

# IWFF Guidelines for Ethical Wildlife Filmmaking<sup>1</sup>

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1. **Practice Conservation in your wildlife films:** Make conservation a key component of your film. Offset any potential environmental impact that the making of your film may have by playing an active role in conservation, renewable energy, or some other method.
2. **Plan carefully.** Create a statement outlining your methods of filmmaking for broadcasters and other interested institutions to assure an ethical and honest production. Use this outline as your guide when shooting under time pressure.
3. **Your subject's welfare should be placed above all else.** Ensure that your activities are not interfering with the subject's natural lifestyle. This includes reproduction and predation. It is unacceptable to restrict, restrain, or drug your subject for the purpose of filming. Furthermore, do not bait or feed your subject as this may interfere with his/her normal, natural behavior.
4. **Research your subject thoroughly before filming.** Learn his/her natural behaviors and what they mean. Knowing what is natural will help you avoid interference or negative impacts.
5. **Be careful about putting your subject in danger.** Your work may attract onlookers that could put your subject at risk. Night shooting with artificial lights may make your subject vulnerable to predators. Filming a den or a nest may attract predators; use every method possible to guard against these.
6. **Acknowledge the use of tame or captive animals.** Ensure the proper care of the animal. Always have the animal's trainer or custodian present during filming. Do not cuddle, pet, feed or stroke captive animals in the course of your work; it is not your role as a filmmaker and it may convey an improper message.
7. **Take care of the environment you are filming in.** Leave a place as you have found it (for example, tie back vegetation rather than cut it). Follow local and national wildlife laws; remember, you are only a visitor.
8. **Don't mislead your audience.** For example, if you use different animals for additional shots to make your sequence work or for the purpose of displaying a life cycle, disclose this to your audience. If the animals featured in your program are captive and not wild, be sure this is clearly conveyed in your program.

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are inspired by the BBC's Editorial Guidelines, the Code of Ethics of Filmmakers for Conservation, and Chris Palmer's book *Shooting in the Wild* (Sierra Club Books, 2010).

9. **Make sure you portray the picture of events fairly and accurately.** Different times of the same location may be used. Filming at one location and claiming it is another is unacceptable.
10. **Ensure that digital manipulation, such as CGI, does not distort the meaning of events.** Such effects should not impact the genuine material presented. If there is a risk of misleading the audience, clearly label digital techniques or add an explanation in the commentary.
11. **Reconstruction of events is legitimate but needs to be made clear to the audience.** The sequence should either be labeled or visually differentiated, such as using slow motion or black and white images in a consistent way.
12. **Staging or re-staging of actions or events is unacceptable.** Do not stage events, even if they could be a significant development of the narrative of your story. Inter-cutting to suggest events that are happening at the same time is also unacceptable.
13. **Simulation is legitimate when it is impossible to film an original event because it is rare or dangerous.** Make sure to inform the audience of the use of such techniques. You can do it through announcements, commentary, or as a last resort, in your end credits.
14. **Avoid close-ups or prolonged shots when depicting death.** Such scenes should be handled with great sensitivity. Try to flag what is likely to happen to lessen the audience's distress. Gratuitous violence may be considered an unethical portrayal.
15. **Work closely with reputable scientists.** Wildlife filmmakers and scientists benefit greatly from each other's cooperation. Ensure that the scientist is credible and ethical in his or her dealings with the species, the environment and the local people if applicable
16. **Excessive manipulation of species or habitat.** For the purposes of filming, getting a shot, tracking a species, and the like, filmmakers should not engage in nor support scientists who use excessive means to track, follow or engage in understanding of a particular species or environment. This would include collars, telemetry, or other external means that put undue stress on the subject.

**International Wildlife Film Festival Mission:**

*To promote awareness, knowledge and understanding of wildlife, habitat, people and nature through excellence in film, television and other media.*

