Wildlife Heritage Areas

A new catalyst for responsible wildlife tourism
Wildlife Heritage Areas is a project from World Animal Protection and the World Cetacean Alliance.

Wildlife Heritage Areas is a new catalyst for responsible wildlife tourism, directing travellers and travel companies to the most responsible and community-led wildlife watching experiences. The programme has grown out of Whale Heritage Sites, which has successfully rallied community stakeholders around the conservation of whales and dolphins in 11 destinations globally.

The platform will launch in May with a full public launch in September 2023.
An urgent problem

The window of opportunity to protect the world’s wildlife from suffering and loss is narrowing every day.

The climate and biodiversity crisis has shown us that this is everyone’s problem. Without thriving biodiversity, everything we depend on, from food to water, is at risk. When wildlife is suffering, we all pay the price.

Communities must be empowered to drive local nature-based solutions that benefit wildlife, ecosystems, economies, and well-being.
Tourism's failings

The travel industry has historically relied on zoos, aquariums and other exploitative venues, for ‘animal entertainment’ tourism.

The dominance of the captive animal entertainment industry has contributed to a lack of investment in high quality wildlife tourism experiences.

Outside of captive entertainment, wildlife watching guidelines can be few and far between.
Shifting demands

As Booking.com’s 2021 Sustainable Travel Report confirmed, animal welfare and sustainable tourism are rising up the priority list of the travelling public.

Public attitudes towards exploitative wildlife tourism are changing, and revenue from it is in decline across Europe and North America.

Tour operators and destination managers are increasingly looking for animal welfare, wildlife conservation, sustainability, and community engagement.
Nowhere to turn

Travellers and the travel industry currently have no way of identifying destinations:

- meeting high animal welfare standards;
- where wildlife experiences are run and led by the community or custodians;
- that adhere to expert-written and species specific wildlife watching guidelines;
- where the local community and the wildlife directly benefits from tourism income;
- that embed social and environmental sustainability into wildlife watching experiences.
Outstanding wildlife watching destinations where local people recognise their natural heritage with a sense of pride and play a central role in protecting wild animals and their habitats.

Until... Wildlife Heritage Areas
Wildlife Heritage Area Vision

- Wildlife is not cruelly exploited for tourism.
- Local communities play a leading role in defining responsible wildlife watching destinations that benefit animals, people, and place.
- Communities are empowered to solve our planet’s most urgent issues.
- People work in harmony with and celebrate the natural world.
- We all reconnect with, protect and respect nature to turn the tide on biodiversity loss and wildlife suffering.
A proven concept

The forerunner to the concept of Wildlife Heritage Areas was developed by the World Cetacean Alliance in 2015. Its flagship programme - Whale Heritage Sites - promotes responsible whale and dolphin watching tourism. There are currently 11 sites worldwide.

Working alongside the World Cetacean Alliance, this initiative will adapt and expand the Whale Heritage Sites programme to incorporate all wildlife on land and at sea.

For example, Gorilla Heritage Areas, Tiger Heritage Areas, Turtle Heritage Areas, Lynx Heritage Areas...
Increased media attention at Dana Point including National Geographic, USA Today, LA Times and the New York Times. The term “Whale heritage Site” is increasingly referenced when covering Dana Point, bringing credibility to the area as a responsible whale watching destination. This led to an increase in demand for responsible whale watching tours.

Increased interest from tourists about responsible whale watching and biodiversity. The Tenerife-La Gomera WHS acts as a focal point for lobbying including turning around government plans for a macro port on the coast where pilot whales reside. Press, activists, experts, and public opposition to this construction all cited the WHS certification as a key argument against the proposal.

Rallied Hervey Bay stakeholders together in an authentic way. WHS has seen increased communication between regulators and the whale fleet, and the organisation of events that increase communication between researchers and the public, and the WHS committee itself; acting as a central point to which all cetacean enquiries can be directed.
How is this programme unique?

- Incorporates animal welfare as an integral part of what constitutes ‘sustainable practices’ or ‘wildlife friendly’.
- Utilizes an approach that combines nature conservation and animal welfare concepts successfully.
- Goes further to empower and defend the rights of local communities to care for and protect their own unique wildlife.
- Emphasizes our cultural links with nature as a very powerful tool to encourage positive change for animals and people.
- Provides a clear label for governments and the travel industry to promote more sustainable wildlife destinations as an alternative to exploitative, extractive, or consumptive captive or wild animal attractions.
What is this programme not?

Another certification...
There are over 200 certifications in travel and tourism alone. Applications and supporting evidence is often opaque/hidden while costs are high.

The Wildlife Heritage Area process has been designed to be:

- Transparent
- Accessible
- Robust
- Inspiring
Facilitating collaboration

We don’t want to reinvent the wheel but do want to open conversations and get people working together better by:

- Strengthening existing relationships
- Driving change through collaboration
- Inspiring action via an engaging platform

Communities will choose the partners they'd like to work with on the journey towards Wildlife Heritage Area designation.
The process

**WILDLIFE HERITAGE NETWORK:**
Specialist wildlife/conservation NGOs
Responsible tourism operators and experts
Communities interested

**WILDLIFE HERITAGE AREA CANDIDATE:**
Community steering committee – partners with a specialist wildlife/conservation NGO – and (where relevant) a responsible tourism partner. Collates and uploads evidence to meet criteria.

**WILDLIFE HERITAGE AREA DESIGNATION:**
The specialist wildlife or conservation NGO confirms Wildlife Heritage Area has met all required criteria, indicators and evidence and designates the Wildlife Heritage Area.

- Watch WHA pledge video
- Do online training to understand WHA criteria
- Sign MOU to agree working together
- Area uploads evidence and management plan to WHA website
- WHA designated
- Submits annual updates
- Spot checks on % of areas
- Independent Review Panel
The criteria

**Criterion 1 : Respectful human-wildlife coexistence**

The custodian community has developed, and seeks to continually improve, a responsible framework to manage the coexistence of people and wildlife within the Wildlife Heritage Area.

**Criterion 2 : Cultural significance**

The WHA focal species or habitat is of exceptional significance to a culture or a people and is a key feature of a custodian community's identity.

**Criterion 3 : Sustainable management**

The custodian community makes and enforces decisions and rules (e.g. access and use) about the area or species’ habitat to reverse negative damage from human impacts.
The evidence
Timeline

- Jan 2023: Phase 1 website goes live
- Jan - Feb 2023: Test criteria and indicators
- Jan - April 2023: Identify first Wildlife Heritage Areas
- Jan – April 2023: Develop platform
- April 2023: Test platform
- May 2023: Launch platform
- Sept 2023: Launch the programme with at least 3 Wildlife Heritage Areas designated
Get involved:

wildlifeheritageareas.org

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