



Field Trip Etiquette

Teacher

This information is adapted from the Sister Shorebird Schools Arctic Nesting Curriculum.

Promote conservation! Conservation is the protection and wise, sustainable use of natural resources. A visit to any natural area can be a very stimulating and exciting experience for any age student. However, all of us must be careful to remember that natural areas are habitat for wild plants and animals, so we as visitors should act like guests visiting or sharing someone's home.

Teach important field skills. A field trip is an excellent opportunity to teach students outdoor etiquette skills that they can use all of their lives. How can you help take care of animals, plants, and other organisms you encounter in your field and classroom studies? How can you keep from disturbing wetland homes? How can you learn more about your environment by observing it in its natural state? We will see more if we are quiet. The site should be left as close to natural as possible, so that future visitors will be able to enjoy the area's plants, wildlife, and beauty.

For these reasons some rules are necessary when visiting a natural site. Here are some suggestions:

- Step softly and quietly while observing animals. Stay quiet. Yelling, shouting, and "roughhousing" will scare animals away, and may cause some to abandon their nests or young or avoid the area in future.
- Replace rocks and logs after looking underneath (to keep the roofs on animal homes and to keep people from stepping in the depressions left by the rocks).
- Handle animals gently. They have different anatomies than our own, and we may be unaware of ways they can be hurt. Any animals that students handle will probably be much smaller than them as well.
- Fill in holes after looking at worms or clams (to prevent suffocation of the animals next door, and people stumbling in the holes).
- Do not take live animals away from their homes.
- Do not litter.
- Pick up any litter you find. Carry a litter bag in your back pocket.
- Minimize trampling of plants and fungi. If trails are designated, stay on them as much as possible.
- Even if shorebirds aren't nesting in your area, be aware that many other birds, whether in the forest, meadow, or marsh, or on the beach, nest on the ground. Remember that such nests and the chicks are camouflaged from predators, and therefore difficult to see before one's foot is right over them. Always watch where you are walking, and keep pets leashed during the spring and summer breeding season. This is another reason to stay on trails.
- Never chase, repeatedly flush (cause to move away), or harass animals (whether on foot, in a car, boat, plane, all-terrain vehicle, or snow machine). Harassing animals is against the law in many states and may be punishable by a fine or jail sentence.
- Move slowly, allowing the animal to keep you in view. Avoid sneaking up on or surprising animals. The following are signs that you may be too close to birds:
 - Head raised, looking at observers
 - Skittishness
 - Excessive preening or pecking at dirt or foot; bill wiping
 - Alarm calls; repeated chirping and chipping
 - Distraction display: broken wing, tail spread
- Check state and federal regulations regarding collecting of plants or animals. In general, collecting of any kind should be minimized; have students make careful observations and detailed sketches in lieu of collecting. If you decide to include study of the birds' invertebrate food sources, limit the number of bottom and core samples taken, as these are very disruptive to the area. This is especially true of areas which receive a large number of visitors already.
- Bathroom stops should be made just before leaving on the trip and afterwards. However, teach children that if it is necessary to "use the bushes," never leave toilet paper scraps behind. (Ask students "How do you feel about a place when you come across toilet paper?") Used toilet paper should always be carried out in a plastic bag, and everyone should carry their own when a long trip away from facilities is anticipated.
- Before leaving, take time to assess the impact of your visit. Have students ask themselves: "Is this area as beautiful now as before my visit?"