



Criteria and indicators

How to become a Wildlife Heritage Area

To be designated a Wildlife Heritage Area, an applicant must:

1. Bring together a steering committee which is representative of the wildlife-friendly community living and working in the relevant area.
2. The steering committee must provide two pieces of evidence that meet each Indicator.
3. The steering committee must meet Criteria 1,2, 4 and 5. If tourism experiences and visitor attractions involving wildlife exist or are being planned within the Wildlife Heritage Area, they must also meet Criterion 3.

Terminology:

Wildlife Heritage Areas

An outstanding wildlife watching destination where local people recognise their natural heritage with a deep sense of pride and play a central role in protecting wild animals and their habitats.

Community

A group of people living or working in the Wildlife Heritage Area that make and enforce decisions and rules through a functioning governance institution (steering committee) which may or may not be recognised by outsiders or by statutory law of the relevant country.

Steering committee

Each committee of local stakeholders with a focus on wildlife that decides on the priorities for the community, as defined by the requirements of the Wildlife Heritage Area. The steering committee provides support, guidance, and oversight.

Responsible wildlife experiences

Tourism to encounter wildlife that utilises collaborative management and ongoing research to put the needs of wildlife before commercial interests.

Wildlife

All undomesticated animal species, including those held in captive environments. Also defined as the native fauna and flora of a region.

Cultural Heritage

This refers to the traditions, beliefs, customs, artefacts, and values that are passed down from one generation to another within a community in relation to the wildlife in that area.

Criterion 1: Cultural importance of wildlife

Wildlife within the Wildlife Heritage Area is of exceptional cultural importance and a key feature of the local community's identity.

Indicators and examples of required evidence:

1.1 Cultural heritage links people to wildlife demonstrating an understanding and on-going respect for wildlife and habitats.

- Written, recorded, or illustrated evidence of nature communicated through religious or cultural beliefs.
- Photographs of wildlife as a major totem, crest, or symbol.
- Audio, video or written recordings of local or traditional ecological knowledge.
- Interviews with local people to show that a species or habitat is ubiquitous in the collective cultural consciousness of the place.

1.2 The presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage that is linked to wildlife is respectful and sensitive to those living and working in the Wildlife Heritage Area.

- Promotional materials and/ or contracts demonstrating the involvement of local and indigenous communities in developing and delivering cultural heritage experiences.
- Training course certificates, attendees lists, or other evidence that people living within the Wildlife Heritage Area are employed/ prioritised in delivering wildlife cultural heritage experiences.
- Evidence of local participation and feedback on the planning of new (or changes to existing) cultural heritage experiences, interpretation, and presentation linked to wildlife.
- Proof that participation in cultural heritage experiences linked to wildlife is based on mutual respect and equality, regardless of gender, age, or social status, and upholds the right of Indigenous Peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

1.3 Efforts are in place to continually revive, reimagine, and enhance cultural heritage linking people to wildlife.

- Meeting minutes describing efforts to enhance and expand cultural heritage linked to wildlife.
- Planning documents describing concepts for new artistic interpretations linking wildlife and people.
- Event brochures showing how cultural activities such as festivals are evolving to meet the needs of local people and wildlife.
- Proof that efforts are being made to revive indigenous or traditional cultural heritage linked to wildlife.

1.4 The community regularly monitors the impact of cultural heritage linked to wildlife and takes action to strengthen that impact based on the latest evidence.

- A monitoring/ feedback system is in place to capture how cultural heritage positively impacts people's relationship and connection to wildlife and nature.
- Evidence of inclusion of local communities in data collection and evaluation.
- Evidence that the desired outcomes of heritage-based projects are factored into evaluation.
- Evidence of co-designed evaluation frameworks with local stakeholders.

Criterion 2: Respectful human wildlife co-existence

The community working to protect the Wildlife Heritage Area has developed a responsible framework to manage the relationship between people and wildlife.

Indicators and examples of required evidence:

2.1 The community works collaboratively to ensure wildlife is protected through research, nature conservation, regenerating biodiversity, and safeguarding individual animals from harm.

- Published list of protected sites and assets, indicating type, conservation status and vulnerability.
- Legislation designed to protect wildlife from harm.
- Evidence of repurposing income from tourism to support conservation and animal welfare initiatives.
- Proof of communications with visitors, local people and other stakeholders to reduce the spread of alien species.

2.2 The community raises awareness about the protection of wildlife, including ways for everybody to help contribute to solutions.

