

TIPS FOR YOU, PROTECTION FOR THEM

Wildlife viewing in Hawai'i offers you the opportunity to view some of the most unusual and rare animals found in the United States. Many of these species are threatened or endangered due to habitat loss and non-native species that out-compete them. Whether on land or in the sea, many of Hawai'i's native birds, marine mammals and sea turtles struggle to survive so you must use extreme care when viewing these remarkable and protected animals.

This guide features some of the best sites to view native wildlife and habitats on each island. But finding a destination is only the beginning. The following tips are designed to help you be a successful and responsible observer, and to protect wildlife from harm or disturbance. In some cases, viewing guidelines are backed by state and federal laws.



Wildlife viewing in Hawai'i is different. Unlike other states on the mainland, where you might be able to see a few dozen species of wildlife on any excursion, in Hawai'i—on a good day—you are more likely to see three or four native species. The exception is in the water, where the diversity of nearshore fish species offers snorkelers and divers the opportunity to see a multitude of fish of every imaginable size, shape and color.

General Viewing Guidelines

Look in the right place at the right time. Many species live in very specific habitats, such as high elevation rainforests or coral reefs. Some may be unique or endemic to specific islands. In addition, the time of day or season are important factors to consider when looking for wildlife. Generally, animals are most active in the early morning and late afternoon. Seasonal migration periods are also key times to look for some birds and marine mammals, such as humpback whales.

Learn before you go. Read about the wildlife, viewing sites and local regulations to get the most from your viewing experience. When you arrive, stop at the visitor center, talk with residents and hire local guides to increase your chances of seeing wildlife.

Keep your distance. Wild animals are sensitive to human disturbance. Resist the temptation to move too near to them. Use binoculars, spotting scopes and zoom lenses to get a closer view. If an animal changes its behavior—if it stops feeding, raises its head sharply, appears nervous or aggressive, changes its direction of travel, exhibits a broken wing or circles repeatedly—move away slowly. Maintain your distance from nests, rookeries and resting areas.

Look, but don't touch. Wildlife may approach you, but resist the temptation to reach out and touch any animal. If a wild animal comes toward you, stay calm and try to back away. If the animal appears sick or injured, contact the local authorities for advice. An animal that is sick or injured is already vulnerable and may be more likely to bite if it feels threatened or afraid.

Do not feed or attract wildlife. Feeding or attracting wildlife with food, decoys, sound or light disrupts normal feeding cycles, may cause sickness or death from unnatural or contaminated food items and habituates animals to people. Habituated animals are more vulnerable to injury and can become aggressive if they are taught to expect food from people.

Help others. Speak up if you notice other viewers or tour operators behaving in a way that disturbs the wildlife or other viewers, or impacts sensitive habitats. Be friendly, respectful and discrete when approaching others. When operating a boat, lead by example and reduce your speed in areas frequented by marine wildlife, anchor properly and encourage others to do the same. Violations of the law should be reported to local authorities.

Respect the rights of other people. Many people enjoy Hawai'i's public parks and beaches. Always seek permission to enter private lands and abide by all no trespassing signs. Be considerate when parking in and walking through urban neighborhoods.

Lend a hand with trash removal. Human garbage is one of the greatest threats to wildlife. Carry a trash bag with you and pick up litter found along the trail, shore and in the water. Plastic bags, floating debris and monofilament line pose the greatest risk to marine wildlife.

Land-based Viewing Tips

Here are a few tips for making your wildlife viewing on land more successful.

Look for flowering native plants. Hawai'i's native wildlife has evolved to take advantage of the diverse native plants on the islands. Flowering native trees and shrubs are magnets for colorful honeycreepers and butterflies.

Listen for the calls of birds. Dense tropical forests can make birdwatching a challenge. Listen for calls and songs to help you locate the bird.

Find a high spot and sit awhile. One of the best techniques for wildlife viewing is to find a spot that overlooks a valley or bay. Watch for movements in the water or treetops, then switch to binoculars for a close-up view.

KEEP IN MIND...

Clean your shoes after the hike. Seeds from invasive plant species are often transported to other sites in the tread or on the soles of muddy shoes. Carefully clean your shoes of all dirt and seeds after your hike and double check for unwanted hitchhikers before visiting the next trail.

Water-based Viewing Tips

Never chase or harass marine wildlife. Following a wild animal that is trying to escape is dangerous. Never completely surround the animal, trap an animal between a vessel and shore, block its escape route or come between mother and young. When viewing from a boat, operate at slow speed or put the engine in neutral until the animal moves away. Move parallel to the swimming animals. Avoid approaching head-on or from behind and separating individuals from a group. If you are operating a non-motorized vessel, emit periodic and gentle noise to make wildlife aware of your presence.

