

POSITION STATEMENT

Birding Code of Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Birding as a pastime has grown in popularity in recent decades and, when conducted in an ethical manner, can promote awareness of birds and the need to conserve them. By its very nature, birding frequently brings participants into the domain of birds and their natural habitats. Birders are advised to consider not only their responsibilities towards the birds they admire, but also towards themselves and others.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

Whilst BirdLife South Africa acknowledges the excitement that arises from spotting birds that are rare or difficult to find in their natural environments, we advise birders to put the interests of the birds first at all times. Depending on the species, location and time of year, birds will respond to the presence of people in different ways. Birders should avoid chasing and repeatedly flushing birds, while maintaining appropriate distances from nests and nesting colonies without disturbing them or exposing them to danger. BirdLife South Africa recommends that the use of playbacks be avoided to attract any species, in particular those regarded as Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable or Near Threatened by the IUCN, especially during the breeding season when playbacks will divert territorial birds from more important duties such as feeding or protecting their young. It is recommended that artificial light be used sparingly and with discretion during filming and photography. The responsible use of laser pointers is mandatory and guides/leaders should never point directly at the bird. Using the laser to guide birdwatchers to the correct general area is acceptable but if the use of the device has a noticeable impact on the behaviour of the bird the laser should be switched off immediately.

With climate change threatening biodiversity around the globe, birders are advised to consider the carbon footprint their travel arrangements will leave before they set off on a “twitch”, and should try to counteract such

an impact by, for example, using the “twitch” as a way to raise money for a local reserve or conservation project. With the proliferation of smart phones, most birders can now share their sightings instantly. Before doing so, consider the potential impact of spreading the news on the landowner/manager on who’s property the bird has been observed and on the species. Revealing the location of rare breeding birds especially could potentially expose the species to egg-collectors and other forms of trade and persecution.

BirdLife South Africa promotes ethical birding that will enhance the image of the birding community in the eyes of the public. The privacy of landowners should be respected, and permission should be obtained before private property is accessed. Groups should be limited to sizes that do not threaten the environment or the peace and tranquillity of others. Birders are advised to be cognisant of their own safety at all times, and to investigate and judge the safety risk associated with certain birding localities before setting off.

Birders are in an ideal position to add to our knowledge of South Africa’s birds, and should consider contributing towards conservation efforts by submitting data to various atlas/citizen science projects. For more information on how you can become a citizen scientist, please visit <http://birdlife.org.za/get-involved/birdlasser>.