

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Policy Statement and Guidelines on Disturbance to Wildlife and their Habitats.

Reviewed July 2016 by the Trustees

Introduction

SBBOT recognises the importance of an interest in wildlife for health and wellbeing and for the future conservation of the countryside. We encourage people to learn and understand more about our wildlife and their habitats. When observing any wildlife within the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory area, visitors are requested to adhere to the principles outlined in this policy.

Principles

When observing wildlife the interests of the wildlife come first.

Any unnecessary disturbance to wildlife and their habitats should be avoided including by dogs.

Know the law and countryside code (which can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code) and follow it.

Be aware that others may also wish to observe what you have seen.

Wildlife and the Law

It is a criminal offence to disturb, intentionally or recklessly, a species listed on Schedule 1 (birds), Schedule 5 (animals) and Schedule 8 (plants) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. (which can be found at www.legislation.gov.uk/1981/schedule/ 1 or 5 or 8). The courts can impose fines of up to £5,000 and/or a prison sentence of up to six months for each offence. Disturbance could include playback of songs and calls of birds.

It is illegal to uproot any wild plant without permission from the landowner or occupier.

It is also a criminal offence to destroy or damage, intentionally or recklessly, a special interest feature of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or to disturb the wildlife for which the site was notified. A fine of up to £20,000 may be imposed by a Magistrates' Court, or an unlimited fine by a Crown Court.

Birds

Be aware that birds respond to people in different ways, depending on the species, location and time of year. If a bird flies away or makes repeated alarm calls, you are too close.

If birds are disturbed they may keep away from their nests, leaving chicks hungry or enabling predators to take their eggs or young. During cold weather, or when migrants have just made a long flight, disturbing birds can mean they use up vital energy.

Playing a recording of bird song or calls to encourage a bird to respond, for example for photographic purposes, can divert a territorial bird from other important duties, such as feeding its young. Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust does not consider sound luring to be an acceptable activity except as part of scientific study under the appropriate licences. If you are using sound in the field to better your knowledge of bird calls, please ensure you are wearing headphones.

Avoid approaching too closely when photographing birds. Be aware that some nest photography requires a permit. SBBOT does not condone the disturbance of any nesting bird.

Other Wildlife

All wildlife and their habitats should be respected.

You should give animals the appropriate distance needed so that they can continue their natural behaviours uninterrupted.

Plants

When looking at plants, stick to footpaths where they exist. In other areas, take care not to damage either the plant you wish to observe or photograph or any surrounding flora.

If a plant looks unusual, or if there is very little of it, resist the temptation to pick it. Collecting small amounts of plant material for identification purposes for research may be acceptable if authorised by SBBOT. This will never be agreed for Red List species or if the population is small and may suffer as a result. If a specimen really is needed, remove the minimum quantity of material.

How you can help

Follow the guidelines in this policy.

Lead by example and sensitively challenge the minority of wildlife watchers who behave inappropriately.

If you witness anyone who you suspect may be illegally disturbing or destroying wildlife or habitat, phone the police immediately and please report it to SBBOT.

SBBOT carries out various scientific studies, some of them under special licences. We ask that you ensure that your actions do not disrupt survey activities and equipment. If you are interested in this aspect of our work, please don't hesitate to ask a Trustee of SBBOT or visit our Website <http://www.sbbot.org.uk>.

Agreed by council 11/01/2016