

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

## Why a code of conduct for nature journalers?

Nature journaling brings people with diverse skills and experiences into nature and wild spaces who engage in new activities. There are specific codes of conduct for scientists, naturalists, photographers and artists. Place- specific rules and laws are in force across the world for public nature spaces. These codes guide us in interacting with nature in a respectful way. They also prevent us from unknowingly causing harm.

When we nature journal:

- We may stay in one place for longer periods of time than when we pass through on walks. This can result in different types and scale of harm to wildlife and habitats.
- We may use art supplies that might be harmful to the environment, if not handled properly.
- We may not know what are acceptable practices in natural spaces or in art

We want to do the right things. How do we know what that means in practice?

What is in the best interests of the place (habitat, wildlife, other people)?

What is in the best interests of the connected places, people and things?

What's respect in practice? What's right? What's legal?

**We are role models.**

**We can choose to set an example of  
how to be an ethical nature journaler.**

**“As we nurture nature, nature nurtures us.” John Muir Laws**

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

## Respect guides me in awareness and practice

I strive to respect:

1. Wildlife and Wildness
2. Environment and Habitats
3. Myself and Other People
4. The Nature Journal Experience
5. How I Learn and Grow

I strive to express my respect practically in my actions. I ask the following questions to figure out my responsibilities.

### 1. How am I in this space?

What's my responsibility (do right, intervene &/or report wrongs) when:

- I am alone. I am a group member. I am the group leader.
- What is the purpose of the group: getting to a destination; focusing on an aspect of wildlife such as birds or habitat; nature journaling.

### 2. Who am I in this place?

- Am I a resident, frequent visitor or tourist?
- Does my presence here displace or disadvantage others?
- Does my presence support the exclusion of others? Does it benefit the environment and communities around the space?
- Do I know local customs?
- Who walked here before me? What is the history of the space? I can learn about the human history of spaces and respect the people associated with them. Ask questions: have communities been displaced or otherwise disadvantaged?

Now that I have figured out my place in this space, I can look at practices.

## Putting Respect into Practice

I put nature first, above my wishes. My experiences are a privilege; the wellbeing of the wildlife and habitats are essential for the planet.

I observe with minimum interference. When recording observations, I consider how my behaviour may be affecting wildlife and habitat. If in doubt, I err on the side of caution.

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

## 1. Respecting Wildlife and Wildness

- I put the health and safety of wildlife first.
- I learn to recognise when I am unsettling wildlife. I know that my presence is a stress. I learn to recognise and respond to stress behaviours and alarm signals.
- I observe animals from a distance that is safe for me and for them. I use binoculars, spotting scopes and viewing blinds for a close look.
- I avoid handling, feeding, engaging, or otherwise interacting with wildlife. I do not chase, herd, flush, use audio playback, laser pointers, phishing, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones).
- I film and photograph wildlife responsibly. I use a telephoto lens from a viewing blind or a vehicle.
- I minimize risks to wildlife such as: accidental harm; parental desertion of young; attracting predators; diverting energy from survival; disrupting relationships between species, or between wildlife and habitat.

## 2. Respecting the Environment and Habitats

- When using my art supplies, I carry out my pencil shavings and other waste from my nature journaling.
- I am careful about protecting local water. I bring in and carry out water for painting. As an alternative, I use a waterbrush and “wrist-sock”.
- I never place or pour paints or other art media or supplies into natural water features. I never pour paint rinse water into natural water features or on to land.
- I think carefully when choosing a spot to sit and set up when nature journaling, to avoid harm or damage.
- I check the spot before I leave for any rubbish or disruption to the space. I collect litter that I come across.
- I leave habitats and natural features as I found them.
- I leave natural things in their place, such as feathers, abandoned nests, shells, living animals, wild flowers, fruits and seeds, animal remains, etc.
- I read and follow rules and regulations of places.
- I stay on trails and roads.
- I limit the environmental harm from my transport by using rideshare, public transport, biking or carpooling.

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

- It should not be necessary to say it, but if I find archaeological structures, artifacts or fossils, I do not touch them. I take photographs, note location and report to authorities.

## 3. Respecting Other People

- I have respect for and am polite to others, including those whose paths I cross.
- I acknowledge and care for others in my group.
- I let myself and others focus on the immediate experiences. If talking to myself or others, I speak softly. I avoid singing, humming, whistling, etc.
- I use welcoming and inclusive language
- I share information, skills and space generously.
- I actively seek to learn from others, and express my appreciation when I do. What I know may be wrong. I learn and share with humility.
- When in a group for whom nature journaling is not their purpose, I adapt my recording to keep pace with and respect the purpose of the broader group.
- I am curious, I ask when I do not understand
- I am respectful of differing viewpoints and experiences
- I focus on what is best for the nature journaling community
- I show empathy towards other nature journaling community members

## 4. Respecting the Nature Journal Experience

- I respect other nature journalers, including those who wish to keep their nature journals private. I rightfully expect the same respect.
- I plan for my comfort, and wellbeing. I bring water, food, walking stick, etc. I wear and bring appropriate clothing for season, climate, local conditions and customs.
- Comfort - stretch, keep hydrated, eat as I need to, keep my load to a minimum or within my fitness level, use a walking stick.
- Well-being - know my limits. If I am with a group, I let the group leader know if I need a rest, or am having difficulties.

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

- I take responsibility for my health including any medication I might need I inform someone “.. of any existing medical condition or injury which might affect me on a field excursion.
- I take precautions against locally prevalent diseases, for example malaria, bilharzia, Weil’s Disease, cholera, etc.
- I have due regard to public safety and public health.
- Safety - I take appropriate action to reduce the risk of accidents.
- Enjoy myself - if I am not enjoying the experience, I am missing out and likely to affect the experience of those around me.

## 5. Respecting How I Learn and Grow

- In practicing my drawing and painting skills, I respect the creative rights of artists including photographers and other nature journalers.
- “When I copy the art of another, I make a note on the page that says "after ....." with the name of the artist.”
- Images from books or online are only free to use, if the creator of the image has given their permission.
- I clearly acknowledge the source of images that I use to practice including copied drawings, photographs and art. “If I share a copied drawing online, I include a note that gives the source, and a link. It is a way to honor our teachers and show where we get our ideas, just as a scientist cites related and foundational research.”
- I do not sign or sell work as my own if it is based on another artist’s work.
- I do not seek or accept payment for artwork that I produce based on the creation of another artist.
- I do not claim credit nor submit such artwork into exhibitions or competitions.
- I use royalty-free photos from sites that make these explicitly available.
- I seek to be generous, respectful, honest in the way that I learn and grow in my understanding of nature and the world.
- I learn by practicing my nature journaling skills. I learn in multiple ways. Much of my learning is from others, who in turn have learned from those who nature journaled before. I acknowledge and respect people and sources of knowledge.<sup>ii</sup>
- I benefit from the knowledge shared by Indigenous peoples with colonialists. The early European explorers are attributed with “discovering” and naming many species that are known today. I seek to counter the erasure of indigenous languages and peoples in developing the current state of science.

# Code of Conduct for Nature Journalers

I also ask myself:

- What am I doing to pay it forward?
- How am I exercising stewardship?
- Is there unacknowledged injustice in the history of a place?

---

<sup>i</sup> JML in response to post by [Corrine Borgström-Johansson March 22, 2015](#)

<sup>ii</sup> SEE page 17 JML “The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling”.