



STC Expeditions

# Animal Code of Conduct

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The STC has worked alongside **World Animal Protection** to develop an understanding of current animal welfare and protection methods. With this advice we have developed our current Animal Code of Conduct for operations on all STC trips.

As a responsible travel business/tour operator with strong commitments on sustainability, we care not only for the welfare of people, but also for the welfare of animals. The STC believe that wild animals should be kept in the wild and not caged or staged for tourism activities with negatives impacts for the animal itself. Any wild animals that have been held captive must be released to the wild responsibly or where this is not possible for the welfare of the animal it is to be rehomed into sanctuaries or rehabilitation centres where their freedoms are maintained. We work closely with our in-country teams to ensure that any visits of these sanctuaries are closely monitored, and outcomes are to the animals' best interest.

The STC ensure that any animals involved in any element of STC trips have the right to the five animal freedoms:

1. **Freedom from hunger or thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
2. **Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
3. **Freedom from pain, injury or disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
4. **Freedom to express normal behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
5. **Freedom from fear and distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

Animals may be incorporated into STC trips in a variety of means, examples of these means are detailed below. Further descriptions of these are detailed within the document:

- **Working animals:** Pack animals (equids and camelids) and domesticated farming animals (equids and bovid).
- **Animal visits:** Animal sanctuaries and/or rehabilitation projects may be visited, and participants may aid local staff on site.
- **National parks and wild animals:** Safari visits in national parks may be incorporated into itineraries such as the Serengeti in Tanzania or Corbett in India

## Working animals:

The STC only condones the use of working animals on long trekking routes. Donkeys, mules, yaks, and camels are able to carry loads for trekking participants only if our code of conduct is adhered to. In some instances, cultural village additions may have working horses or oxen that conduct daily agricultural tasks. We understand that working animals can contribute directly to households' livelihoods and the overall welfare of families along with a benefit to the local economy either through agricultural activities or adding extra benefit as pack animals. At any point that animals are used for carrying supplies or for any trekking services the following principles apply:

- are regularly fed and watered. It should be of a healthy weight and size relevant to its species
- are free from disease or injury, they do not have any open lesion (wounds) on their bodies
- working environment is suitable to the animal's welfare, it can be identified when the animal may be overworked and causing too much stress
- have reached maturity to cope with the weight
- have sufficient means of cooling, either water and/or shade dependant on the animal's requirements
- are cared for and treated respectfully. It does not show signs of depressive or aggressive behaviour
- hooves are appropriately manged and do not cause distress or unbalance
- have a maximum agreed work load to carry persons/equipment and the weight is evenly distributed for the animals' comfort and ease
- have appropriate harnesses and padding to help with the load bearing or persons/equipment

- have appropriate shelter and space to rest at the end of their working day

#### **Working staff:**

Any working staff related to the working activity with the inclusion of animals (owners/handlers) should understand fully that they are to uphold the above care and welfare of the animals and:

- are experienced in handling animals and animal husbandry
- are able to communicate and brief participants prior to attending the animals or embarking on the journey
- are employed on ratios appropriate to the size of group and ability to handle and control the animals

#### **Equipment:**

- any harnesses should be correctly fitted and able to take the weight of the individual/load
- Saddles are fitted and adjusted to the individual participant
- Any stores and equipment carried are loaded equally and securely

### **Animal visits:**

In accordance with this code of conduct, The STC does not offer any activities which do not meet our animal welfare standards. Activities not considered acceptable include dolphin shows, walking with lions, using animals as photo props and riding of elephants.

#### **Riding elephants**

Elephants are highly intelligent and socially developed animals and can develop post-traumatic stress disorders. In elephant camps they are prevented from forming social relationships with each other – this is hugely damaging to their physical and psychological wellbeing.

To 'train' an elephant, they are taken from their mothers at an early age and their spirit is broken through both physical and psychological pain, including isolation, starvation, beating and being chained up in small enclosures.

Elephants are one of the most dangerous animals to handle. Bull hooks (pointed and sharp metal hooks on long sticks) are used during rides with tourists to maintain control of the elephants, which can result in serious injuries such as infected sores and cuts.

Most elephants have very little access to veterinary care, meaning that a relatively minor illness can quickly become a big problem, causing unnecessary suffering. The best elephant experience is a wild one, as part of a wildlife safari, viewing elephants free in their habitat displaying their natural behaviours.

#### **Petting lion cubs, walking with lions, and canned hunts**

Lions are wild animals. They retain their wild behaviours and natures despite close contact with human owners in captivity. Lion cub handling, walking with lions and photo opportunities with lions are most common in southern Africa. These facilities depend on the supply of young lions – usually captive bred and taken from their mothers shortly after birth.

Separation can be very stressful for both cubs and lionesses. In the wild, they would normally stay together for at least two years. Wild lionesses would usually have one litter every two to three years, but those breeding for the industry can be forced to have up to two to three litters per year.