Let resting animals be. Some marine animals, such as monk seals and green sea turtles, leave the water or are exposed at low tide as part of their natural life cycle. This is normal behavior and typically does not indicate illness or distress. Young animals that appear to be orphaned may actually be under the watchful eye of a nearby parent. If possible, try to stay at least 50 yards away from beached animals and farther back if young are present. If it is not possible to keep a safe distance of 50 yards because of the type of terrain, then try to avoid sudden and abrupt movements to minimize the risk of disturbance.

Know your abilities before entering the water. Ocean conditions can vary from hour to hour, so be aware of the weather and water conditions before entering. Always stay with a buddy and wear personal flotation devices when kayaking.

KEEP IN MIND...

If you are operating a motor boat in Hawaiian waters, visit the NOAA Fisheries website for more details on safe boating practices around marine mammals and sea turtles at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/MMWatch/hawaii.htm.



spinner dolphin

Whales and Dolphins

Humpback whales are present in the winter months and dolphins occur year-round. When looking for cetaceans, scan the ocean without binoculars to search for their spouts as they rise to the surface to breathe. Once you see spouts, switch to binoculars and sight along their path for a closer view.

The best viewing is often from shore with binoculars, where an elevated view allows you a broader and more stable vantage point. Water-based viewing is best done with a reputable commercial

tour operator who is sensitive to the animals' need for space. Mothers and their young are the most vulnerable to disturbance and injury so use extreme caution when young are present.

Whales and dolphins in U.S. waters are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Some species, such as humpback whales, are also protected by the Endangered Species Act and Hawai'i state law. Humpback whales in Hawai'i are afforded additional protection under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. See pages 125 and 147 for more natural history information about humpback whales and spinner dolphins.

KEEP IN MIND...

Federal regulations prohibit vessels and people from approaching humpback whales closer than 100 yards by water or 1,000 feet by air. Federal guidelines further recommend that vessels and people remain at least 50 yards from spinner dolphins and other species of small cetaceans to avoid illegal harassment of the animals. Please refrain from trying to swim with the dolphins as this can disturb them, which is illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Under Marine Mammal Protection Act regulations, feeding or attempting to feed marine mammals is also illegal.



Hawaiian monk seal

Hawaiian Monk Seals

Your best chance of seeing monk seals is when they are resting on shore. They tend to haul out on sandy beaches or shallow rocky reefs, so look for their distinctive dark forms along the shore.

Monk seals in U.S. waters are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act and Hawai'i state law. They are one of the most endangered marine mammals in the United States. Seals are vulnerable to canine diseases, so keep pets well away from beaches where seals are known to rest. See page 51 for more natural history information about the monk seal.

KEEP IN MIND...

Federal guidelines recommend staying at least 50 yards away from the seals whether they are resting on shore or swimming. As with other species of marine mammals, it is illegal to harass, feed or to attempt to feed monk seals.



green sea turtle

Sea Turtles

Green sea turtles are fairly common throughout the Hawaiian Islands. They are attracted to shallow shelves of lava or coral reefs where they feed on algae or limu. From shore, watch the nearshore waters for the turtles as they surface to breathe, swim in the surf and feed on the bottom. Green sea turtles also regularly come ashore to warm in the sun (a behavior known as basking).

Keep your distance from sea turtles resting on land. If you are in a vessel, avoid paddling, swimming, snorkeling or diving near a swimming turtle. Back off further if your presence is disturbing the turtle. Limit your viewing time to 30 minutes. See page 177 for more natural history information about the green sea turtle.

KEEP IN MIND...

Sea turtles are protected by the Endangered Species Act and Hawai'i state law, so it is illegal to disturb them. Do not touch, ride, feed or otherwise disturb sea turtles on land or in the water. For more information about Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines, go to www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/MMWatch/hawaii.htm



ornate butterflyfish

Fish and Coral Reefs

The best snorkeling and diving occurs around rocky areas and coral heads where reef fish have places to hide from predators. Sandy beaches generally have poor visibility and limited diversity of habitats, so head for rocky headlands or outcrops for the best viewing.

No peas please! Feeding fish frozen peas or any other food can cause illness or death and disrupt natural fish populations. Do not attempt to touch fish or any marine life. In shallow water, avoid stepping on or touching coral heads by

entering the water at a sandy location and floating above the coral. See pages 67 and 151 for more natural history information about reef fish.



'apapene

Birds

No matter where you are viewing, start by using your eyes to watch for movements and your ears to listen for calls. Once you spot a bird, switch to binoculars to get a close-up view.

Ground nesting seabirds are the most vulnerable to disturbance. In areas where Laysan albatrosses and wedge-tailed shearwaters nest, stay on designated trails and well back from nest sites. All nesting birds are sensitive to disturbance so if you spot a nest, back away from the area. See pages 46, 55, 83, 87, 115 and 161 for more natural history information about Hawaiian birds.