

NATURE SOCIETY (SINGAPORE)

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Code of Ethics for Nature Lovers and Photographers¹

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Wild animals, birds and plants have to constantly struggle for survival in an ever changing world. This Code is guided by a vision of a world rich in biodiversity, with people and nature living in harmony, equitably and in a sustainable manner.
2. We have the privilege and honour of sharing our planet and lives with wild animals, birds and plants. The least we can do as nature lovers, wildlife watchers and photographers is to respect their rights and dignity and to ensure that we place their health, safety and welfare above our own interests.
3. Wildlife watching and wildlife photography should be ecologically sensitive and wildlife-friendly pursuits. A key goal of wildlife observation and photography should be to minimise the disruption and inconvenience caused to the wild animals, birds and plants being observed or photographed.
4. The code recognises that the health, safety and welfare of individual animals, birds and plants are central to the conservation of entire species.
5. The code embraces the Precautionary Principle and supports the exercising of restraint and caution during wildlife observation and photography. Putting wildlife first means reducing to a minimum any disturbance caused to wild animals, birds and plants and their habitats, even if this may result in us not seeing them at all.
6. In applying the Precautionary Principle and evaluating risks, risks that a wild animal, bird or plant should never be subjected to include acts which could result in a) disturbance caused to the animal, bird or plant, b) physical damage caused to the animal, bird or plant, its environment or its dwellings c) the animal or bird experiencing stress or anxiety d) consequential predation and e) reduced reproductive success².

Be Considerate and Courteous

- 1 Be punctual for every nature outing irrespective of whether it rains or shines. Most wild animals and birds are best viewed and photographed in the mornings and evenings. If you are late, you

¹ The code is a non-binding code designed to guide members of the Society and others who choose to refer to it. In putting this code together we have referred to various other wildlife codes which have been described in full (with short forms) at the end of the code. The short forms have been employed in the footnotes below.

² The breakdown of the various risks that a wild animal or bird should never be subjected to is drawn from the RPS Code.

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risk spoiling the outing both for yourself and for others³.

- 2 Do your best not to block other observers. When you have seen/photographed the animal and bird, move away to make room for others to view or photograph it. Be considerate, especially when viewing opportunities are limited. Give others a chance to view the wild animal too⁴.
- 3 Offer all help possible to beginners and be patient with them⁵. New wildlife watchers are often put off by experienced wildlife watchers who are unhelpful. Always strive to encourage others to appreciate wild animals and birds.
- 4 Practise common courtesy in the field. Your exemplary behaviour will generate goodwill not only from other wildlife watchers and photographers, but also from those who have little interest in wildlife⁶.
- 5 Be as quiet as possible, so that the wild animals and birds you are observing or photographing can be seen by others. If disturbed, it may be a while before they return or re-emerge. If you are loud, you could spoil the experience for others⁷. In particular:
 - A Keep your voice down and minimise conversation in the field.
 - B Avoid sudden movements when observing wildlife as this may cause them to move or fly away, or to go into hiding.
 - C If you spot a rare creature, it is important to contain your excitement and not to celebrate loudly or telephone friends to announce your find.

Reduce your Environmental Footprint and Respect Habitats

- 6 Always be alert and follow the instructions of your group leader⁸.
 - A Your group leader is likely to be more familiar with the site, and will be able to assist you in spotting wild animals and birds.
 - B The group leader will also be able to advise you on how best to view or photograph wild animals and birds in a manner that is environmentally sensitive and wildlife-friendly.
 - C The group leader is likely to be familiar with safety issues relating to the particular wildlife outing. He or she will be in a position to brief you on the various dos and don'ts.
- 7 Respect all forms of wildlife and plant life that you come across⁹.

³ The general principle is discussed in the BG Code

⁴ The general principle is discussed in the BOCA and NPSS Codes.

⁵ The general principle is discussed in the ABA and BG Codes.

⁶ The general principle is discussed in the ABA Code.

⁷ The general principle is discussed in the BG, NPSS and WS Codes

⁸ The general principle is discussed in the BG Code

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For example, when watching or photographing birds, it is important to remember that bird habitats often also contain plant, invertebrate, mammal, reptile, amphibian, aquatic and other life. Ensure that your presence in these habitats does not have a negative impact on the well being and survival of these other species.

- 8** Ensure that the wildlife watching and photography equipment you carry does not cause damage to the environment. The less equipment one brings along (and the smaller the equipment) the less disturbance one is likely to cause when moving through forested areas.
- 9** Do not litter.¹⁰ Collect and carry your rubbish with you and properly dispose of it at the end of the trip. Minimise your environmental footprint to preserve the ecological sanctity of wildlife habitats¹¹.
- A** The presence of litter will spoil the beauty and sanctity of any ecosystem.
- B** Most items of litter are non-biodegradable and the substances contained within can poison the ecosystem.
- C** Litter may be consumed by wildlife and result in them falling ill or dying.
- D** Wild animals or birds may become trapped in discarded bottles or become entangled in plastic bags, ropes, strings and nets left behind. This may cause them to die of starvation or leave them vulnerable to predators.
- 10** In this respect, it is important not to pollute water bodies like rivers, streams, lakes and ponds, by disposing rubbish into them or by using them as toilets. The pollutants may contaminate these water bodies and have an adverse knock-on effect on the well being of creatures dependent on them.
- A** Many creatures including fish, amphibians and reptiles live in them.
- B** Many others, from large eagles to small dragonflies, rely on them for food.
- C** Water bodies are also used by a variety of life forms to hydrate themselves.
- 11** Where available, please use public or field toilets. Whilst bodily substances are discharged by all creatures including wildlife, the composition and toxicity of human discharge may be foreign to an ecosystem. Its bio-chemical breakdown may have a negative impact on an ecosystem.
- 12** Keep habitat disturbance to a minimum. Only walk on designated

⁹ The general principle is discussed in the BG and NPSS Codes.

¹⁰ The general principle is discussed in the NPSS and WS Codes.

¹¹ The general principle is discussed in the NPSS and WS Codes

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pathways, trails or tracks. Do not leave these pathways unless you have obtained permission from the relevant authorities. Never mark or cut new trails.

