

Liite 2 (Annex 2)

100 best practices for organised wildlife watching

TRANSLATION OF SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR WILDLIFE WATCHING

Kajaani University of Applied Sciences
Outdoors Finland



OUTDOORS FINLAND



Outdoors
Finland
TRADE



Emphasis of the practices is on the safety aspect and the practices do not provide comprehensive guidelines or advice to product development as such. Integration of the safety practices into the quality management of companies considerably advances the product development in the field of Finnish wildlife tourism.

Application

This document sets out in practical terms the principles to which companies offering safe wildlife watching operate. These principles and best practices ensure the implementation of safe and high-quality wildlife watching for both employees and customers. At the same time these practices are flexible enough to cover the variety of situations and activities of wildlife tourism in Finland.

The safety practices complement the rights and obligations set out in legislation. They do not repeat law provisions nor do they create an interpretation of the law. The practices act as a guideline offering safety related criteria for all professionally organised watching activities. Species-specific differences between practices are mainly described in terms of animal behaviour and the various risks such behaviour may pose.

A professionally skilled tour operator can identify the key risks posed by different animal species. Finnish consumer safety legislation also assumes that the operator is familiar with the risks associated with the activity and has taken steps to prevent them. The practices are also written in a way that will help field-based guides to draft guidelines and information folders. The '100 Best Practices' document is divided into sections covering professional expertise, preparing for an activity, behaviour at the watching site and movement from place to place (transit). In addition, the best practices associated with facilities are included.

Translation: Kielipalvelu Enticknapp-Seppänen



Professional Expertise

1. The aim of all operations should be to increase customers' experiences, knowledge, enjoyment and positive experiences of nature and wildlife.

2. The operator must be familiar with the key legislation controlling the activity. Finnish Consumer Safety legislation requires that certain service providers must draft a safety document.

Maintaining a safety document, whether compulsory or not, is a good way to ensure a safe service. The operator should compile a safety document in accordance to the Consumer Safety Act and an emergency rescue plan in accordance to the Rescue Act. If necessary, the safety document can be included in the rescue plan. These documents should be regularly updated when the risks, operational environment or service change.

3. The operator must ensure that all necessary permits, notices, and other arrangements have been arranged well in advance of beginning operations.

4. The operator will undertake a comprehensive risk assessment and other consumer safety measures in accordance with the Act.

5. The operator and the guides are familiar with the region's ecology, how the species to be observed behave, their needs and their reactions to the presence of people. Participants should have access to at least one guide with at least 2 years of experience.

6. Advertising and the content of related material must correspond to reality and promote the sustainable use of the environment. Advertising must not promise the customer too much nor create false expectations.

7. The ability to tell stories is also included in professional expertise. Effective communication of safety issues is a part of this ability.

8. Wildlife watching and professional photography carried out as a trade is conducted primarily under the responsibility and supervision of the tour operator.

9. The operator should appoint a person in charge of safety and a deputy.

The safety document names the safety officer, his or her deputy, and their contact details and duties, which should also be known by all members of staff.

10. The tour operator must draw up separate safety plans for watching tours that differ from the general rule. These may include, e.g., watching trips abroad organised occasionally by the operator.

11. The operator has an internal and external crisis communications plan in case of accident or other emergency situations.

12. There must be a sufficient amount of staff to cope with the nature and extent of the activities in question, the number of customers, their level of skill and any special requirements.

13. The tour operator should work in accordance to a generally approved quality system or has clearly documented the company's own quality processes.

14. Operations that follow the principles of sustainable wildlife tourism should be conducted responsibly, engaging in the care of the environment and taking local customs and culture into account. The operations should not interfere with, destroy or alter the region's flora or fauna. The operations should burden the environment as little as possible, ensuring that any waste resulting from the operation is removed from the surrounding environment.

15. Animal carcasses should be set up and used according to instructions. An existing carcass used for photography purposes must not be used for hunting. The carcass should be placed so that customers and preying animals do not meet. For example, carcasses must not be placed along the routes customers use to transfer from one place to another. Attention should be paid to the quality and aesthetic aspects of using carcasses for feeding purposes. The food bait used to attract wildlife is intended to be the natural food of a wild animal.