Once cubs are taken from their mothers at just a few weeks old they are subjected to frequent handling by their owners until they are able to feed themselves and are ready to attract tourists. Their days are spent in a cycle of handling and photo opportunities. This is different from the cubs' wild existence where they are fiercely protected by their mothers and depend on them for reassurance. Handled cubs can lose their hair and become ill with diarrhoea and other illnesses because of the chronic stress and sleep deprivation inflicted on them. Then, once an unwieldy size, lions are reportedly drugged and abused until they become compliant enough for photo opportunities or lion walks with tourists.

Sometimes they may be sent to canned hunting camps to be shot by trophy hunters in small enclosures.

## Animal Sanctuaries and conservation sites/projects

Sanctuaries are facilities that provide lifelong or long-term care for animals rescued from need (including abuse, injury and abandonment) and which may never be able to truly be returned to the wild. Rehabilitation facilities provide short-term care for animals rescued from need (injured, orphaned, sick) and prepares them for eventual release back into the wild.

Animal shelters and sanctuaries are not commercial profit-making endeavours and should be critically examined whether the purpose of the visit is for the benefit of the animal or whether it seems to be a commercial tourist enterprise. Only sites that are for the benefit and rehabilitation of the animals are acceptable on STC trips. The welfare of the animals is paramount at these sites where interaction with humans should be limited, acquisition of animals is not exchanged on a financial basis and facilities are designed for the specific needs of the animals.

## National parks and wild animals:

The STC condones the use of regulated national parks with locally qualified guides to view, from a distance, wild animals in their habitat. Any participants, leaders and guides should not disrupt or encourage interaction with the animals and should not entice the animals with any foodstuff.

Interaction should be limited as animals should be able to rely on their natural instincts and rely on sustainable sources of food such as the natural prey or flora within the national park.

Any vehicles used to enter the national park should be of the highest standard required by the park authority or national regulations ensuring no detrimental environmental issues impact on the animals within the national park.

Safari guidelines should be followed within the national park, if the national park has guidelines without enforcement then the following good practice should be followed:

### Good practice

1. Learn and obey the rules and regulations of the national park
2. Make sure your safari vehicle is in good running condition
3. Always follow the instructions given by the accompanying wildlife guard / safari guide
4. Stay inside the vehicle throughout the safari
5. Leave enough space (20-25 metres minimum) between the vehicle and wildlife before stopping
6. Learn something from the safari trip about national park ecology and conservation
7. Appreciate the driver and the accompanying staff if they completed the safari responsibly.

### Poor practice

1. Don't use alcohol and drugs in the national park and make sure your jeep driver and the accompanying staff are not on alcohol or drugs
2. Don't overload the vehicles
3. Don't encourage speeding – 25km/hr is the recommended speed inside the national parks
4. No off-road driving!
5. Don't drive into herds and don't block their movements
6. Never raise the engine when the wildlife are around
7. Don't shout or scream while watching wildlife – silence is rewarding!
8. No tipping for close-up shots of wildlife
9. Never encourage the driver and the accompanying staff to rush between locations inside the park for wildlife viewing opportunities

## Animal trade and souvenirs:

All participants on STC trips are discouraged to purchase any souvenir items made from or containing parts of wild animals'

These items can include:

### **Ivory and other mammal or reptile teeth and bones**

One of the highest profile animal products is Elephant Ivory. The trade in elephant ivory has sadly experienced a large surge in recent times, with approximately 4000 elephants killed for their tusks in 2012 in Africa and Asia. Ivory is recognised as a luxury product in China, however ivory from elephants can also be sold in the form of carved figurines, chopsticks or bangles. The appetite for ivory products fuels poaching and is responsible for pushing elephants towards extinction. Furthermore, teeth from endangered tigers, bears and crocodiles may also be sold as jewellery or as charms. Although this may seem like only a very small item, the animal may have been killed purely for it.

### **Quills, feathers and bird beaks**

Quills, feathers or birds' beaks may be used for decorative or novelty items. Many bird species around the globe are close to extinction, such as the endangered hornbills. Buying products made from their parts supports and the illegal wildlife trade.

### **Reptile skins**

Reptile skins from snakes and crocodiles may be used for footwear, hats, belts, handbags, wallets, and drums. Many snakes are caught in the wild and inhumanely slaughtered for their skins. As most crocodile species are now endangered, farms now breed them for their meat and skins. The farms often keep large numbers of crocodiles in concrete pools in unnatural, overcrowded conditions. The killings are commonly inhumane.

### **Furs**

Animal furs are typically found used in clothing items, but they may also be used for trinkets, 'good-luck' charms or in traditional materials. Furs deriving from wild animals could come from endangered wild cats and deer, which are usually caught in traps. Many of the furs used in trims and coats in fashion outlets will be sourced from China where animals are raised in intensive farms in appalling conditions and skinned inhumanely. Animals used by the Chinese fur trade include domestic cat and dogs

### **Turtle and tortoise shells**

Turtle and tortoise shells are made into items such as combs, hair brushes, necklaces, cigarette cases, hair clips, spectacle frames and jewellery or as whole shells as decorative items. The treatment of animals when they are caught is typically inhumane.