- A** Walking on designated pathways will minimise the disturbance caused to wildlife and their habitats¹².
 - B** The ground adjacent to these pathways is also likely to be alive with insects, small animals, growing plants and delicate seedlings. Trampling damages, hurts or kills them. It also results in the creation of barren areas along these designated pathways, leaving less nature for us to appreciate¹³.
 - C** As more and more people leave designated pathways, especially at “strategic points”, new pathways will be created. This will “open up” nature areas and reduce the private space and quiet spots needed by animals to feed, rest, breed, socialise and stay clear of predators¹⁴.
- 13** When in the field, it is important to keep group sizes small and not to stray from the group.
- A** This will ensure that the group’s physical impact on the ecosystem and wildlife disturbance is minimal. Wild and semi-wild areas are natural habitats. If we proceed through them without exercising proper care, we could invariably disturb, damage or destroy these habitats.
 - B** The safety of participants will be enhanced if we stay together in groups. The smaller the group, the easier it is for group leaders to ensure safety for all.
- 14** Do not remove or move dead leaves or animals. They too have a role to play. As they decay, nutrients vital for the sustenance of a particular habitat are returned to the ecosystem¹⁵.
- 15** When in the field, care must be taken whilst consuming refreshments.
- A** Food items should be well packed and sealed to ensure that their smell do not attract wildlife. Unconsumed food should never be disposed of in nature areas, however well packed or sealed.
 - B** Ensure that food breaks do not become full scale picnics. Picnics may attract wild animals, birds and insects after food. Eating human food may disrupt the dietary balance of wildlife, expose them to predators, and increase the chances of wildlife-human conflict¹⁶.

¹² The general principle is discussed in the ABA, BOCA, RSPB, NPSS and WS Codes.

¹³ The general principle is discussed in the WS Code

¹⁴ The general principle is discussed in the WS Code

¹⁵ The general principle is discussed in the WS Code

¹⁶ Many of these issues are discussed later in this code in the context of “reasons why wild animals and birds should not be fed”.

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Minimise the amount of Stress and Discomfort caused to Wild Animals and Birds

- 16** Know your field-craft. Wear inconspicuous clothing in the field. For example, avoid bright colours such as red, white or yellow when watching birds. Blending in with the environment minimises wildlife disturbance. However, be aware that there are some national laws that prohibit or restrict the use of camouflaged clothing¹⁷.
- 17** Minimise noise pollution in the field. ‘Foreign’ sounds can startle, distract, alarm or frighten wildlife, and cause them to suffer both stress and discomfort. Accordingly;
- A** Lower your voice and minimise conversation in the field.
B Avoid sudden movements as the noise generated can frighten or startle wildlife.
C Walk slowly, tread lightly and where possible avoid stepping on twigs and dry leaves.
D Put your mobile phones on silent mode. The phone sounds emitted may startle and frighten wildlife.
E Do not bring along “recreational equipment’ such as radios, portable televisions and DVD sets¹⁸. Whilst wildlife trips may conceivably last several days, one should only embark on these trips if one is prepared to give up certain luxuries.
- 18** Keep a respectable distance from wildlife. Wild animals and birds may feel harassed, distracted, stressed or frightened if approached too closely. This stress is similar to the stress induced by approaching predators. Accordingly;
- A** Keep a good distance from wildlife. Use binoculars or telescopes for close-up views¹⁹.
B Use a long lens for photographing wildlife that is far away. It is better than to approach them and risk putting them to flight.
C Where approaching a wild animal or bird is unavoidable, ensure that it can observe you coming, so that it will not be startled by your “sudden” appearance.
- 19** Minimise disturbance to vegetation and undergrowth, employed to flush birds and animals out from their concealed positions²⁰.
- A** The practice of “flushing” can cause the bird or animal considerable stress. This stress is similar to the distress experienced when it seeks to escape from predators.
B Furthermore, when migrant birds have just made long flights, their

¹⁷ The general principle is discussed in the BG Code.

¹⁸ The general principle is discussed in the WS Code

¹⁹ The general principle is discussed in the RSPB and BOCA Codes

²⁰ The issue principle is discussed in the BOCA and RSPB Codes.

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repeated flushing can mean that they use up vital energy needed for feeding.

- 20** Limit the time spent at any one location viewing or photographing wildlife²¹. Group leaders must take into account the cumulative effect of the number of people present. This may vary from species to species. For example, it may be acceptable for five people to spend 10 minutes photographing or observing an animal or bird. But 10 people spending 10 minutes or even two photographers spending 30 minutes could cause the particular animal or bird feel stressed. It is time to leave at the first signs of stress (eg. animal keeps moving away).
- 21** The use of temporary hides or blinds, both for wildlife watching and wildlife photography, requires careful consideration²².
- A** Ensure that wild animals and birds are not be stressed by the presence of the hide. Care must be taken to ensure that the hide is not so close to them as to cause wildlife disturbance.
- B** Additionally, hides should not be set up such that they draw the attention of curious members of the public or predators.
- 22** Do not corner or surround wildlife for the purposes of getting a good glimpse or a great photograph.
- A** Cornered or surrounded animals and birds often hurt themselves while trying to escape.
- B** Some species of birds may suffer such great psychological trauma that they may 'freeze' or go limp. This may have a permanent impact on their health. Whilst it is in a state of "shut-down" it is also extremely vulnerable to predators.
- C** Some animals may defend themselves by biting, clawing or charging when cornered, putting the observer or photographer at risk.
- 23** Seek to understand the natural history and behavioural ecology of animals and birds observed or photographed. Do this to ensure that the health and welfare of these creatures are not compromised²³. For example, wildlife may respond to people in many ways. Such response factors depend on the species, the location, the terrain, the climate, the time of year, and on whether they are breeding, nesting or are with young. It is important for people to adjust their behaviour to take these variables into consideration. Some of these issues are considered in the section entitled Special Rules in Special Circumstances.
- 24** Notwithstanding the various points above, be aware of the signs of

²¹ The general principle is discussed from the BOCA Code.

²² The general principle is discussed in the BOCA, RSPB and RPS Codes.

