



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.23 (Rev.COP14)

Original: English

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES

Adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 14th Meeting (Samarkand, February 2024)

Recalling UN General Assembly Resolution 69/233, calling for the “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty reduction and environmental protection”,

Emphasizing that UN General Assembly Resolution 69/233 invited “governments, international organizations, other relevant institutions and other stakeholders, as appropriate, to encourage and support best practices in relation to the implementation of relevant policies, guidelines and regulations in sustainable tourism, including the ecotourism sector, and to implement and disseminate existing guidelines”,

Recognizing that in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved by the UN General Assembly, tourism is included as a goal under three of the SDGs: SDG 8: *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*, SDG 12: *Sustainable Consumption and Production* and SDG 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*,

Aware of existing guidelines that address the impacts of tourism on biodiversity, inter alia, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on the promotion of “sustainable tourism” and “ecotourism”; the IUCN-WCPA *Sustainable tourism in protected areas*, the World Heritage Convention’s *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites*; and the *CBD Guidelines on biodiversity and tourism development*,

Recognizing the frameworks and plans under various regional and sub-regional initiatives that include measures to address the impacts of tourism on natural resources and species, such as but not limited to, the Coral Triangle Initiative in the Asia Pacific, the Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion in South-East Asia, the Caribbean Regional Sea Programme, particularly through its protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA), the Transfrontier Conservation Areas of the South African Development Community (SADC), the EU Guidebook on Sustainable Tourism for Development and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) with its guidelines on the development of ecotourism at wetlands,

Emphasizing the economic importance of the tourism sector in many countries,

Acknowledging the role of sustainable tourism as a positive driver towards environmental protection, the eradication of poverty, improved quality of life, the empowerment of local communities and its impact to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), particularly in developing countries,

Aware that ecotourism is a growing market which has the potential to take up increased market share,

Further aware that ecotourism that involves wildlife interaction with a range of terrestrial and marine migratory species – birds, marine turtles, whales, dolphins, Dugongs, sharks, rays, seals, among others - increasingly plays a significant role in the industry,

Recognizing that ecotourism activities can increase awareness and drive positive change in attitudes towards wildlife conservation, including generating resources to support protection of migratory species and their habitats,

Aware that the sustainability of tourism involving migratory species is dependent on the non-disruption of the migration cycle thus providing assurance of regular and predictable influx of migratory species populations,

Affirming that all countries need to take equal responsibility for ensuring sustainable and unobtrusive tourism activities in relation to migratory species,

Noting that ecotourism activities can have the best intentions but be undermined by a lack of clear understanding on migratory species behaviour and requirements, including potential creation of new inequalities in access to resources and distribution of benefits,

Welcoming Resolution 11.29 (Rev.COP12) on Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching, Resolution 11.23 (Rev.COP12) on Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Complexity and Resolution 12.16 (Rev.COP14) on Recreational In-water Interaction with Aquatic Mammals,

Further welcoming the report and analysis of case studies provided in the Convention on Migratory Species' publication *Wildlife watching and tourism: A study on the benefits and risks of a fast-growing tourism activity and its impacts on species*, as well as the report and analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on "Wetlands and sustainable tourism",

Recognizing that a number of governments have put in place comprehensive national regulations or guidelines to ensure the sustainability of tourism activities with stringent regulations on interactions with wild animals, but that the effectiveness of such measures can be compromised if similar protections are not provided for migratory species in other jurisdictions throughout their range,

Recognizing further the value of migratory species in the promotion of ecotourism and in the national economy, and that adequate management interventions and national policies are provided to support effective wildlife conservation and ecotourism management,

Acknowledging that there are numerous voluntary certifications and criteria that responsible ecotourism facilities and organizations have adopted,

Noting that sustainable tourism can contribute to global biodiversity and sustainable development goals and targets including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032 of CMS, the Conservation Committee Strategic Plan of the International Whaling Commission, and the conservation of wetlands by the Ramsar Convention, and

Noting with appreciation the review of ecotourism undertaken by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presented in UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6,