16. The operations must not disturb areas critical to reindeer herding such as

calving and marking areas, summer and autumn forest pastures as well as transportation and access routes.

17. Cooperation agreements with the Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services are recommended when working in protected areas.

18. The operations must not endanger other livelihoods and business operations or other people who are present in the area.

19. The operator knows the public right of access rules 'everyman's right', of which customers will be informed. In addition, other forms of good customer and watching behaviour should be observed and explained to the customers before the activity.

20. Wildlife watching observes minimum safety distances that are specific to different species. For example, a normal feeding distance of 30-40 meters is required for bears in a pine forest. Feeding at a further distance would require the removal of trees, which is, in turn is against the principle of sustainability.

21. The operator should define clear maximum weather limits, such as temperature and wind speed.

22. Operators who transport customers over water must have a charter boat operator's certificate.

23. The tour operator must ensure that the subcontractors' equipment and operations are legal (for example, that they have a safety document) and for example, in the case of boating, that the subcontractor's boat kit and vehicle inspection documents are valid and up to date.

24. The operator should use guides who are familiar with safety issues. New guides are introduced to the operations on a one-to-one basis. It should be ensured that the guide has adequate customer-oriented communication skills such as language skills.

25. Trainees (e.g. students) should primarily work only under supervision and helping regular members of staff. The tour operator must ensure that trainees are capable of working safely.

26. The tour operator must take out statutory insurances (pension and accident insurance) for persons in his or her employment.
27. In addition to statutory insurance it is recommended that operators organise not only some form of voluntary insurance to cover themselves and their staff but also general liability insurance cover. Liability insurance coverage should be assessed on a case by case basis. It is also worth considering various forms of voluntary group insurance coverage for participants in different events or the operator should ensure that the participants' accident insurance has been arranged in other ways. Insurance policies always include some form of own liability and compensation restrictions as well as limits within the insurance terms and conditions. Comprehensive risk management also includes insurance against possible legal expenses.
28. The guide should be guaranteed sufficient time to rest during wildlife watching work and to recover after providing a service belonging to the programme. After an eight hour-long period of watching or guiding, the guide should be entitled to rest for one hour. Time to rest must also be arranged for customers.
29. The operator should have a feedback system where customers, employees and possibly, local residents can comment on the sustainability, quality and safety of the product. The feedback system should also be located on the company's website which includes basic key information concerning safety.
30. Safety training and drills should be arranged for all staff at least once a year e.g. before tourists arrive, to practice sounding the alarm, using rescue devices and fire extinguishers, resuscitation and actions taken during the most common cases of sudden illness and accidents. In particular, it is necessary to practice emergency rescue operations and staff cooperation for such situations. Special and emergency situations should be practiced in the actual terrains where the company operates under all types of conditions. The drills can be carried out in cooperation with e.g. the rescue services and other tour operators. Training courses and drills should be recorded in the safety document. The operator should organize rescue and safety drills at regular intervals as well as participating in other drills.
31. The tour operators must ensure that help can access the site or the area near the site of operations (watching area) or they must draw up an action plan for emergencies. The rescue services must know where permanent sites (watching sites) are located and operators should contact the emergency and rescue services and ambulance service in advance to define in cooperation the exact location of the rescue site. Possible rescue helicopter landing sites should also be indicated. The operator should also determine in advance the local rescue service response time, i.e. the time it will take them to arrive after the alarm has been given and the volume of their resources. The aforementioned information, once it has been established, should be recorded in the safety document.