²³ The general issue is considered in the RPS and RSPB Codes

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stress caused by your presence. Move away at the first indication that the wild animal or bird is becoming stressed or agitated²⁴. Sometimes, these signs of stress are evident as can be seen in the examples below:

- A** The animal or bird tries to hide or moves out of sight.
- B** It runs or flies away.
- C** It makes repeated alarm calls.
- D** A bird trying to attract your attention by flying in front of you.
- E** A bird trying to lure you away from a position or even attacking you.
- F** A bird that is either carrying food or nesting material perches at one spot for a long time, waiting for you to move away.
- G** A bird ruffling its feathers; the involuntarily raising of hair on the back of an animal; the raising or lowering (depending on the species) of the ears of an animal; or the body of a mammal or reptile tensing up.
- H** A mammal baring its teeth or growling; or a snake hissing, moving threateningly towards you or trying out to strike out.
- I** An animal or bird going 'limp' or freezing.
- J** An animal or bird, in extreme circumstances, trying to sting, bite, claw or lash out with its tail.

Nests and Nesting Sites

- 25** Keep well back from breeding colonies, roosts, display areas and important feeding sites²⁵. If you get too close, your presence may disrupt or distract wildlife, preventing them from feeding, breeding and performing other functions vital to their survival.
- 26** Keep a distance from any occupied nest or weaning den. Wildlife watching and photography close to a nest or nesting site should be minimised or avoided altogether²⁶. If undertaken, use long lenses, binoculars or telescopes to keep your distance from the nest. And remember to move away at the first signs of the bird or animal showing stress (point #24). At no time should you molest the nest and its nestlings. This includes not 'relocating' the nest.
 - A** Brooding birds and animals weaning their young are especially sensitive to human presence. For example, disturbance can keep birds from their nests, leaving chicks hungry and exposed. The absence of parent birds may also enable predators to take eggs or young.
 - B** The continued presence of people may also highlight the presence of the nest or weaning den to predators.
 - C** Bird nestings may fail because parents feel harassed by groups of people hanging around all the time. They may opt to abandon their chicks as a result.

²⁴ This issue is considered in the RSPB, BOCA and NPSS Codes.

²⁵ The issue is addressed in the ABA Code.

²⁶ The issue is addressed in the RSPB, BOCA and NPSS Codes

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- 27** Do not reveal the location of active nests and weaning dens²⁷. For example, do not post images of birds nesting until the young birds have left the nest or are in a position to fend for themselves.
- A** Highlighting the presence of a nest or weaning den may draw large numbers of visitors. In addition to the reasons set out in point #26, the ecosystem may not be able to cope with the increase in visitor numbers and consequent environmental impact.
- B** Highlighting a nest or den may also draw poachers after young birds, eggs or young animals.
- 28** Be discreet. Only inform others of the presence of a rare animal or bird, or of its last known location, if you are confident that they will not do anything to compromise the creature's safety and welfare. Do not post or circulate photos of rare or unusual animals or birds if the photographs reveal where they were taken.
- A** As above, the ecosystem may not be able to cope with the increase in visitor numbers of and consequent environmental impact.
- B** Highlighting the presence of a rare animal or bird may draw poachers after rare animals or birds.
- 29** Remember that birds like Hornbills, Kingfishers, Bee-Eaters and Nightjars do not build conventional nests. Exercise the same level of restraint and caution when viewing and photographing these "other" dwellings and hatcheries.

The use of Technology

- 30** Minimise the use of playback recordings and other methods of attracting birds. Repeatedly playing a recording of birdsong or calls to encourage a bird to respond can divert a territorial bird from important duties, such as feeding and fending for its young²⁸. Do not use playback recordings a) to attract bird species that are threatened or endangered, b) when birds are breeding or c) in heavily birded areas.
- A** During the breeding season, birds should not be disturbed or confused by playback.
- B** In heavily birded areas, birds are likely to be repeatedly stressed by playback. Avoid using playback.
- C** Care must be taken to ensure the survival of rare and threatened species. The use of birdcalls may disrupt them from vital survival functions such as breeding, feeding and resting.

²⁷ The issue is addressed in the RSPB and BOCA Codes.

²⁸ The general principle is discussed in the ABA, BOCA, RSPB and NPSS Codes.

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31 It is important to acknowledge that with digital photography:

A It is possible to take much more wildlife photos without being limited by the costs associated with film photography. Digital photography allows the option of taking hundreds of shots of a subject before selecting only a few.

B Digital photography has sparked a substantial increase in the number of nature photographers. This is because even amateur nature photographers can produce high-quality shots.

With greater opportunity comes greater responsibility. Photographers should exercise greater restraint. Limit the time spent photographing individual subjects. Limit the number of photographs taken of subjects, to minimise disturbance during both day and night photography.

32 Limit the use of flash photography.

A This may confuse, distract or frighten wild animals and birds.

B Additionally, wildlife may experience great discomfort and pain when their eyes are exposed to intensely bright flashes.

C More importantly, intensely bright flashes, especially when taken in quick succession and by several people at one go, may cause the creature to suffer irreversible eye damage. Please bear in mind that at night and in poor lighting, many animals and birds dilate their pupils to see better. They are therefore particularly vulnerable to flash photography and artificial lighting. When suddenly exposed to camera flashes, it is difficult for them to reduce the size of their pupils quickly. This could blind them temporarily or in rare cases, permanently.

D The excessive use of bright flashes at a bird nest may cause the parents to abandon their young, or result in baby birds falling out of their nests.

33 During the night or when lighting is poor, care needs to be exercised when using flashlights or spotlights to view or photograph wildlife in the field. Light pollution can, as suggested above, temporarily blind wild animals and birds, distract them, cause them discomfort and frighten them.

A Where the use of such artificial light is necessary, it is important, where possible, to use diffused or dimmed light to minimise any discomfort caused to wildlife.

B Whilst moving through forested areas or whilst searching for wildlife it is important, where possible and safe, to use natural light (like moonlight). Alternatively, rely on the flashlight of a single team member to limit wildlife disturbance.