*The Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals*

1. *Urges* Parties to adopt, as they consider appropriate, measures such as national action plans, regulations and codes of conduct, binding protocols or additional legal frameworks and legislation, in full transparency and involvement of stakeholders in the tourism value chain, with the aim to ensure tourism activities do not negatively affect species anywhere within their migratory range;
2. *Recommends* that Parties in promoting tourism or recreational activities involving wildlife interaction, take into account the following basic philosophies:
 - a) Tourism activities should not inhibit the natural behaviour and activity of migratory species nor adversely affect their associated habitat;
 - b) The activities should not have significant negative impact on the long-term survival of species populations;
 - c) Tourism activities should create sustainable social and economic benefits within local communities;
 - d) Revenues generated from the activity should be able to provide resources for the conservation of the species or group of species subject to tourism, including the protection of their habitat, and sustaining best practices;
 - e) Tourism involving wildlife should take into account the safety of observers and wildlife as well as risk to human health;
 - f) When possible, tourism activities should contribute to conserving, restoring or sustainably managing biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as their functions and services;
3. *Requests* that Parties consider developing appropriate measures and guidelines dependent on the target species, including, but not limited to:
 - a) Accreditation of operators, provisions of training and a clear code of conduct;
 - b) Allowable types of interactions;
 - c) Level of activity, including aspects such as maximum interaction hours per day, maximum observation time per interaction, or number of individuals/vehicles within designated interaction zones or distances;
 - d) Appropriate equipment or technologies to be used with limits on any that could cause undue disturbance to target species;
 - e) Consider seasonal or life stage-specific regulations or exclusions (e.g. during the mating season);
 - f) Monitoring of implementation through the relevant agencies and authorities, with suitable engagements with operators to facilitate compliance;

- g) Monitoring potential impacts of tourism activities to target species, their habitats and their migratory routes;
 - h) Communication and awareness raising among stakeholders involved in tourism activities and the wider public;
 - i) Involvement of local communities in preparation of tourism plans;
4. *Recommends* that the same measures are made applicable to non-dedicated or opportunistic interactions;
 5. *Encourages* Parties to apply the Precautionary Principle where there is a lack of information concerning the effects of interactions brought about by tourism on a species and/or their habitats, as well as on their migratory routes;
 6. *Encourages* Parties to perform regular appraisals of enacted measures to account for any new research or relevant information, adapt regulations as appropriate, and share experiences of applying measures and guidelines;
 7. *Recommends* that relevant government agencies of Parties provide adequate resources to support thorough ecotourism planning process, and the development of protocols and standards applicable for target species or species groups, facilitating their adoption by relevant actors in the tourism value chain. Protocols shall be directly and clearly stated to ensure that impacts are avoided especially on breeding, foraging, and resting areas of specific population;
 8. *Recommends* that Parties collaborate closely with relevant stakeholders in planning for tourism involving wildlife such as, but not limited to, regulatory agencies, conservation organizations, scientific experts, private operators, indigenous and local communities; and
 9. *Endorses* the guidance in the Annex of this Resolution, and *encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to apply the guidance.

Annex to Resolution 12.23 (Rev.COP14)**ECOTOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES: GUIDANCE FOR PARTIES AND STAKEHOLDERS****Human-wildlife interactions**

To maximize the opportunities for ecotourism to achieve sustainability, a positive contribution to nature conservation, support for indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and local livelihoods, and education for participants, Parties should balance trade-offs between visitor satisfaction, enterprise profitability, species conservation, tourist safety and the welfare of individual animals.

In order to avoid adverse impacts on wildlife, tourists should be encouraged to maintain an appropriate distance. The perception that many recreationists do not feel that they have a negative impact on wildlife and that it is possible to closely approach wildlife should be countered through education, particularly of tour operators, guides, or through publicly available information such as signage.

Participants should avoid direct contact with wildlife (as also recommended in the CMS Guidelines on *Recreational In-water Interaction with Aquatic Mammals* (Res.12.16 (Rev.COP14)), and *Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching* (Res.11.29 (Rev.COP12)), and instead practice passive observation. To prevent harm to both tourists and animals, participants should, in particular, avoid directly interacting with: wildlife during important life cycle events (e.g., mating behaviour, reproduction); particular individuals (e.g., females with young offspring, sick or injured animals); or in response to animal behaviour (aggression, stress).