Preparing for an activity

32. Before the start of the programme the participants will be informed of possible physical or psychological risks in a language they can understand. Foreign participants should be given adequate instruction and guidance and the operator/guide must check that the instructions have been understood.
33. The participants should be instructed how to act in a possible emergency and how to get help and they will be informed of who is in charge. The participants should be given in advance maps and clear instructions on how to exit the hides or to call for help (map coordinates, floor plans, and instructions should also be placed on the wall of the hide). The customers should also know the most direct route to the nearest road from the hide.
34. The participants should be told what to do if someone goes missing. The operator should have a plan and written instructions on what to do if someone gets lost. In case someone goes missing, the guides should carry the telephone numbers of all their customers. When it can be reasonably assumed that a person is lost or injured, the police will be informed of the missing person(s). In these cases, the police will lead the search. Guides and customers should also be reminded of alternative practices if someone is thought to be missing, such as blowing a whistle or sounding the car horn.
35. The guides should also have a set of instructions for the customers (also in English at the very least) in case the guide is incapacitated.
36. There should also be instructions on how to act after an accident: who will inform who within the organisation, who will inform the participants' next of kin, and the media; who will notify the authorities (health inspector, police, local occupational health and safety authority); how psychosocial support will be organised; how accidents will be reported and analysed.
37. The tour operator should prepare carefully for welcoming special needs groups (e.g. people with limited mobility and other disabilities) by requesting information using a health questionnaire form in advance.
38. In particular, children and people with limited mobility require supervision and care. Children under the age of 18 must have their guardians' consent to participate in the programme. The operator must obtain reliable proof of consent (e.g. a letter of consent signed by the child's guardian). If children under the age of 18 participate with their guardians' consent, but the guardians are not present, the operator must record the guardians' contact information so they can be contacted if necessary.

39. Customers are requested to bring their own medication in case they have to remain at the watching sites for longer than expected.
40. Before starting any activity, the customers should be told that participation is voluntary. The participants must not be forced to do anything. Participants may feel under pressure socially to have a go at an activity e.g. as a part of their work community. The staff should tactfully survey the situation and provide the participants with the opportunity not to accomplish the activity.
41. The operator must provide customers with sufficient information in advance concerning necessary clothing, personal equipment (such as binoculars, cameras, etc.) and physical fitness requirements. Before the program begins, the operator should check that the participants are wearing clothing suitable for the activity and prevailing weather conditions. The operator should equip participants with suitable protective clothing if necessary.
42. It is best to warn customers in advance if they may be exposed to insect bites/stings that could cause an allergic reaction or to infectious diseases spread by animals at the watching site.
43. The tour operator should be able to provide customers with cameras and binoculars, as well as adequate outdoor clothing if necessary.
44. Participants should be told what to do in case of a random encounter with predators.
45. The operator and the guide are responsible for informing, instructing, and supervising customers and their safety throughout the whole activity.
46. Watching tours are not carried out in the dark, unless the adventure related content of the watching product or the species to be watched require it.
47. Weather changes can affect the safety and quality of wildlife watching. Guides should know the weather forecast for the watching period.
48. All employees should be familiar with the division of responsibility (who will rescue, give first aid, call for help, guide etc.) and who will be in charge if an accident occurs.
49. The operator must negotiate the conditions of use of the terrain with the landowner concerned. The landowner's or land manager's permission is required for maintaining a watching site with a carcass, installing nest boxes and game cameras.
50. Large carnivore watching occurring near populated or semi-urban areas poses an increased risk to third parties. In the vicinity of areas where people go jogging, orienteering, mountain biking etc., these kinds of fast and silent forms of exercise may result in taking a bear by surprise.
51. If the customers are placed in separate hides, set times and means of regular communications (e.g. SMS) should be agreed upon between the guide and the different groups before entering the hides. This will help anticipating the departure time and prevent unnecessary journeys between the hides/watching points.
52. The guides should not carry deterrent tools (gas/pepper sprays etc.) because their use involves unnecessary risks.
53. It should be ensured that mobile phones are working properly and that their batteries are sufficiently charged. Staff should know which areas of terrain do not have any coverage. The guides should have a telephone/ VHF radio or satellite phone for emergencies.
54. The guides should use a checklist when instructing customers (including e.g., camera flash use, mobile phone use, waste handling, body temperature monitoring, meals, use of the WC, what to do if the guide becomes incapacitated, map of the area etc.).
55. The group sizes will depend on and be adjusted according to the special requirements of the focal species. Oversized groups should be avoided and people should not be permitted to wander about alone. The group size will also depend on the amount of available guides. The maximum size of any one group present at the watching site should be 15 persons.
56. The watching site cannot be occupied by many separate groups or parties at the same time. Therefore customers should remain in one unified group.
57. Each excursion should be accompanied by a guide with first aid skills.

