



How to Watch Wildlife

Whether you're suffering from an **existential crisis** or you just want to learn more about the natural world, few activities can make you feel "in touch" with nature like watching wildlife. Wildlife observation is a fun learning experience for people of all ages, and you can do it no matter where you live or travel. Best of all, watching wildlife doesn't require a big budget or a lot of equipment. In fact, observing animals in your own neighborhood can be just as rewarding as traveling to exotic locations. No matter where you go, here's what you should know.

Steps

- 1 Decide where you're going to observe wildlife.** Obviously if you want to observe a particular type of animal or bird, you'll have to go where that creature lives. If you're more flexible, however, you can find wildlife just about anywhere, even in the middle of the city. Consider your budget and the amount of free time you have available, and then go out and meet nature. Your own garden or the nearest park or green space can work to if you can travel easily. You can even watch wildlife through a window.
- 2 Research the wildlife in your chosen location.** Find out what creatures you can expect to see, and find out a little bit about them. Pay special attention to information about their daily lives and behavior—their feeding, sleeping, and breeding habits, for example—and what environments they prefer so you'll know where and when you're most likely to see them. A little research will also help you figure out what animals and birds are doing when you see them. Look up specific species on the internet, read about them at your local library, or visit your local nature center or wildlife-watching club for more information. Don't have to high expectations. It takes patience and time to see rare animals and birds exhibiting unusual behaviour. Don't forget that common species can be fascinating too. Insects, Sparrows, Grey Squirrels, pigeons and Starlings are wildlife too. Watching a Starling feed it's chick may not be as exciting as watching a Timber Wolf hunting, but you have to start somewhere!
- 3 Prepare for your expedition or outing.** The preparations and equipment you will need will vary depending on where you're going. Make sure to bring appropriate clothing for the climate, and dress in layers if it's cold. Let somebody know where you will be and when you expect to be back. Research the area if you're unfamiliar with it, and get a map and compass or GPS device if appropriate. Remember to take a pad, pen, and camera to record your observations. You may also want to take binoculars. If you like to sketch, why not take a sketch book and pencil. You can challenge your self by taking a list of things you hope to see and ticking them if and when you spot them. Field guides can be useful for helping identify what you see.
- 4 Blend in with your surroundings if required.** Wear camouflage clothing appropriate for the setting, or simply wear earth-tone or drab clothes—avoid flashy, bright attire that will call attention to you. Don't wear colognes, perfumes, scented lotions or hair products. Above all, be quiet. Keep talking to a minimum (use hand signals whenever you can), and step lightly, being careful not to break twigs underfoot. Turn off your cell phone or pager, and wear clothing that does not make excessive noise (cotton is usually a good choice in warm dry weather; wool or polyester fleece for pants and sweaters is smart for safe, comfortable viewing in cold or wet conditions).
- 5 Be still and wait.** Perhaps the best way to get a chance to observe wildlife, especially at a wildlife viewing area, is to simply wait for animals or birds to show up. Find a comfortable, partially concealed place from which to observe wildlife. You can use a constructed implement, such as a duck blind, or you can simply crouch low to the ground or hide behind rocks or trees. Be patient. Animal and birds may hear you coming and go into hiding, or they simply won't show up if they sense your presence, but if you wait long enough and quietly enough, chances are they'll either not notice you or not feel threatened by you.
- 6 Approach wildlife carefully.** Usually your best bet is to sit still in one place (a place where you know you have a good chance of spotting wildlife), but sometimes you'll see something in the distance and want to get a closer

look. Remember to remain silent and try to stay downwind from it. Move slowly, and use the cover of trees, rocks, and other natural features to your advantage. If it is a potentially dangerous animal, you're better off keeping your distance and viewing it with binoculars or your camera's telephoto lens. Even if the creature is harmless, respect its space and don't disturb it.

7 Use your ears. Whether you're searching for wildlife or observing it, you'll be more successful if you rely on more than just your eyes. Listen for cracking twigs or branches, animal calls, or the flutter of birds' wings to help you locate wildlife. While you're watching animals and birds listen to the sounds they make. Soon you'll be able to distinguish different types by sound alone. To amplify sounds, cup your hands behind your ears.

8 Figure out what wildlife is doing. If you've done your research you should know a bit about the behavior of the wildlife you're watching. Try to identify certain behaviors as you observe them in the wild, and make a note of behaviors that you're not familiar with.

9 Record your observations. If you really want to get serious about wildlife watching, you should keep a journal of your observations. Note the types of creatures you see and their characteristics, and jot down what they are doing and where. Make sketches or take pictures and paste them into your journal.

10 Learn more about what you observe. Once you return from the field, review your journal and do some more research to answer any questions that came up during your observations.

Tips

- You'll need a lot of patience: if animals see, hear, or otherwise know you're there, it'll take a while for them to come out. Sometimes you might not see the animal you're looking for. Don't be discouraged; take the opportunity to observe other wildlife, and try again another day.
- Appreciate the little things. Many people think of wildlife as only large animals or birds, but the world is literally buzzing with other creatures. From bees and ants to mice and lizards, small animals offer ample opportunities to learn and to be amazed. They also can be found just about everywhere, so you can see wildlife even in the "concrete jungle" of the city.
- A wide variety of guided watching experiences are available, from nature walks in city parks to wilderness expeditions in distant countries. A naturalist or experienced local guide can help you see more wildlife and learn more about the lives of the creatures you see.
- If you want to photograph wildlife, it's usually best to have a good telephoto lens (at least 210 mm, and preferably 400 mm or more) so that you can do so from a distance. If you're observing very small creatures, such as insects, get a macro lens for close-ups.

Warnings

- If you're observing in the woods, exercise caution during hunting seasons. Avoid areas where you know hunters are located, and wear bright orange clothing.
- Even small and harmless-looking animals can bite or otherwise hurt you in defense. Never chase wild animals or try to touch them or get too close to them, no matter what their size. Even if you escape uninjured, the encounter will cause the animal undue stress. If you try to approach a baby animal, you risk encountering a fierce parent—don't approach babies or get between babies and their mothers.
- Never get too close to a baby animal! They aren't likely to attack you, but where there's a baby, there's an angry mom.
- Don't interfere with nature. It can be tempting sometimes to try to rescue a rabbit from the clutches of a fox, for example, but it's important to understand that such interferences throw off the natural balance and are harmful to at least one of the animals involved. You could also be injured while interfering.
- You can take pictures, but do not use a flash! Even if they didn't seem to notice you at first, a camera flash could startle them and cause them to injure you!
- Never tease, pet, or get too close to animals during the dry season (no matter how cute they look, or how calm they are in the rainy season). This is a time of stress for the animals, and even the calmest or animals could injure you.
- Many animals, such as bears, walruses, and breeding stags (male deer), can be dangerous. Keep a safe distance away from these animals.

- Stay off private property or obtain permission from the property owner before entering.
- Never feed animals or try to lure them with bait.

Things You'll Need

- Binoculars and / or camera with a telephoto lens
- Notebook (preferably waterproof) and pen
- Flashlight for early morning or late evening travel
- Patience
- Wildlife identification book
- Appropriate clothing
- Water

Made Recently

Did you try these steps?
Upload a picture for other readers to see.