If tourists are prohibited or advised against taking or purchasing animal products/souvenirs, this information should be made widely available through, *inter alia*, tour operators and hotels.

Governance

National action plans, regulations and codes of conduct, binding protocols or additional legal frameworks and legislation should be developed and adopted as urged in Paragraph 1 of CMS Resolution 12.23 (Rev.COP14). Consideration should be given to whether such plans need to vary at a national or local level, and whether they should be formal or informal.

Participants should be made aware of the legal responsibilities incumbent upon themselves and the operator, and if industry codes of conduct differ from local by-laws and other legislation.

Parties should cooperate to regulate ecotourism involving transboundary (including migratory) target species. This is especially important where species are subject to different pressures under different jurisdictions.

The precautionary principle should be applied. Assertions of lack of impact should be supported by scientific evidence. Equally, restrictions, including bans, on activities should only be implemented where there is evidenced need for such strong measures, with consideration for alternative, sustainable, livelihood provision.

Spatial planning

In order to achieve the aims for which protected areas are designated, consider excluding tourism from core zones and investigating how buffer zones may best be used.

Spatial planning for managing ecotourism should be focused to protect the species tourists wish to see, but should also consider other vulnerable species and habitats in the same area, particularly species with site fidelity, small populations and/or other factors where tourism may cause significant impacts on a population.

Target species should be protected by controlling access in both space and time, for example to aid shielding from less obvious stressors such as noise and light.

To spread the burden of ecotourism, and maximize the benefits to indigenous peoples and local communities, consider incorporating lesser-known attractions and communities into tourism circuits.

The sensitivities and/or vulnerabilities of individual species should be included in planning of tourist schedules, for example to reduce risks of the spread of invasive alien species, or disease transmission.

Tourism trajectories and market segments

The ecotourism offered in an area should be subject to appropriate levels of regulation based on the sensitivities of species involved, the different types of ecotourism being offered, and the numbers of tourists visiting.

In relation to the development of new ecotourism destinations and activities, providers should focus on maintaining standards of species protection and identify areas that can be developed while maintaining the standards required and attracting a viable segment of the market. As tourist numbers increase, providers should consider how visitor profiles may be changing and whether further information is needed to manage a risk of decreasing concern for species conservation.

Monitoring

Ecotourism monitoring should be implemented *prior* to observation of negative impacts, enabling establishment of robust baselines and levels of natural variability. Consider leaving some colonies or populations undisturbed; these can act as '*controls*' with which to compare those subject to ecotourism or other stressors.

Some ecotourism target species should be regarded as '*common-pool*' (i.e., with finite interaction potential) rather than '*open-access*' (i.e., with indefinite interaction potential) resources; this may be particularly important for the welfare of individually recognizable animals.

Individual tour operators should consider cumulative effects from other visitors as part of their monitoring programme; some form of external oversight such as formal permitting schemes to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation may be required to regulate this.

Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that results from monitoring are acted upon. Adaptive management should be used to enable flexible responses to changing conditions as they are detected.

Training/certification

Training of guides should include recommended observation techniques and be assessed through evaluation of whether species show signs of disturbance or not.

While '*good practice*' or even '*best practice*' guidelines can help to identify and reward sustainable ecotourism operators, it is important to ensure optimization '*in practice*'. As a result, and especially for target species that are vulnerable to disturbance, or are '*common-pool*', Parties should consider using labelling and certification to control the number of commercial operators active in an area, and to identify operators committed to excellence.

Labelling and certification should be available for use by small and medium-sized enterprises, and ideally tailored to local and regional criteria.

Messaging

Communication around ecotourism should simultaneously publicize ecotourism attractions and disseminate their associated regulations and sustainability guidelines. Guidelines should be visible, accessible and consistently presented to stakeholders.

A balance should be struck between modifying visitor behaviour through information and via enforcement.

A variety of communication techniques should be deployed, including direct personal interaction and/or incentive-based messaging if descriptive interpretation materials are ineffective. Educational programmes should also maximize conservation benefits by incorporating wider environmental messaging.

Where target species sightings cannot be guaranteed – as is usually the case – ecotourism operators should emphasize '*the thrill of the uncertainty of what may be seen*' rather than put pressure on field staff to break regulations in order to meet the expectations or desires of tourists.