Facilities

58. The photography and watching hides, as well as bird-watching towers should be located far enough away from residential areas, trails, reindeer husbandry areas and other livelihood related facilities.
59. The structures used should be durable, safe and suitable for the designated activities. The facilities shall comply with existing safety requirements (e.g. building regulations and relevant standards and guidelines). In accordance with good building practice, the facilities should be constructed to be durable, safe, accessible, and suited to the surrounding environment and designated activity.
60. Hides, towers and other structures, including accommodation and toilets should be kept clean and in good condition.
61. The recommended material for the walls of bear watching hides is 9 mm-thick hard board or an equivalent material. In addition, the hide should be odour and sound proof and a 6-8 meter high odour-removal pipe should be built in the hide to control and remove odours. The hide should also have an indoor toilet and sufficient clothes storage facilities.
62. Nothing edible should be stored in the photography hide and carcasses should not be placed in the immediate vicinity of the hides.
63. The edges of the lens opening located below the window should be reinforced. The lens openings should be equipped with lens funnels (a piece of fabric, which can be tightened around the lens hood with a draw string) to keep in sounds and smells. A camera platform should be installed at the same height as the lens opening.
64. Hide safety can be increased with an electric fence and by making them sound and smell-proof.
65. Instructions for making an emergency telephone call (112) should be placed where they are easily noticeable/visible in the hide/watching facility in at least Finnish and English and also Russian (in languages spoken by the customers).
66. A well-equipped watching facility includes a first aid kit, fire and gas alarm, fire blanket and fire extinguisher in a prominent, easily noticeable position. Fire-fighting equipment is essential in hides with heating and cooking facilities.
67. Offices, transport, accommodation and camp sites should be equipped with a sufficient number (according to risks assessment) of serviced fire-extinguishing equipment. The fire extinguishing equipment must be placed in a prominent position, be easily accessible and clearly labelled.
68. The hides should have waste disposal bins and the waste should also be taken away when customers leave the hide.
69. A notice board stating that wildlife watching is occurring in the area should be set up on the route/trail leading to the watching site. E.g., the board may request the public to avoid the area completely. However, it is questionable to restrict the public's movements and especially to ban their presence because it is everyman's right to move freely in the terrain.
70. It is intended that wildlife watching should take place at the same watching sites. This is mainly to assure the focal animals that humans behave predictably.
71. A person in charge of machinery and equipment should be designated whose name and contact information should be available in the safety document. Machinery and equipment should be inspected and maintained on a regular basis. A maintenance plan including inspections should be compiled and a maintenance log must be kept.
72. Facilities managed by the operator and used for implementing services (including e.g. the condition of duckboards and hand-pulled ferries) should be serviced and inspected regularly. A maintenance plan including inspections should be compiled and a maintenance log must be kept. A person in charge of maintenance and inspections should be designated whose name and contact information should be available in the safety document.

Behaviour at the watching site

73. Participants should follow advice and instructions as well as considering the safety of others.
74. The guides should accompany customers throughout the excursion. Guides and people with extensive experience of nature excursions (e.g. professional photographers) may agree separately that the guide does not need to be continuously present. In such situations, the guide may meanwhile pick-up and drop-off groups.
75. It is necessary to keep in groups at the watching sites and the guide should be constantly aware of the exact number of people in his/her group. Customers should not have to be / go unnecessarily far from the guides.
76. Alcohol should not be served at any point during wildlife watching. Neither members of staff nor customers should be permitted to participate in wildlife watching if under the influence of alcohol. Participants must be clearly informed of the ban concerning intoxicating substances e.g. during payment and in information distributed in advance so that the ban does not come as a surprise. Prior information should also mention that guides are permitted to check the state and capacity of customers before participation. The operator is entitled to and has a duty to prevent or interrupt a service/activity on the grounds of safety.

