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NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS CODE OF ETHICS

Compiled by The Photographic Society of South Africa to promote the conservation and awareness of our natural heritage through observation and exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

The Photographic Society of South Africa has, in order to help protect all nature subjects and the environment, proposed a code of ethics for all nature enthusiasts to follow, whether in national parks, wilderness areas or even in your own garden.

Acknowledgement must go to the Association of Natural History of Great Britain, the Nature Division of the Photographic Society of America and all naturalist photographers from whose codes of practice this document is derived.

Always remember, that the welfare of the natural history subject is of prime importance. You are an intruder and as such must respect both the creatures and the ecosystem. Our aim must be to preserve our heritage and by following the guidelines set out in this document, each of you can help. Social courtesy and respect must be shown all around us be, they animal, vegetable, mineral or human being.

Respect encompasses a knowledge and understanding of your subject as well as being sufficiently familiar with other natural history specialities to be able to avoid damaging their interests accidentally. The law as it affects all nature subjects must always be observed.

Nature photography is defined as the use of the photographic process to depict all observations of facts and phenomena from all the various branches of natural history, including botany, zoology, geology, physics, chemistry, meteorology, palaeontology, anthropology, archaeology etc., in such a fashion that a well informed person will be able to identify the subject material, and to certify to its honest presentation. Human elements if present should be unobtrusive and enhance the nature story. Photographs depicting cultivated plants, still life studies, domestic animals, mounted specimens, museum habitats or groups, derivations or any form of photographic manipulation are not acceptable – with the exception of detailed micro or macro photographs.

A wildlife photograph as opposed to a nature photograph is one that depicts “one or more organisms living free and unrestricted in a natural or adopted habitat and not made under controlled conditions.”

Whatever your interest in nature, be it to photograph or to observe, you will only achieve your aim and be able to consider yourself a true naturalist when you become one with your surrounds.



1. BAITING

2. OUR NATIONAL PARKS

In national parks you are generally restricted to your vehicle and as a driver you should observe common courtesies and obey all rules and regulations of the park. Do not speed up to or past a stopped vehicle – slow down, wait a short distance off and make sure that you will not disturb anything before driving on, or wait to be waved on. Do not drive in such a way as to box other cars in, particularly when near dangerous animals such as elephants.

Your passengers too, should observe normal safety precautions and common courtesies such as not hanging out of windows or playing radios or taped music. Nature has a wonderful sound all of its own, stop and listen and enjoy all facets of our natural history.

If any creature shows uneasiness caused by your presence you should move off rather than force the creature to move. It is totally unethical to throw anything at a creature to cause it to change its position or area. Thoughtless conduct could force a creature to leave its accustomed surrounds because it finds you an unbearable nuisance and in doing so the whole ecosystem can become unbalanced.

3. BIRDS AT NESTS/CREATURES AT DENS

It is particularly important that photography and or viewing of breeding creatures only be undertaken by people with a good knowledge of the creature's breeding behaviour – books, study groups, etc. will help to further your knowledge.

It is generally best to use a hide in order not to disturb the creatures. When erecting a hide do not erect on a regularly used approach line, nor where the attention of the public or predators is likely to endanger the subject. You should not approach a nest or den too closely, careful judgement is necessary. No part of the occupant or his equipment should be visible through or from outside the hide. Do not keep a hide set up if the parents do not return within approximately half an hour especially on very cold or very hot days.

“Gardening” i.e. interference of surrounding vegetation is sometimes necessary for photography, this should be kept to a minimum, not exposing the subject to predators, people or adverse weather conditions. Gardening should be carried out by tying back and not cutting off branches and grasses. In between each shooting session and at the conclusion of any session, everything should be returned to the way it was and tracks to and from the area should be very inconspicuous.

Although the best time for viewing and for photography is at the time of the hatch or birth, this is not the time to start erecting a hide, nor when eggs are newly laid. You must wait until the parents' reaction to the situation is firmly established.



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Nestlings should never be handled or removed from the nest nor may you restrict their movement while photographing them in situ.

Scientific banding is accepted in photographs.

4. INSECTS, SNAKES AND REPTILES

The removal of these creatures to a studio for photography is an accepted practise provided that their subsequent release is in the original habitat as soon as is practical. These creatures should only be photographed in surrounds and on perches where they would naturally occur.

Chilling, freezing and light anaesthesia of any creature is not acceptable. The photographer may not endanger the life of any specimen.

Diurnal creatures should be photographed in the early morning or late afternoon or when the weather is colder when they will be more torpid, likewise for nocturnal creatures.

Recording these creatures in the field would probably tell a more accurate story.

5. TIDEPOOL SUBJECTS

Tidepool animals have a definite role in our ecology and creatures living on top or below rocks will die if those rocks are turned over and not replaced the way they were found.

6. GEOLOGY

The appearance of pictographs and petroglyphs should never be altered by applying any substance, even the simplest of compounds, likewise cave formations and crystals should never be moved, broken or tampered with. These ancient arts can never be restored.

7. BOTONY

It is most important that the preparations to photograph or view one specimen do not involve treading on other specimens. Avoid trampling on fragile habitats, especially grasslands, marshes and wildflower patches as damage to the habitat affects all species in the ecosystem.

A competent photographer or botanist need never pick wild flowers. No rarity should be picked, let alone dug up, for studio photography, or to facilitate the in situ photography of another specimen, nor should any part be removed to facilitate the photography of another part.

If rocks or logs or other objects natural to the area brought in to provide a scientifically correct and more photogenic background these should be returned to their original place.



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CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can only suggest that both the recording and viewing of any natural history subject can only be enhanced by doing so in its natural surrounds.