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- C** Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially in relation to close-ups²⁹.
 - D** In any event, minimise shining your lights directly at wild animals or birds. Instead, direct the light slightly away from the subject. Using this technique, you are able to view the subject with a diffused beam and with reflections off surrounding objects.
 - E** Restrict the time spent viewing wildlife at night with artificial lights to minimise disruption.
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- 34** Minimise the use of laser pointers as a means of pointing out wildlife. The heat and intense laser beam can burn wildlife, and cause them to suffer irreversible eye damage. Invertebrates, small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles are particularly vulnerable.
 - 35** Do not pre-position cameras next to perches regularly used by birds, nests and other wildlife dwellings, in order to operate them by remote or cable extension. The presence of foreign objects near wildlife dwellings, especially for extended periods, may cause the animal unease or discomfort. This may result in them abandoning their dwellings.
 - 36** Minimise the use of flash extenders in night or poor-lighting nature photography. Flash extenders focus light directly on the subject, instead of diffusing light, increasing the risk of irreversible eye damage.
 - 37** Minimise, where possible and safe, the use of vehicles when viewing and photographing wildlife. If you wish to temporarily park your vehicle in a nature area, please park in such a manner that minimises disturbance to wildlife.
 - A** The noise and fumes emitted can disturb and irritate wildlife.
 - B** Moving vehicles may crush and run over animals, plants and seedlings, especially smaller ones.

However the Code of Ethics recognises that for both logistical and safety reasons, certain nature areas (eg. Panti) are best visited using vehicles.

Unethical and Illegal Activities

- 38** Do not feed wildlife to encourage them to take up more 'viewer or photo friendly' positions, as it is not in their best interests.

For example, feeding birds items like grasshoppers, caterpillars, worms, meal worms, fish bait, frogs, processed or cooked food may result in some of the following problems.

²⁹ The general issue is addressed in the ABA and NPSS Codes

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- A** The food fed may not meet the bird's dietary needs. Birds may eat the food if they are tired and hungry after a long flight, or if the food is similar to their usual prey. However they may then fall sick, become lethargic or, in extreme cases even die.
- B** Even where the food provided is similar to their naturally foraged food, birds need to consume a variety of food types for a balanced diet. These food types would ordinarily be available in their natural environment. However, the easy availability of human-fed food may cause these birds to give up foraging for other food types, leading in turn to their diet becoming unbalanced.
- C** Food obtained from pet shops may degrade and cause harm to the environment if they are rejected by birds.
- D** Food provided to birds, including live food, may contain chemical contaminants. Some of the worms and other life forms that are fed to birds may be diseased. Birds may thus pick up infections or fall ill.
- E** Food like mealworms (beetle larvae) may, if not consumed, escape into the environment and reproduce, becoming an alien invasive species.

Additionally;

- F** Feeding harms wildlife in the long run. They can become over-dependent on 'handouts' from humans. They may consequently lose the ability to fend for themselves.
 - G** In some instances, feeding may tempt the wild animal or bird to leave the relative safety of its natural setting. This may expose its presence to predators.
 - H** Feeding wildlife may cause them to lose their fear of humans. It can result in them becoming easy targets for poachers.
 - I** Feeding animals such as monkeys may cause them to a) Become aggressive and demanding and b) Enter areas inhabited by humans. This results in an increase in human-wildlife conflicts.
- 39** If you witness unethical behaviour or behaviour that is harmful, or exposes wildlife to danger, do assess the situation first. Intervene if you think it safe to do so³⁰. Try explaining to the errant individual(s) why such acts are undesirable and wrong. Attempt within reason to have them stopped. If it is not safe to intervene, document (eg. discreetly take photos of) the undesirable conduct and notify the Authorities³¹. In particular, actively discourage the following acts:
- 40** Discourage photographers who, in order to obtain better pictures, trim or remove foliage around active nests. Birds choose nesting

³⁰ The issue is addressed in ABA and NPSS Codes.

³¹ For activities that occur within Singapore's National Parks and Nature Reserves contact the National Parks Board and for activities that are outside Singapore's National Parks and Nature Reserves contact the Agricultural and Veterinary Authority (AVA). NParks: +65 1800-471 7300 AVA: +65 62270670 (wildlife)/64719996/64717198 (animal welfare)

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sites because of the protection offered. Altering the site may result in the elimination of shade or expose the nest to predators.

- 41** Discourage those who handle, deface or structurally alter nests to obtain better photographs.
- A** Parent birds may abandon such nests if they no longer seem familiar or if they no longer appear secure.
- B** The young may also become more exposed to predators.
- 42** Discourage those who manhandle young animals, young birds or eggs to obtain better images.
- A** Taking a frail youngster out of its nest may kill it. Parents may have difficulty recognizing its scent after it has been touched. They may abandon the nest as a result.
- B** Young animals and birds may not survive the manhandling.
- C** Eggs that are handled may become damaged or may cease to be viable.
- 43** Discourage photographers who restrain wildlife to obtain better pictures. Some apply bird lime or other adhesives on branches that birds normally land on, preventing birds from changing positions. Some use restraints such as wire and string to prevent birds from flying away. Such acts of cruelty should not be condoned under any circumstances.
- A** Birds that are trapped in this way become easy targets for predators.
- B** Given their inability to move, they also lose the ability to feed or fend for themselves. They eventually die a slow death.
- C** Even if these birds are subsequently released, they are likely to sustain injuries whilst being freed.
- 44** Discourage photographers who chase or stalk animals and birds in order to get good pictures.
- A** Wildlife harassed in this way may choose to leave the area altogether to avoid harassment
- B** Resting or feeding birds pursued in this manner are particularly affected by harassment. Energy conservation and food intake are crucial for their survival.
- 45** Discourage those who restrain, pick up or handle wildlife to either observe or photograph them, or pose with them for the camera³².
- A** This causes considerable stress to the animal or bird.
- B** Such posed photos may encourage others who view these pictures

³² The general principle is discussed in the WS Code

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to treat wildlife disrespectfully. They convey a sense of man's dominion over all things natural, when it is in fact important to emphasise that these creatures are worthy of the same dignity and respect that we claim to be entitled to.

- 46** Be familiar with and respect the laws protecting wildlife and their habitats, both in Singapore³³ and abroad. These laws have helped to secure the conservation of species and their habitats.

When overseas, wildlife observers and photographers should, if legislation relating to the protection of wildlife is either inadequate or absent, continue to observe high standards of ethics.

