ① Shorebirds are additionally sensitive to disturbance – in particular, disturbance during the breeding season (1st of August to 31st of March) can lead to high levels of stress and brood failure. Don't search for shorebird nests, and learn their behaviours that indicate distress and disturbance

## 3. WHEN YOU ARE PHOTOGRAPHING LANDSCAPES AND/OR FLORA:

### ☐ **Will you encounter sensitive flora or ecosystems, including orchids, threatened values and alpine vegetation? (see section C)**

- ① Understand that your actions may be degrading sensitive values and follow general best practice principles from section A as well as avoiding the scenarios outlined in section C

# Checklist CONTINUED

## 4. CONSIDER WHAT EQUIPMENT YOU ARE USING:

- ☐ Do you use drones, automated camera traps and/or artificial light for nature photography? (see section D)
- ① Apply principles from section D to avoid detrimental impacts from these technologies
- ☐ Is it possible your equipment could spread weeds or pathogens? (see section A)
- ① Apply best practice environmental hygiene – [www.nrmsouth.org.au/biosecurity](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/biosecurity)

## 5. DO YOU COLLECT PHOTOS AND/OR SHARE THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

- ☐ Yes – See section E for social media culture (sharing and collecting trophy photographs)
- ① The key theme is that sharing or collecting nature photographs should make a positive contribution to conservation, art, general awareness or appreciation, and should not place the subject at risk through greater exposure or desire to photograph amongst others



# Guidelines for ethical nature photography in Tasmania

**The following information on ethical nature photography has been compiled from a variety of sources, including local experts and studies relating to Tasmanian species and ecosystems.**

Following these guidelines and adhering to the principles will reduce potentially harmful interactions with nature that can unintentionally result from photography.

The key theme is that taking and/or sharing nature photographs should never be at the expense of the subject and should not override ethical practices and respect for nature. If there is any likelihood that your photography may impact or interfere with wildlife or flora then it should only be undertaken with appropriate permissions, which may include ethics approval (e.g. through the DPIPWE Animal Ethics Committee) and/or threatened species permits.

## SECTION A

# General principles of ethical nature photography in Tasmania

### ① Understand the potential cumulative effects of your disturbance

- Consider your actions in the context of the potential impacts if everyone was to do the same thing

### ① Keep your distance – be a spectator and a witness, not a participant

### ① Don't 'garden' the area of your desired photo

- Even small alterations around your subject will make them more exposed to predators and weather conditions

### ② Watch your step and respect property boundaries

- Stay on formed tracks and areas of hardened ground or bare rocks – only go off track if there is a genuinely important reason for obtaining a photo, and if so use the same path to get back to the track
- Walk softly and avoid delicate soils and plants
- Ensure you have explicit permission before entering a property
- Never enter prohibited areas cordoned off and designated for rehabilitation or protection by conservation groups, Councils, etc.

### ① Apply best practice environmental hygiene

- To avoid spreading weeds and pathogens, make sure your clothing and equipment are thoroughly clean of soil, water, plants and animal material, including tripod legs, Velcro, shoe laces, your vehicle, etc.
- Don't handle your subjects; in particular, handling frogs can spread the lethal chytrid fungus
- Follow Tasmanian best practice guidelines for environmental hygiene:  
[www.nrmsouth.org.au/biosecurity](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/biosecurity)  
[www.nrmsouth.org.au/walkclean](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/walkclean)



## SECTION B

# Ethical wildlife photography in Tasmania

① Keep your distance – close approach will cause significant disturbance to wildlife – let the animals come to you

- Use telephoto lenses or digital zoom to reduce disturbance
- If you influence the behaviour of an animal, you are too close and are causing disturbance – you should distance yourself at once

- Follow whale and dolphin viewing guidelines when photographing marine mammals

[www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/caring-for-wildlife/whale-and-dolphin-viewing-guidelines](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/caring-for-wildlife/whale-and-dolphin-viewing-guidelines)

① Learn animal behaviours that indicate distress and disturbance

- Mammals will typically pause and tense their body for running when threatened by the approach of people
- Some species may attack if they feel threatened
- Signs of distress and disturbance in birds are presented in subsections B1 and B2

① Do not manipulate or influence behaviours of wildlife into more aesthetic or visible scenarios, including by:

