

## The African Bird Club

### Code of Practice for Birders

The ABC's Code of Practice for Birders sets out five key principles that all Members should follow wherever they are birdwatching. By following the Code, leading by example and sensitively challenging the minority of birders, photographers and guides who behave inappropriately, you will be helping promote responsible birding that will ultimately help protect the birds, their habitats and benefit local people.

This Code of Practice is endorsed by the African Bird Club (ABC), the Neotropical Bird Club (NBC), the Oriental Bird Club (OBC), and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia (OSME) and is resident on the Clubs' websites. Wording may vary in detail according to different regional geography of the Clubs concerned but the key underlying principle is consistent - the welfare of the birds comes first.

#### **Five key Principles**

- The interests of the birds come first
- Be an ambassador for ABC when birding abroad
- Show respect for habitats and the environment
- Show respect for local laws and customs
- Think about the interests of wildlife and local people before passing on news of a rare bird, especially during the breeding season

1. Whether you are particularly interested in photography, sound recording or just birding, remember always to put the interests of the birds first.

Avoid going too close to birds or disturbing their habitats particularly near a nest site. Do not disturb vegetation around a nest – if a bird flies away or makes repeated alarm calls, you're too close.

Sound playback should be used responsibly. It is recognised that, for some forest species, sound playback may be the only way to see them, and that an ability to see them consequently builds support for local conservation. However, repeatedly playing a recording of song or calls to encourage a bird to respond can cause distress and may divert it from ultimately feeding its young. Never use playback to attract a species near its nest. Local guides should not be pressed to continue playback once a bird has been seen. Playback volume should be kept to an effective minimum. A good principle is "keep the volume down, and keep it short".

Photography of birds at the nest should be discouraged unless achievable at distance using a long lens. Birds should not be harassed when one or two photographers have failed to obtain their 'perfect shot'. Roosting birds should not be disturbed with flash photography. For nocturnal species, close flash photography, and direct spotlight illumination, may impose a long period of dark adaptation recovery.

Driving or 'pushing' of birds, particularly secretive species, from their preferred habitat to afford better views for visiting birders and photographers is particularly controversial. If performed at all, it should be conducted, with maximum sensitivity, for the minimum duration required to achieve the objective.

Remember, intentionally or recklessly disturbing some birds at or near their nest is illegal in many countries. Although not necessarily law everywhere, it is a good principle to avoid disturbance.

2. Showing respect for habitats and environment is crucial. Remember sites are often rich in biodiversity; it is not just the birds you might disturb. Be careful with habitats and take care to leave a site as you found it. Do not pollute or leave reminders of your stay.

3. Consider those that live and work in the area where you are birding and use local services and guides where possible. Raising awareness of the benefits to local communities of trade from visiting birdwatchers may,

ultimately, help the birds themselves. Respect privacy and landownership. Always obtain permissions if you are in doubt about entering an area. Always obey local rules and follow instructions given in National Parks and reserves that are there to protect wildlife.

4. Rare birds are always of interest but with the growing numbers of birders/ photographers visiting the region you may not be the only person potentially disturbing a rare bird and its habitat. Think carefully about the effects of releasing news if you find a new site or rare breeding bird.

5. As an ABC member it is important to demonstrate a high standard of birding behaviour. Lead by example and use this code to explain sensitively to others what is considered acceptable by the wider birding community. Be a good ambassador for birding.

If you've been birding in the region, pass on your rare bird sightings to the BirdLife International Partner in that country by visiting [www.worldbirds.org](http://www.worldbirds.org). Your data could be vital in helping to protect sites and species in the country you've visited.