Contact the authorities³⁴ if you witness wildlife crimes, including the following;

- A** The killing of wild animals and birds
- B** The hunting, trapping and capturing of wild animals and birds
- C** The hurting or maiming of wild animals and birds
- D** The ill-treating, torturing or beating of wild animals and birds
- E** The harassing of wild animals and birds
- F** Poaching of the young of animals and birds, and stealing the eggs and nests of birds
- G** Individuals with nets and traps, likely used to trap and capture wildlife.
- H** Individuals applying bird lime to branches, or using decoy or caged birds to lure wild birds.

- 47** While in the field, report the following activities to the authorities as they may have an adverse impact on nature:

- A** People bringing pets into nature areas and reserves, especially where this is clearly prohibited. Pets may transmit animal-borne diseases to wildlife. Pets like dogs may chase or kill wildlife, including insects.
- B** High impact activities like jogging, mountain biking, boating or fishing in natural areas, where these are clearly prohibited or where these areas have not been formally set aside for such use.
- C** Land clearing and construction activity including, excavation works, drilling and piling, in or close to natural areas.
- D** Bio-prospecting especially in natural reserves.
- E** People poaching amphibians, worms and insects for use as fish or bird food.

³³ In Singapore, the legal provisions relating to the protection of wildlife include Section 5 of the Wild Animals and Birds Act, Sections 8 and 9 of the Parks and Trees Act and Section 42 of the Animals and Birds Act

³⁴ For activities that occur within Singapore's National Parks and Nature Reserves contact the National Parks Board and for activities that are outside Singapore's National Parks and Nature Reserves contact the Agricultural and Veterinary Authority (AVA). NParks: +65 1800-471 7300 AVA: +65 62270670 (wildlife)/64719996/64717198 (animal welfare)

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It is important to remember that whilst such activities may sometimes be legal, providing the authorities with information and feedback will enable them to better deal with threats facing natural areas and wildlife.

- 48** In Singapore, contact the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES)³⁵ if you come across a wild animal or bird that is sick, injured, trapped, in distress or is unable to move or fly due to fatigue or illness.
- 49** Discourage photographers who “manufacture” the following shots in order to take the ideal photograph, at the expense of the health, safety and welfare of animals or birds:
- A** *Action Shots:* These are spectacular shots of wild animals or birds in flight. These shots may be obtained by spooking the animal or bird. An unethical photograph of a gliding colugo or one of a flock of herons taking off is not worth much if the subject was harassed into moving for the shot.
- B** *Reaction Shots:* An unethical photograph of a snarling tiger or one of a cobra with its hood raised is not worth much if the animal was taunted into behaving that way.
- C** *Distraction Shots:* A photograph of a stag with its magnificent horns looking at the camera is not worth much if it has been distracted by noises the photographer made. Similarly, waking up a sleeping lion, by making loud noises to get a better picture, does not say much about the photographer.
- 50** Discourage those (unless they are performing authorised research) who remove wild animals and birds from the wild, even temporarily, so that they can be observed or photographed in a controlled setting like a studio. Wildlife caught and taken out of their natural environments suffer great distress.
- 51** Never enter Nature Reserves or other formally protected areas at night without the permission of the relevant authorities. In Singapore our Nature Reserves fall under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Board.

Respecting all Plant Life

Plant-life or flora including trees, shrubs, forest herbs, vines, forest undergrowth and grasses, perform crucial ecosystem functions.

- A** Many animals, birds and insects depend on fruit, leaves, seeds, nectar, pollen, wood substrate, tree bark and underground roots and stems for food. Bear in mind that many species have limited ranges. Once their food supply runs out in a particular area, their

³⁵ ACRES (Wildlife Hotline) can be reached at + 65 9783 7782.

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very survival is threatened.

- B** Plants and trees also serve as homes, perches and places of sanctuary for mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and other life forms. They provide shade, reduce the temperature of the biosphere, produce oxygen and assist with carbon sequestration.

Accordingly;

- 52** Minimise the collection of plant specimens and seeds when out in the wild. It may be tempting to collect these for food, medicinal purposes, decorative purposes or simply so that they can be re-planted in the garden. However, over time certain plants can disappear from the ecosystem as a result of over collection.
- 53** Plucking or picking the flowers, leaves or fruits of endangered plants and trees, however beautiful or tasty, can similarly contribute to the demise of these species
- 54** Do not trample through undergrowth and over grasses and small plants unless performing authorised research. These plants are as important to the functioning of the ecosystem as their larger counterparts.
- 55** Do not “bash through” or cut your way past obstructing branches and vines in heavily wooded areas, unless you are performing authorised research. Appreciate forested areas even if they slow you down or set limits on your ability to observe or photograph wildlife.
- 56** When setting up or positioning temporary shelters, encampments, field equipment or camera aids, do not attach these to fragile trees or their branches. This may cause damage to such trees, cause their branches to break, and frighten or displace the animals and birds that rely on them for food, shelter or refuge.
- 57** Do not post or circulate the photographs of rare or unusual plants or trees if these photographs reveal where the plants were photographed. Only inform others (or reveal its location) if you are confident that they will handle the information discreetly.
- A** Given that plants are by nature static, it will not be difficult for poachers to harvest them if they even have a general sense of where they are located.
- B** Green areas may attract large numbers of visitors hoping to view these rare specimens. The ecosystem and wildlife that live therein may not be able to cope with the influx.
- 58** The shedding of tree bark is a natural process. It is important not to peel off the bark of trees unless performing authorized research. Furthermore, do not carve on tree barks even for navigational

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purposes. If you keep to designated hiking trails, there is no need to leave any markings. Bark removal may expose the trees to fungal infections and other diseases.

- 59** Be aware that light pollution, during night-time wildlife watching and photography, could even affect plants. Biological processes like fruiting and flowering cycles, as well as photosynthesis, are dependent on the cyclical presence and absence of natural light at different times of the day. Consequently, the “untimely” introduction of artificial light during times of relative darkness may disrupt plant cycles and ‘pre-timed’ biological processes.

Respecting all life in our Inter-tidal Areas

When visiting Singapore’s inter-tidal areas, it is important to ensure that we take into account the health, safety and welfare of all inter-tidal life forms. These include sea-grasses, fish, rays, crustaceans, horseshoe crabs, starfish, sea snakes, marine molluscs, corals, barnacles, anemones, marine worms, sea cucumbers, sea urchins and sponges.

