

Guideline for ethical behaviour during animal photography and videography

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Background

All DBCA activities involving fauna must meet animal ethics requirements, with consideration of the need to minimise detrimental impacts on animal welfare. This includes filming and photography of wild animals during their capture, handling and release. For the purposes of this guideline, 'wild' animals are not domesticated or habituated to humans, including individuals that have been bred in captivity for release into a free-roaming environment.

DBCA are obliged to comply with the Australian Code For The Care And Use Of Animals For Scientific Purposes (as stipulated under the Animal Welfare Act 2002) and penalties for breaches of this code can include the loss of licences and approvals necessary to undertake biodiversity conservation programs involving fauna. Major breaches may result in prosecution, fines or even imprisonment.

Conduct requirements

Ultimate decision-making responsibility for day-to-day wildlife intervention work is held by the lead animal handler of the associated program, as the onus is upon them to make sure all animal ethics requirements are met. The points below provide guidance for any person filming or photographing the capture, handling or release of animals based on best practice for minimising their effect on animal welfare.

1. Any specific film or photographic interests, including planned shots and their likelihood of occurrence, must be discussed with the lead animal handler prior to animals arriving (translocation) or being caught (trapping). This represents an opportunity for discussion and negotiation around what is potentially feasible, but the final decision rests with the lead animal handler. These discussions should result in a mutually-agreed upon plan that is communicated to the rest of the team, particularly if it requires a departure from standard practices.
2. Talking around animals must be kept to an absolute minimum. Voices and actions must be quiet and calm whenever in the presence of animals – this includes when they are in carrying boxes, handling bags or within a trap.
3. While animals are being transported, handled or released, avoid any unnecessary interference with them or designated animal handlers. This is particularly important while animals are being handled because distractions, and particularly noise, caused by interruptions and unnecessary movement can cause stress to the animal through prolonged handling times, injuries to both animal and handler, and data being recorded incorrectly or not at all. To reduce disruption, the animal handler may ask only those required to complete the shot to remain in the immediate area.
4. The handling of animals often takes place with the aid of a handling bag and consequently the animal may only be partially visible during this process. Taking the animal completely out of the bag for photos or filming will only be done at the discretion of the animal handler. This is likely to increase stress to the animal, may result in injuries and there is a high likelihood that the animal will escape, which are all undesirable outcomes. Preferentially, images or footage of whole animals should be taken when the animal is being released.

5. In the context of translocations, release times will be set by the lead animal handler and are non-negotiable. Most Australian mammals are nocturnal, therefore the use of suitable equipment (i.e., low-light capture technology) is highly recommended for night-time filming with minimal or no additional lighting. As per the *Ethical Wildlife Photography: Standards and guidelines*, “photographers are discouraged from using an artificial light source as nocturnal animals may be sensitive to light; a non-direct diffused flash will reduce the impact of photography on these species”. Previous research of techniques and equipment used by experienced natural history photographers is also recommended. While footage taken during daylight hours is generally of a higher quality than night-time footage, the welfare of the animals must always be a higher priority.
6. When animals are being released:
 - a. Once animals have been released, there will not be the opportunity to reset and redo. There will not be any attempt to recapture an animal once it has been released. **All** equipment e.g., cameras, tripods, lighting (if agreed to by lead animal handler), batteries, film/memory storage etc must be prepared in advance and ready to go before arriving at the filming opportunity.
 - b. The maximum number of people present at any one release will be determined by the lead animal handler.
 - c. Release sites will be selected by the lead animal handler based on suitability for the animals being released. Photographers must not physically alter the environment (remove habitat or vegetation) due to the disruption this may cause to habitat and refuge sites of the animals being released.
 - d. Photographers must set up shots prior to animals being released: holding animals in bags for a few extra minutes to allow set up may be possible but will only be permitted at the discretion of the lead animal handler. Any set up needs to be calm and quiet, rather than rushed and frantic.
 - e. Filming from in front of the animal is to be done with just the camera placed in position and the operator elsewhere. The camera position must be angled off to one side and still allow a clear path or escape route for the animal (i.e., not placed directly in front of the animal). The operator and all other observers are to remain behind or to the side of the animal being released.
 - f. Choose a position to film from and stick with it. If an animal heads toward you, remain calm and as quiet as possible, keep still and be mindful of your feet.
 - g. Moving to block the chosen path or escape route of an animal or attempting to pursue an animal after release is completely unacceptable and will result in suspension of filming/photography by the lead handler.
 - h. Animals may have been in a highly stressful environment for up to 24 hours (translocation). The length of time allowed for observing animals following release will be determined by the lead animal handler. Periods of exposure to bright lights or camera flashes must be minimised, and unnecessary headtorches turned off. Lights must not be directed at the eyes of animals as this can result in temporary night blindness.
 - i. Once an animal has been released, personnel must depart the area as calmly and quietly as possible.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these conduct requirements, please bring them to the attention of the lead animal handler prior to the planned work taking place.