77. Smoking should be prohibited in the terrain/watching site and during the movement from place to place. The operator/guide should indicate a separate smoking area if necessary.
78. Open fires are prohibited unless a separate agreement exists between the operator and the landowner. Open fires are permitted at specifically set up fire places or campfire sites.
79. The use of fragrances and perfumes should be avoided before and during wildlife watching.
80. The size of the tourist group affects the focal species in the same way as watching distance. The more people present, the more likely the watched species will be disturbed. The shorter the watching distance, the more likely the watched species will be disturbed.
81. The smell of humans and noise affect the behaviour of wildlife during watching, as do quick, unpredictable movements and approaching the animal(s).
82. Loud conversation should be avoided in the hides as well as making other sounds and sudden noise. Noise can occur e.g. when taking pictures, by falling items or when fetching items. In order to avoid these disturbances, customers should be instructed to have cameras and other pieces of equipment readily available before focal animals appear on the site.
83. Camera flashes should not be used during wildlife watching. Other camera lights could also disturb wildlife.
84. Customers should not exit the hide if the bear is still visible at the feeding site or is in the immediate vicinity of the hide. It is recommended that customers make themselves heard when leaving the hide so that the bear is not taken by surprise.
85. Other activities occurring in the vicinity of the hide may disturb the bear's normal behaviour and increase safety risks. Such activity should be observed and its impact assessed. This could be, e.g. a random berry picker wandering near the hide. In addition, border guards, reindeer herders or other professionals may be present in the environs of the watching site and their safety should also be assessed in case of such situations.
86. The participants' well-being should be monitored during any activity in case of hypothermia, heat exhaustion, dehydration, frostbite, fatigue, illness, or fear.
87. A sufficient supply of food and water should be provided during watching. If food is offered in the field, it is necessary to comply with the Finnish Food Safety Authority's (EVIRA) regulations for selling outdoors. Food products for consumption in the field and during watching should be packed in an air-tight and durable container. A company providing food must have a sufficient in-house control plan included in its operational risk management system.
88. It should be ensured that customers do not feed the animals intentionally or through carelessness with their own provisions or with leftovers/rubbish.
89. The tour operator/guides should keep a record of natural phenomena, the observed behaviour of the species watched, and of observations regarding quality factors (e.g. the condition of the facilities).
90. Observations of animals that may be injured should be recorded and reported.
91. Near misses should be recorded and discussed amongst the company's employees and all action taken should comply with the Finnish Consumer Safety Act.
92. Do your bit to engage in the fight against nature related crime. Make a note of any unusual activities (e.g. collection of birds' eggs, illegal hunting) and report it to the authorities if necessary.

Movement from place to place (transit)

93. During transit avoid making a noise and littering. For safety reasons, there should be adequate lighting. Moving to and from the bear hide in the dark or in poor visibility should be avoided.
94. Motor vehicles should only be used when absolutely necessary and to ensure the safety of the group.
95. The guide should normally drive. In some cases, the group leader can drive but in this case the driver's experience, driving style, and knowledge of rules and conditions should be checked. It is particularly important to pay special attention to the skills and experience needed for driving in winter conditions.
96. All cars and boats should carry first aid kits. Other necessary safety equipment (such as life jackets, helmets) should also be included.
97. Transit should not interfere with any other activities in the area nor should it cause an increased risk of accident. Routes, such as traffic routes and waterways designated for transit purposes should be used.
98. Transit routes should avoid critical animal habitats (breeding, feeding or resting areas etc.).
99. The tour operator should check the safety of the transit routes regularly. E.g. this could mean clearing undergrowth from the trail leading from the bear hide.
100. Island and maritime destinations have their own specific safety instructions.



OUTDOORS FINLAND



maaseuturahasto

Outdoors
Finland
TRADE



Visit Finland