- 60** Avoid stepping on rocks covered with sea grasses and barnacles. These ‘attachments’ are living things worthy of respect. Avoid stepping into murky water. You may inadvertently step on and kill or injure an inter-tidal creature³⁶. Slide your feet forward instead when moving through murky waters.
- 61** Do not tease or dig out inter-tidal creatures that are hidden in drift wood, rock crevices, in between coral formations, in / under sand or mud, and in other inter-tidal safe havens³⁷. Do not use sticks or other instruments to “explore” inter-tidal sanctuaries or to determine if they are occupied. Respect the privacy of these marine creatures, their shy nature and their need to conceal themselves.
- 62** Do not ‘save’ or bring home any inter-tidal creatures³⁸. They generally have difficulty surviving outside an inter-tidal ecosystem. Removing them is tantamount to killing them.
- 63** Whilst walking along the beach, on mudflats or wading through water, be careful not to kick anything. You may be kicking an inter-tidal creature or its dwelling.
- 64** Whilst walking along the beach or on mudflats, stick to solid ground where possible. Soft sand and mud offer refuge to inter-tidal creatures. You risk trampling on and harming them if you walk in their habitats.

³⁶ The issue is addressed in the WS Code

³⁷ The issue is addressed in the WS Code

³⁸ The issue is addressed in the WS Code

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- 65** Do not poke or taunt any inter-tidal creatures with pens, sticks, pointers or other instruments³⁹. Know that harassing them in this way subjects them to the same amount of stress experienced by land-based wildlife that are chased or cornered.
- 66** Groups exploring the seashore or mud-flats should move about, where possible, in a single file. This restricts the group's physical impact on the ecosystem to the path used, and minimises their impact on all inter-tidal life.
- 67** When looking under rocks, driftwood and other inter-tidal structures, lift and lower these gently to minimise wildlife disturbance. Place them in their original positions after viewing.
- 68** Do not handle inter-tidal creatures unless participating in research or when guided by those familiar with handling them.
- A** Handling inter-tidal creatures may cause them to suffer considerable stress.
- B** Additionally, creatures like crustaceans, horseshoe crabs and coral structures are extremely fragile. Handling them improperly may cause their limbs, tails or physical structures to break off.
- C** Tapping or knocking the shells and exoskeletons of such creatures, or throwing them into the water from height may damage their protective structures⁴⁰.
- D** Creatures like Stone Fish, Stingrays, Sea Snakes, Jellyfish, Cone Snails and Sea Urchins do bite and sting. Refrain from handling them to minimise your risk of getting hurt.
- 69** Ensure that substances like sun screen lotions, moisturisers, topical medication and insect repellents that you have applied do not come into contact with any inter-tidal creatures, their habitats or the water. The chemicals in them may kill or harm wildlife.
- 70** Do not feed inter-tidal creatures. They have specific dietary needs. The food provided by you may harm them instead.
- 71** Do not litter. In addition to being unsightly, litter has an adverse impact on the inter-tidal ecosystem.
- A** Litter pollutes and poisons the ecosystem in general.
- B** Creatures often become entrapped in bottles, bags and other debris left behind on beaches and mudflats.
- C** Some inter-tidal creatures and sea birds may mistake litter for food. They may end up getting poisoned, choked or starved to death. For example, shore birds and turtles may mistake plastic bags for jelly fish and pieces of string or rope for worms. Accumulated litter is

³⁹ The issue is addressed in the WS Code

⁴⁰ This issue is addressed in WS Code.

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permanently lodged in the animal's stomach, taking up space and preventing it from consuming enough food. As a result, ingested litter slowly starves the poor creature to death.

- 72** If you discover abandoned fishing nets with trapped horseshoe crabs in them, do release these crabs. Please inform NSS about this, so that we can keep records of where improperly discarded nets are found⁴¹.

Respecting all Invertebrate (Insect) Life

It is tempting to view invertebrates such as insects as lesser life forms because they are diminutive and are not as charismatic as larger animals. These invertebrates include butterflies, moths, beetles, dragonflies, spiders, crustaceans, snails, worms and segmented worms.

Invertebrates are essential components of the ecosystem. They should be treated with the same dignity and respect given to other living creatures. They perform vital functions like pollination, and assist with processes such as decomposition and soil fertilization. They are also a food source for creatures like birds and reptiles.

- 73** Care should be taken not to kill, maim, trample on or cause damage to their exoskeleton. Be observant and watch where you are stepping, sitting or leaning on.
- 74** Do not toy with, swat (unless killing mosquitoes), de-wing or remove the digits of invertebrates. They are not play-things and they contribute in vital ways to the ecosystem.
- 75** Do not trap, net or collect invertebrates like butterflies and beetles in order to convert them into trophies. A live invertebrate contributes far more to the ecosystem than a dead one in a mounted collection.
- 76** Be cautious when using insect repellents, topical medication, skin creams and sun screen lotions. Chemicals and odours present in them could be harmful to invertebrates and other creatures.
- 77** Do not bring "attractants" like dung, nectar or syrups into nature reserves and other protected areas for the purposes of luring butterflies and moths unless performing authorised research.
- A** The introduction of attractants to bait butterflies and moths artificially manipulates the ecosystem and alters species behaviour. Butterflies and moths perform vital ecosystem functions like pollination. Their absence may cause the ecosystem as a whole to