- Evidence of education resources and strategy.
- Evidence of readily available, compelling public and visitor information to raise awareness.
- Incentivised opportunities for local community groups or schools to meet wildlife experts and take responsible wildlife watching tours.
- Evidence that learning about the importance of local wildlife forms part of the school curriculum.

2.3 The community influences the protection of wildlife through strategies that are based on practical, scientific, or traditional knowledge.

- Ongoing long-term independent conservation-research delivered by a number of stakeholders, including NGOs, academic institutions, and government bodies.
- Meeting minutes, project plans or other evidence showing cooperation between communities and local conservation organisations to identify environmental impacts associated with tourism or other factors and measures to reduce them.
- Citizen science projects run collaboratively and involving tourism businesses.
- Evidence of partnerships with local NGO's or universities to provide independent advice and expertise.

2.4 The community recognises that there may be differences in opinion, interests or values related to the protection of wildlife, and meets this challenge through continual dialogue, collaboration, and mediation where necessary.

- Documented conflict resolution tools and resources that are inclusive have been adopted by the steering committee.
- New agreements within the community due to changing mindsets and values, for example between youths and elders.
- Methods are in place to ensure certain individuals, or elites with greater power, cannot dominate the decision-making process, leading to harmony and wider consensus within the community.
- Meeting minutes describing how issues have been addressed and solutions found.

2.5 The community supports and implements sustainability and environmental initiatives that have a positive impact on local wildlife.

- Images of low environmental impact equipment and vehicles.
- Research to understand environmental impacts on wildlife as part of efforts to reduce them.
- Photographs showing efforts to reduce sound and light pollution impacts on wildlife.
- Photographs or video showing adoption of wildlife-friendly infrastructure or technology e.g. wildlife bridges, bee bricks.

2.6 The community regularly monitors the health and protection of wildlife and adopts strategies based on the latest evidence.

- Evidence of on-going science-based monitoring of the WHA's wildlife and the habitats it depends on.
- Evidence of citizen-science focused projects encouraging community engagement and feedback.
- The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.
- Specific quantifiable socio-economic, cultural and environmental indicators are identified.

If tourism experiences and visitor attractions involving wildlife exist or are being planned within the Wildlife Heritage Area, please complete Criterion 3. If not, please go to Criterion 4.

Criterion 3: Respectful human wildlife co-existence

The community working to protect the Wildlife Heritage Area has developed a responsible framework to manage the relationship between people and wildlife.

Indicators and examples of required evidence:

3.1 The community has strategies in place to identify and raise awareness about exploitative, extractive, or consumptive captive or wild animal tourism attractions.

- Evidence that a full assessment has been carried out within the Wildlife Heritage Area for any exploitative, extractive, or captive, or wild animal tourism attractions.
- A short action plan that identifies the most likely threats from newly arising or discovered exploitative, extractive, captive or wild animal tourism and actions that could be taken to reduce or eliminate risk.
- A list of exploitative, extractive, captive or wild animal tourism attractions if they exist.
- Evidence of dialogue with the owners of exploitative, extractive, captive or wild animal tourism attractions to encourage a shift towards a more responsible alternative.

3.2 The community promotes responsible wildlife experiences.

- Public tourist surveys showing that customers recognise the importance of responsible wildlife watching tourism and identify the Wildlife Heritage Area as a wildlife-friendly destination.
- Business models for wildlife-friendly tourism include strategies to provide higher welfare conditions for wildlife in the wild.
- The wildlife-friendly business tourism model for the Wildlife Heritage Area includes a community support fund, where a percentage of annual profit is used to provide financial support to communities.
- Alternative ecotourism activities have been implemented to support the livelihoods of businesses previously reliant on wildlife tourism experiences that are now considered to compromise animal welfare (such as elephant riding).

3.3 Responsible wildlife viewing guidelines are adopted within the Wildlife Heritage Area and regularly updated to follow expert or science-based best practice. These guidelines conform to international, national, or local legislation where it exists.

- Provision of a copy of any wildlife viewing guidelines with the logos, signatories, or stamps of all compliant tour operators or guides. This should ideally include agreed procedures for dealing with non-compliance. Evidence should ideally show that the proportion of operators supporting the guidelines is 60% or more.
- Supporting statements from NGO's/academic institutions/monitoring authorities that guidelines are in place and being followed.
- Evidence of the distribution of guidelines for wildlife interaction to visitors which reflects recognised standards.
- Provision of information to visitors on harmful wildlife interaction, such as touching and feeding. e. Evidence of cyclical review of the guidelines for tour operators with all key stakeholders invited to participate.

