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# *Trial code of conducts*

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## The Wild North - Westfjords cluster

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### The visitor

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**Arctic ecosystems are fragile. To reduce disturbance of wildlife, the following guidelines should be headed.**

#### Generally

- Try to stick to hiking trails when possible.
- Do not leave anything behind that does not belong there (e.g. rubbish, toilet paper, food leftovers etc.)
- When camping, always have your tent closed and your belongings inside to prevent damaging, soiling and theft by wild animals.
- Watch your step and be cautious when approaching a cliff's edge. It is for your own safety, but also avoids stepping on eggs/chicks of ground nesting birds.
- If you have a dog with you, keep it on a leash. Roaming dogs will scare away wild animals and scent mark, interrupting with territory marks.
- Try to observe animals from a distance. Binoculars are very helpful.
- Avoid following or chasing wild animals. You will most likely lose the opportunity to observe them and you may cause them to abandon their territory.
- It is not reasonable to feed wild animals. It will affect their hunting/foraging efficiency and thus lower their survival.
- You should not touch or relocate any apparently lost or injured animals

#### Specifically about Arctic foxes

- Keep a distance of at least 40 m from foxes. The animals may approach you further if they feel comfortable enough.
- Be quiet, still and patient. It will allow foxes to maintain their natural actions.
- Try to limit your time in the immediate vicinity of foxes to 20 minutes. Extended exposure to humans can cause foxes to get accustomed to/tame towards humans in a way that is harmful to their natural way of living.
- If foxes display any of the alerting/distress signs, move to a farther away distance. If alerting/distress signs continue, move away from the area entirely. Unaccepted human presence and stress may prevent parents from feeding their cubs and they might starve.

- Avoid passing between or separating a family of foxes. Stay calm and still and wait for the entire group to pass.
- You should not howl or imitate fox vocalisations in the vicinity of foxes.
- If you notice a den, pass quickly and quietly. Also remember that disturbing/damaging dens in any way as well as urinating by/defecating dens are forbidden by law.

## The guide

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- Remind visitors to stick to the guidelines (do so yourself) and explain their reason, if necessary. If you are in Hornstrandir, follow the regulations of the nature reserve.
- Inform about the landscape and its geological properties (oldest soil in Iceland, shape of cliffs, past glaciers etc.).
- Inform about the history of the area (why settlements abandoned, driftwood collection, bird eggs etc.).
- Inform about different animal (and plant) species encountered during the trip.
- Specifically: Inform the visitors about behaviour, ecology and conservation status of the Arctic fox:
  - Role of predators in the ecosystem
  - Solitary animals, but bonding in pairs for life
  - Territories and territorial behaviour (including alerting/distress signs)
  - Individual differences in appearance and behaviour
  - Breeding season, breeding vs. non-breeding individuals
  - Parental investment, fast growing cubs, need for privacy
- Be attentive about distress signals from animals and react to them appropriately. Also instruct the visitors to do so.
- Time lunch-breaks and similar so that pick-nicks do not take place in the close vicinity (40m) of active fox dens.
- Keep your knowledge up to date and broaden your horizon by attending courses/lectures and directly from specialists.

## The entrepreneur

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- Make sure that the visitor has all necessary information about the area they are visiting:
  - Where is it, how to get there and back (boat schedules)
  - Length and location of the trip
  - Laws and regulations, security
  - Phone connection and what to do in case of emergency (getting lost/injured)
  - Weather conditions, generally and for the period of the trip
  - Required gear to guarantee safety and well-being
  - Food requirements
  - Edible plants/berries/mushrooms, drinkable water
  - Insects and insect protection
- Provide visitors with information about geology, history and wildlife of the nature reserve.
- Encourage the guides to attend courses/lectures to broaden their knowledge and provide them with time and the possibility to do so.

## The boat crew

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- Be aware of animals in the sea: Slow down when you pass them closely and avoid going straight through where they are.
- When you spot wildlife on the sea (whales, seals etc.) let the visitors know too.
- Bird cliffs are protected by law. It is therefore forbidden to cause unnecessary disturbance in their vicinity.
- Do not sound the horn in proximity of wildlife; be it birds on a cliff or animals in the open water.

## The Westfjords cluster:

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The Arctic Fox Centre (cluster leader & fox research). Research: University of Iceland (Research Centre of the Westfjords), Westfjords Natural History Institute. Tour operators: Borea Adventures, Westtours. Special thanks: The Information Centre of Westfjords, Hornstrandir Centre (UST), The Icelandic Institute of Natural History.

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