⁴¹ contact@nss.org.sg

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- suffer.
- B** The use of attractants causes butterflies and moths to congregate unnecessarily, hence exposing them to predators.
- 78** Do not to expose hidden creatures like caterpillars, worms and other invertebrates, in order to lure birds and other wildlife. Whilst these invertebrates are naturally preyed upon by animals, speeding up the process by drawing attention to them will have a negative impact. It affects the role played by the invertebrates in relation to critical ecosystem functions like pollination and soil fertilization.
- 79** Refrain from bringing caterpillars home to rear unless performing authorised research.
- A** Most caterpillars feed on specific plant types. Butterflies thrive in particular environmental conditions that are not easily replicated.
- B** A caterpillar or butterfly taken from its natural environment can no longer contribute to the vitality of that ecosystem.
- 80** During macro photography of invertebrates and other tiny life forms like amphibians, minimise the use of flash. The intense heat generated by a flash can 'burn' the subject, killing it or causing irreversible damage to its organic structure.
- 81** It is easy to re-position an invertebrate or use a pen or stick to prod it to take up a "photo-friendly" position. However, bear in mind that they are as sensitive as their larger counterparts. They too experience stress and discomfort when harassed.
- 82** When insects are hovering around you, stay calm and move slowly. They are probably just foraging for food. They are often more wary of you than you are of them.
- A** If you wave them away, you may disrupt their food foraging and cause them unnecessary stress.
- B** Insects like bees and hornets may feel threatened by your waving arms, and may sting you in self defence.
- 83** If an insect lands on your clothes or belongings, use a fallen twig or leaf to gently brush it onto surrounding plants. Do not panic and squash it to death. It is only normal for insects in their natural environment to land and rest on other creatures and inanimate things. Remember that we humans are the ones entering their "natural space".
- 84** Bear in mind that the eggs of invertebrates are tiny, delicate and are easily mistaken for bird droppings. Care should be taken to ensure that they are not handled, scraped away or dislodged from leaf surfaces, so as to maximise their chances of hatching.

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- 85** Care must be taken when photographing ovipositing butterflies or mating pairs. Birds naturally consume resting and ovipositing butterflies. However, you may inadvertently speed up this process, and cause imbalance to the predation cycle, if you carelessly draw the attention of birds and other predators to such butterflies.
- 86** Bear in mind that when it is neither warm nor sunny, butterflies often take the opportunity to rest and recover expended energy, usually on the underside of leaves. During such times, they are vulnerable to predators. Accordingly, they should not be disturbed and attention should not be drawn to their presence.

Special Rules in Special Circumstances

- 87** Care should be taken when viewing or photographing species that are generally **less mobile than others**. These include the slow loris, tortoises and snakes such as vipers.
- A** The less mobile a species is, the more vulnerable it is to predators and poachers. Drawing attention to the presence of such a creature may attract predators. Describing its location or posting its pictures online, or allowing word of its presence to spread, may attract poachers.
- B** Low mobility species will not be able to move away or hide easily when disturbed. They can thus become easily stressed.
- C** Touching or harassing low mobility animals may provoke them to defend themselves by biting or clawing.
- 88** Take care when observing or photographing **species that are small**. These include squirrels, mouse deers, colugos and many species of birds.

The smaller the creature, the less likely it is to be in a position to defend itself. It is thus more vulnerable to predators, poachers and people who harass it. For example, the presence of large numbers of people photographing a mouse deer may draw in predators like dogs that can easily outrun the mouse deer.

- 89** **Young wildlife** like fawns, cubs and fledglings are particularly vulnerable.
- A** They are inexperienced and do not have the ability to fend for themselves.
- B** They are guided by their mothers, and can easily become confused and lost when frightened by the presence of people.
- C** If they become stressed, they may hurt themselves or expose themselves to predators whilst trying to escape.
- D** Young animals are especially vulnerable to predators. They are especially valuable to poachers. Care must be taken to ensure that attention is not drawn to their presence in a particular area.

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- 90 Parent wildlife with young** are especially vulnerable.
- A** In addition to fending for themselves, parents have to care for their young. As a consequence, they are likely to be easily stressed by the presence of people.
 - B** They require greater privacy to focus on caring for their young
 - C** They may attack or charge at perceived threats to their young.
 - D** They are more vulnerable to predators and poachers, as they cannot escape easily due to the need to also fend for their young. Care must be taken to ensure that attention is not drawn to their presence in a particular area.
- 91** Be aware of **population dynamics** when observing or photographing social animals.
- A** For example, one should be aware that the alpha male of a primate species may become highly agitated if a person takes up a position that prevents the alpha male from having direct access to his females and young.
 - B** During the breeding season, competing males may not take well to the presence of humans who are perceived as intruders.
- 92** Care must be taken when observing or photographing **animals that move in flocks and herds**.
- A** Disturbing a flock or herd may create panic. This may cause individuals to break away and lose contact with the group, even permanently. Communal wildlife rely heavily on the group when feeding, caring for young and for security. Without group support, the individual animal may not survive for long.
 - B** Disturbing a flock or herd may cause individuals to crash into each other and injure themselves when trying to make a getaway.
- 93** Care must be taken with **shy and reclusive animals**. All wildlife are likely to be startled by approaching humans. However, some species are less accustomed to human presence. Those that dwell deep within the forest (eg. Sumatran Rhinos and Barking Deer) are more reclusive than animals like elephants and Sambar Deer that sometimes leave the cover of forest whilst foraging.
- 94** Establish **whether an animal can seek refuge immediately** if it feels threatened, by flying away, climbing a tree, moving deeper into the forest or diving into water. If it does not have any escape options, care should be taken not to frighten it.
- 95** **Establish the size of the subject's ecosystem**. The size of the ecosystem for a pond fish or a pond dragonfly is the size of the pond. Some species may only live in a particular stretch of forest, in a particular valley or at a particular altitude. The size of its

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ecosystem may be further limited by the availability of food resources, climatic reasons or human-induced habitat fragmentation. Such animals do not have the option of moving elsewhere when stressed or threatened by human presence.

- 96 Rare or charismatic wildlife** appearing at a particular location are especially vulnerable if word spreads about their presence. Large numbers of people may converge to see and photograph them. Protect these rarities by telling only a discreet few of their presence. The fewer people present, the less stress they suffer.
- 97 Respect the uniqueness of species.** Photographing the less-tolerant black rhino is not the same as photographing a white rhino. Know the characteristics of your subject. Different precautions may have to be taken with different species.
- 98 Respect the individuality of specific animals or birds.** Each animal has a “personality” different from others in the species. No two elephants will respond in exactly the same way when they sense human presence nearby. Some may move away while others may choose to attack. Observe individual animals closely for signs of agitation or distress.
- 99** Understand the relationship a species has with its environment. Understand the role played by **terrain and natural cover** in the behaviour of a species.
- A** In relation to some species, less cover makes it easier for an animal to spot the presence of man. It may become stressed and take flight. On the other hand, in relation to other species, open terrain may provide security to an animal. It knows exactly where the people are, and knows how to make a getaway if need be.
- B** In relation to some species, good natural cover creates a sense of security by giving individuals easy access to hiding places. Animals may therefore be more tolerant of human presence. In relation to other species, “good” natural cover may mean more obstacles and consequently fewer escape options. It may thus be stressed by human presence.
- 100** Bear in mind that wildlife need rest. Respect their privacy. **Avoid disturbing them when they are resting.** The needs of various types of wildlife can be varied. Some examples:
- A** Most primates and birds rest at night.
- B** Most big cats rest in the day.
- C** In temperate zones, some species of wildlife rest or hibernate during fixed periods in a year.
- D** Migrant animals or birds need to rest and recuperate after completing their long journeys.
- E** Calving herbivores need privacy while giving birth, to minimise

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delivery stress, and to hide from predators. They need rest after delivering their young, in order to recover sufficiently quickly to begin fending for themselves and their offsprings.