3.4 Efforts are made to enforce responsible wildlife viewing guidelines and international, national, or local legislation where it exists.

- Evidence that fines have been issued for poor wildlife watching practice.
- Press stories confirming that fines have taken place.
- Written statements from enforcement officers.
- Minutes from meetings involving offending parties in which offences were discussed and documented alongside agreed solutions.

3.5 Tourism and the behaviour of tourists are well managed to reduce negative impacts on wildlife and habitats.

- Impacts of visitor volumes and activities on wildlife are identified through observation and community and stakeholder feedback.
- Actions are taken to manage visitor flows and impacts.
- Marketing strategies and selection of target markets takes account of visit patterns, the impact of activities and destination needs.
- An assessment of how tourism activities impact nature and wildlife, covering current and future risks is undertaken and made publicly available.

3.6 The community plays a key role in designing and operating wildlife experiences, which provide direct social and economic benefits.

- The direct and indirect benefits and costs associated with wildlife experiences for the local community are identified and documented.
- Evidence exists that people living within the Wildlife Heritage Area take priority when it comes to designing, managing, and operating wildlife experiences and relevant training or support is in place where necessary.
- Evidence of public participation and feedback on any planning of new or changes to existing wildlife experiences.
- Regular feedback mechanisms and surveys document unbiased public attitudes towards wildlife experiences and related tourism. e. Evidence of action taken on the back of feedback from surveys of public attitudes towards wildlife experiences and related tourism.

3.7 The community monitors the impacts of tourism on targeted species and habitats and regularly acts to reduce those impacts based on the latest evidence.

- Evidence of on-going science-based monitoring of the positive or negative impacts of tourism on wildlife and the habitats it depends on.
- Evidence of citizen-science focused projects to assess the positive or negative impacts of tourism on wildlife.
- The monitoring system is periodically reviewed.
- Specific quantifiable socio-economic, cultural and environmental indicators are identified.

Criterion 4: Cultural importance of wildlife

The Wildlife Heritage Area is guided by an active steering committee that represents the community.

Indicators and examples of required evidence:

4.1 The steering committee is an elected body that seeks to be inclusive and representative of all stakeholders.

- Evidence of inclusivity and representation in Steering Committee meeting minutes.
- Guidelines that describe that participation in the Steering Committee is based on mutual respect and equality, regardless of gender, age, or social status, and upholds the right of Indigenous Peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Evidence of outreach and on-going communication in Steering Committee meeting minutes.
- Proof that a democratic voting process took place to elect Steering Committee members.

4.2 The steering committee makes substantial efforts to engage the wider community, including those not traditionally associated with wildlife or conservation.

- Evidence that the Steering Committee directly involves marginalized groups to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.
- Evidence that the Steering Committee involves journalists and independent media, think tanks, faith-based organisations etc., to advance accountability in their societies related to human rights and inclusion.
- Evidence that the Steering Committee involves partners across government and civil society, as well as across traditional, informal, and customary systems, to foster an inclusive and human rights-based approach.
- Evidence that the Steering Committee engages with private-sector partners that advance human rights, gender equality and sustainable development, including in their supply chains.

Criterion 5: **Management plan**

The Wildlife Heritage Area steering committee has authority to make and implement decisions supporting the criteria and delivered through a management plan.

Indicators and examples of required evidence:

5.1 A transparent, written management plan that defines community well-being, nature conservation and animal welfare goals, actions, timelines, responsibilities, and monitoring and evaluating procedures over a three-year cycle.

- A list of priority threats to wildlife and how to address them.
- On-going monitoring and reporting mechanisms built into a Management Plan.
- A published document setting out the current Wildlife Heritage Area strategy and management plan on a three-year cycle encompasses all aspects of these criteria.
- Evidence of stakeholder and wider community consultation in developing the plan. e. Responsibilities are clearly defined with feasible timelines.

5.2 Mechanisms are in place for anyone within the community to provide feedback on the management plan and associated activities and communications.

- Public surveys (and other feedback mechanisms deemed most appropriate to reach and gather unbiased feedback from the largest numbers of people living within the Wildlife Heritage Area) are carried out and reported.
- Surveys or feedback includes visitor and public reaction to Wildlife Heritage Area plans, as well as broader sustainability issues and wildlife protection.
- Evidence of actions taken within the management plan in response to public feedback.
- Evidence of actions taken within the management plan in response to visitor feedback.