- Picking them up and moving them
- Deliberately flushing, startling or chasing animals
- Using call playback, spotlights, laser pointers, etc.
- Feeding or baiting animals
- Animals can waste valuable energy in response to these methods and thus they should never be used for photography

📄 Various practices related to wildlife, including using call playback, spotlights, searching for nests, baiting camera traps, etc., are practices that are deemed to be sufficiently disruptive that they should only be applied under a scientific permit with ethics approval granted for research purposes – i.e. in cases where there are considered to be benefits that offset the impacts, or that impacts can be mitigated satisfactorily with approved methods



TELEPHOTO LENS



DO NOT CHASE  
ANIMALS



DO NOT FEED  
ANIMALS



DO NOT USE  
SPOTLIGHTS OR  
LASER POINTERS

## SUBSECTION B1

# General bird photography in Tasmania

### ① Don't search for bird nests or risk disturbing birds on their nests

- Raptors (including juveniles) will hunker down in their nests when threatened – in particular, they perceive great threat when approached or photographed from above, such as from adjacent hills, from aircraft, or with drones (see section D)
- Nest predators such as ravens and currawongs often watch the movement of people – stopping to observe a nest can thus alert the predator to the nest location and provide an opportunity to predate eggs and chicks
- Within nesting colonies, adults of the same species will kill chicks of other pairs if they leave their nest when a colony is disturbed

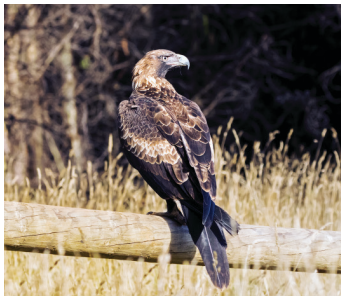
### ① Learn bird behaviours that indicate distress and disturbance

- Signs of distress and disturbance in birds include:
  - Frantic running and/or flying, particularly towards shelter
  - Constant vocalisations to partner and/or chick(s)
  - Overhead or nearby swooping, with or without vocalisations

- Stopping feeding or other behaviours
- Mock injury displays (e.g. limp wings) and playing dead
- Sitting very upright on nests/eggs – shows high vigilance
- Hiding behind vegetation/trying to camouflage
- Attempting to distract observers and draw attention away from nests/chicks

### ① Consult and apply the principles within other guidelines, such as BirdLife Australia's:

- Guidelines for Ethical Birding ([www.birdlife.org.au/documents/POL-Ethical-Birding-Guidelines.pdf](http://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/POL-Ethical-Birding-Guidelines.pdf)), and
- Disturbance from Recreational Activities Policy ([www.birdlife.org.au/documents/POL-Disturbance-to-Birds-2013-003.pdf](http://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/POL-Disturbance-to-Birds-2013-003.pdf))



## SUBSECTION B2

# Shorebird photography in Tasmania

- ① Shorebirds are highly sensitive to disturbance – in particular, disturbance during the breeding season (1st of August to 31st of March) can lead to nest abandonment and brood failure (death of chicks)
- ① Learn shorebird behaviours that indicate distress and disturbance
  - Signs of distress and disturbance in shorebirds include:
    - Head bobbing
    - Preening can indicate birds are conflicted between leaving and staying on nest
    - Frantic running and/or flying
    - Constant vocalisations to partner and/or chick(s)
    - Overhead or nearby swooping, with or without vocalisations
    - Running/flying purposefully towards dunes or other shelter
    - Stopping feeding, including slight crouches/pauses to prepare for running
    - Mock injury displays (e.g. limp wings) and playing dead
    - Sitting very upright on nests/eggs – shows high vigilance
    - Hiding behind vegetation/trying to camouflage
    - Attempting to distract observers and draw attention away from nests/chicks
- ① Shorebirds can be very difficult to detect even by trained observers – they can be disturbed well before observers notice them or they are even visible to the naked eye (with documented cases of small plovers flushing at distances of →200 m)
- ① Similarly, shorebirds may suffer physiological stress before behavioural reactions are apparent to photographers
- ① As little as 15 minutes away from the nest can result in lethal temperature fluctuations for eggs and chicks; shorebirds however are known to abandon their nests for over two hours following people simply walking through their territory
- ① Remaining in a breeding territory searching for a nest will lead to significant disturbance, and you are likely to step on eggs and/or chicks before you see them
- 📖 Subsequently, searching for shorebird nests in order to photograph must not be done; some publicly available images of shorebird nests, eggs, chicks, etc., were taken by trained researchers under permit