- F** Pregnant carnivores require more rest. They expend more energy than normal while hunting.

Overseas Wildlife Observation and Photography and Nature Competitions

- 101** When on overseas safaris, do not employ local “beaters” who use dogs, elephants, ultrasound devices and loud noises to frighten wildlife into leaving their concealed positions. No sighting or photograph is worth the stress and danger caused to the subject.
- 102** Do not “tip/bribe” locals (over and above pre-agreed fees) to “locate” particular animals or birds. When viewing wildlife, do not “bribe” your guides or drivers to move you closer to these animals, or break local regulations and park rules on species protection and eco-tourism.
- A** “Located” wildlife surrounded by hordes of people suffer considerable levels of stress.
- B** “Tipping/bribing” guides may cause them to breach wildlife laws, violate ethical standards and enter prohibited or protected areas in order to “deliver” specific sightings.
- C** Encouraging locals to behave irresponsibly could lead to social problems like corruption. It could also result in local guides and drivers demanding such “tips/bribes” from others.
- 103** Support the preservation of ecologically important areas at home and abroad. Support the conservation of important sites including Nature Reserves, National Parks, Conservation Concessions, important biodiversity areas including all Important Bird Areas (IBA) identified by Birdlife International, sites located along migratory flyways and Ramsar sites.
- 104** When overseas, support the local economy and local conservation efforts by supporting the livelihoods of those reliant on eco-tourism. Stay in locally-owned accommodation, visit locally-owned restaurants, engage local guides and use local amenities and services.
- 105** Respect local customs, cultural norms and idiosyncrasies. It pays to get along with your hosts, respect their rights and draw on their local knowledge. Some issues that can potentially arise are:
- A** Some locals may be chatty, inquisitive or used to a slower pace of life. Be patient when dealing with them. Do not be rude, demanding or patronising. Do not express irritation, assert your rights or issue threats.

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- B** Local guides may be reluctant to visit certain natural areas or to visit them at certain times, due to their local beliefs, superstitions or taboos. These areas could also be sacred. Respect their belief systems and do not pressure them to take you there. You might even refrain from visiting such sites independently, even if it means missing the opportunity to see a local rarity.
- C** Local guides may perform prayers and rituals when at a site. Be understanding, sensitive and patient. Allow your guides to perform these prayers and rituals without complaining or rushing them, even if it means missing the opportunity to see a local rarity.
- D** Respect local laws that relate to species and habitat conservation. Do not judge local conservation efforts, however rudimentary or disorganised they may seem.
- 106** Manage the competitive element that is sometimes a part of bird races and nature photography competitions. Ensure that the desire to win or spot a particular species does not result in you employing intrusive and unethical methods. No win, lifer or photograph is worth it if the safety and welfare of an animal is compromised.
- 107** Manage the expectations of fellow field trippers. Never “guarantee” the sighting of a wild animal or bird. Never suggest that there is a high possibility of seeing it. If you visit a site expecting to see a given species, you may, out of frustration, be tempted to employ intrusive and unethical methods to obtain sightings.

Acknowledgements

In putting this code together reference has been made to the following codes.

1. ABA (American Birding Association) – Code of Ethics (ABA Code)
<http://www.aba.org/about/ethics.html>
2. RSPB – The birdwatcher’s code. (RSPB Code)
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/watchingbirds/code/index.aspx>
3. BOCA (Bird Observation and Conservation Australia) – Ethical Birding Code (BOCA Code)
<http://boca.org.au/about-boca/our-policies>
4. Birdlife International Asia Partnership Bird Tourism Charter for Asia
5. Code of the Bird Group of the Nature Society (Singapore) (BG Code)
6. Code of Birding Ethics of the Malayan Nature Society Bird Conservation Council
7. NPSS (Nature Photography Society of Singapore) – Code of Ethics in the Field (NPSS Code)
<http://www.npss.org.sg/forum/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=1475&sid=c801fb46ab7ff9730f78d6d18f229802>
8. Wild Singapore – Codes of Ethics (WS Code)
<http://www.wildsingapore.com/places/prep.htm#2>
<http://www.wildsingapore.com/places/shoretips.htm>

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- 9 <http://www.wildsingapore.com/places/shorephotos.htm>
Nature Code – Royal Photographic Society (RPS Code)
<http://www.rpsnaturegroup.com/page7.htm>

In putting this code together, we acknowledge the suggestions, advice and support of the following individuals:

Alan Owyong, Willie Foo, Hsu Chia Chi, Sutari Supari, Allen Teo, Tony O' Dempsey, Wee Yeow Chin, Subraj Rajathurai, Ashley Ng, John Spencer, Myron Tay, Fang Sher Chet, Timothy Pwee, Ria Tan, Marcus Ng, Gan Cheong Wei, Edzra Iskandar, Lim Kim Chuah, Sunny Yeo, Melinda Chan, Shawn Lum, Leong Kwok Peng, Margie Hall, Goh Si Guim, Ho Hua Chew, Goh Ter Yang and Anuj Jain.

We acknowledge the insights and suggestions provided by these leaders in the local nature photographic community: Chng Peng Eik, CCP Lim, Ender Tey, Lee Phek Thong, Yeo Wee Han, Cai Yixiong and William Susanto.

Prepared by:
Vinayagan Dharmarajah (Environmental Law and Policy Coordinator) and Gloria Seow (Education Group Chairperson)

The world is a dangerous place, not because of people who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing about it. -- Albert Einstein