### **Wildlife in medicines**

Some traditional medicines may use wildlife products, including endangered species. Some wildlife parts are also used as aphrodisiacs. The use of parts and products from wild animals in traditional Chinese medicine includes bear gallbladder and bile, tiger and leopard bones, glands from musk deer, Saiga antelope horns, rhinoceros horns, penis bone (bacula) from fur seal. Other wild animal species used to make traditional medicines include pangolins, crocodiles, turtles, snakes, lizards, and primates such as macaques. Even in tablet or capsule forms, these products may be illegal for sale in some countries and illegal to take across international borders.

### **Corals and Seashells**

Corals and seashells are often used in trinkets, novelty souvenirs and decorations. Coral reefs are vulnerable to the impacts of tourism. It is estimated 20% of the world's coral reefs have already been lost. Buying products made from coral contributes to the loss of one of the ocean's most important ecosystems. Over-harvesting of seashells has pushed some species, such as the Queen Conch, to the brink of extinction.

There are many laws in place to stop the trades and import/export of items such as ivory, animal pelts, furs or shells.

The STC does not promote the purchase of animal souvenirs in any location and advises local leaders to advise any participants if this is identified as illegal or ethical trade. Any wild animal souvenirs that are purchased contribute to the capture and killing of animals. Animals used are often endangered, many items are also illegal contributing to illegal wildlife trade pushing species to extinction, negative impact on habitats and ecosystems.

## Marine species:

The STC will only include whale and/or marine life watching trips within an itinerary if the provider is registered with the **World Cetacean Alliance (WCA)**. This ensures that the operator conducting the activity is highly regulated in favour of the marine species.

The WCA requires the following minimum standards of all providers.

1. Publicise and use guidelines for safe approach to whales/dolphins Every boat must display a code of conduct / guidelines for how to approach marine mammals so that disturbance is kept to a minimum. Both the local codes of conduct / guidelines and the WCA Minimum Standards Guide must be displayed on all vessels in at least either English or the primary language of the country of operation. Customers should be made aware of these guidelines and where they are displayed before each trip begins and they must be available at all times. For those Operators chartering third-party vessels and/or using very small vessels such as rigid-hulled inflatable boats or kayaks, guidelines must be applied at all times during chartered trips. The guidelines and the WCA Minimum Standards Guide must be made available in a waterproof folder, with passengers made aware of how to access it at all times. In addition, both the local guidelines and WCA Minimum Standards Guide must be displayed on the Partner's website, along with details of an independent WCA contact point for customers to provide feedback.
2. Be valuable as a learning experience Trips should be inspiring and educational, providing customers with information about the animals' behaviour and the environment they live in. Each boat should have at least one guide with a good knowledge of marine mammals. Each tour should include information on at least one issue of concern for cetaceans both locally and globally, with a positive action that guests can take to help.
3. Meet the expectations of customers Each trip should provide customers with realistic information on what they are likely to see during the trip, and be clear on the rules they must follow to remain safe and respect cetaceans and the ocean at all times.
4. Minimise any impact on the marine environment Excursions should actively seek ways to reduce their environmental footprint, and encourage passengers to think about how they can be more 'green' too.
5. Emphasise research work undertaken or support for marine conservation efforts Guides should explain to customers how the business works collaboratively with other Partners to protect cetaceans and the oceans (for example through the WCA Partnership).

## Marine Projects:

The STC may include marine style projects and/or conservation organisations that have been externally accredited by awarding bodies for their benefit to the marine environment. Inclusions on STC trips may include:

**Turtle conservation projects:** Costa Rica, Greece and Borneo

**Marine biology environmental study and management:** Greece and Borneo

All of these projects will be for the benefit of the marine species and in no way, will it have a negative impact upon the species or eco systems.

## Review

Prior to departing on a trip all participants, ground agents and leaders are given information on current animal welfare practices and how to keep an eye out for bad practices.

Any inclusions of animals on STC trips have due diligence checks taken out. Using World Animal Protections sanctuary checklist as a base level and also post trip reviews from our participants (student and teacher feedback forms) as to whether the provision of projects including conservation of animals have been in line with the STC animal code of conduct.

If participants, ground agents or leaders are alarmed or concerned about any practices at these sanctuaries that do not fall in line with the STC animal code of conduct then they are all advised to report this to the STC at the earliest opportunity for rectifying action to be implemented.

All policies and procedures are reviewed annually to ensure current information and best practice is kept.

## Advice and Information

World Animal Protection: <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.uk/>

International Fund for Animal Welfare: <http://www.ifaw.org/united-kingdom>

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora: <https://www.cites.org/>

The Brooke: <https://www.thebrooke.org/> <http://worldcetaceanalliance.org/>

World Organisation for Animal Health: <http://www.oie.int/>

Whale and Dolphin Conservation: <http://wdcs.co.uk>

Tourism Concern: <https://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>

Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries: <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/>