CONSTANT VOCALISATIONS  
CAN INDICATE DISTRESS  
AND DISTURBANCE



BREEDING SEASON (1ST OF  
AUGUST TO 31ST OF MARCH)



15 MINS AWAY FROM THE  
NEST CAN RESULT IN  
LETHAL TEMPERATURE  
FLUCTUATIONS FOR EGGS  
AND CHICKS



## SECTION C

# Ethical **flora and landscape** photography in Tasmania

- ① Understand sensitive ecosystems and learn to identify non-target species – follow general principles in section A
  - Photogenic habitats such as cushion plant mosaics and other alpine habitats suffer significant rates of dieback and death from trampling
  - Some natural formations (such as karst) are so fragile they can be damaged just by breathing on them
  - Other threatened and/or delicate plant species are often trampled where they occur around frequently visited photogenic orchids, as are seedlings and non-flowering plants of the same species
- ① Understand the potential flow-on and cumulative effects of your disturbance
  - Leaving prominent markers around orchids, such as fluorescent flagging tape, unnecessarily leads to increased visits from observers
  - Long focal length lenses and digital zoom are advisable for small subjects, including popular orchids in high traffic areas – multiple people getting as close as possible to an orchid increases the likelihood of accidental physical damage, and will concentrate the impacts of trampling and soil compaction around the plant – the latter can impact soil biology detrimentally, with potential impacts to the mycorrhizal fungi on which orchids rely



## SECTION D

# Risks associated with **camera technologies**, including drones and camera traps

- ① The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service have draft guidelines for the use of drones in reserved land in Tasmania and are developing a policy for designated use areas – currently drones cannot be operated in reserved land in Tasmania without a permit ([www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=41796](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=41796))
- ① Research into the impacts of drones on wildlife is currently limited – some species have been found to be resilient to approaches of drones within 5 m, but it is generally advisable to adopt a precautionary approach and for the current use of these technologies to be limited to the purposes of wildlife research with appropriate permits and approvals
- ① Do not launch drones within 100 m of wildlife
- ① Birds and other wildlife should not be chased with drones
- ① Territorial species such as raptors can suffer injury from strikes with drones, particularly those with uncovered blades
- ① Animals can waste energy investigating automated camera traps placed around nests, dens or other sensitive areas, and can abandon their young as a result of the disturbance
- ① No white light should be used at night around animals, if flash must be used it should be with a red/orange filter



AT NIGHT IF A FLASH  
MUST BE USED IT  
SHOULD BE WITH A  
RED/ORANGE FILTER



100m

DO NOT LAUNCH  
DRONES WITHIN 100 M  
OF WILDLIFE



BIRDS AND OTHER  
WILDLIFE SHOULD  
NOT BE CHASED  
WITH DRONES



## SECTION E

# Social media culture

## (sharing and collecting trophy photographs)

- ❗ Avoid the temptation of collecting images simply for sharing on social media or adding to your collection – only a limited number of images offset the impacts of acquiring the image by making contributions to conservation, art, general awareness or appreciation
- ❗ If you like to collect images, consider compiling your collection from images taken by others (only with explicit permission)
- ❗ If you are going to share images of nature online, consider using them as a platform to raise awareness about nature conservation and threats to the subject of your photos
- ❗ Consider property owners' rights when it comes to sharing images from their land – do they want images made public?
- ❗ Increased knowledge of a sensitive species or location will result in cumulative impacts as more people access the site. This is particularly important within declared nature reserves, which have been set aside to protect threatened species and communities, and are not intended as recreation areas
- ⊘ Do not assume that photos shared from an area of private land indicate that other people can access the site without explicit permission from the owners
- ❗ The locations of threatened species, including rare nesting birds and orchids, should only be shared with the Threatened Species Section at the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, who will determine if the location should be made available on the Tasmanian Natural Values Atlas – even publicising a general location is inadvisable for species with prominent, easy to find nests in predictable locations, such as eagles, colonial seabirds and shorebirds



## IMAGE CONTRIBUTIONS

Thanks to the following photographers whose work appears in this guide:

### P7

(top right) Paul Gray

(bottom right) Vali Ruoppolo

### P11

(top left) JJ Harrison

(top right & bottom left) Eric Woehler

(centre & bottom right) P. Gray

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