



Frequently Asked Questions

What are Wildlife Heritage Areas?

A Wildlife Heritage Area is 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.

As animal welfare and sustainable tourism in general become more important for the travelling public, Wildlife Heritage Areas will identify places that meet the highest standards of animal welfare, wildlife conservation, community well-being, and sustainability, whilst also maintaining high tourism value.

By coming together to reconnect with, protect and respect nature, Wildlife Heritage Areas will help turn the tide on biodiversity loss and wildlife suffering by demonstrating the power of local communities to help solve the planet's most urgent issues.

What makes Wildlife Heritage Areas unique?

Wildlife Heritage Areas is a programme founded by World Animal Protection and the World Cetacean Alliance and is steered by supporters focused on wildlife conservation, animal welfare, and responsible tourism.

We believe in the power of communities to help solve our planet's most urgent issues. By coming together to reconnect with, protect and respect nature, we can all help to turn the tide on biodiversity loss, wildlife suffering, and the climate crisis.

Wildlife Heritage Areas was started to celebrate and guide travellers to places where local people are committed to further a deep and respectful connection between people and nature. We are a solutions-focused and positive-minded programme designed to showcase how culture, responsible tourism, and ideas for coexistence can create a better future for places, nature, and people.

What are the benefits of becoming a Wildlife Heritage Area?

There are many benefits to becoming a Wildlife Heritage Area including:

1. Promoting your destination to responsible tourism operators
2. Accessible website helps you to manage the programme
3. Promotional campaigns to drive interest
4. Enjoy a programme purpose-built for communities
5. Best practice sharing leads to tangible economic benefits
6. Support from NGOs and wildlife experts
7. Designed around principles of effective collaboration for communities
8. Drives social benefits for your community
9. Champions local solutions to global biodiversity loss and wildlife suffering
10. Requires continual improvement (it's not just about the badge)
11. Application is FREE and open to all communities

What is the Wildlife Heritage Network?

The Wildlife Heritage Network is responsible for designating Wildlife Heritage Areas through strategic partnerships between specialist wildlife NGOs and the local communities applying to be designated.

Responsible tourism members support the network by promoting responsible wildlife watching experiences delivered by local communities within Wildlife Heritage Areas. They also provide advice to applicants working to develop new responsible tourism initiatives. Independent specialist experts join the network to share ideas with communities that help enhance cultural links celebrating nature.

Finally, storytellers that align with the Wildlife Heritage Area mission join the network to spread the word about the world's most responsible community-led wildlife destinations.

Can any travel company join the Wildlife Heritage Network?

The Wildlife Heritage Area programme will only partner with responsible travel operators that have made a time bound and policy-based wildlife-friendly pledge with zero-tolerance to wildlife exploitation in their product portfolio and have agreed our guiding principles.

Working together with local communities and a network of experts, responsible travel operators can help to develop successful wildlife friendly destinations that meet the highest standards of animal welfare, wildlife conservation, community well-being and sustainability.

What are your guiding principles?

Each member of the Wildlife Heritage Network adheres to the following Guiding Principles, demonstrating their commitment to making the world a better place for people, wildlife, and the places they both call home. Joining the Wildlife Heritage Network offers members the opportunity to strengthen their commitment to these principles by accessing the latest science-based guidance, expert advice, collaborative opportunities, and local understanding.

As a Network Member I/we will:

Help turn the tide on biodiversity loss and the climate crisis

Members recognise and are guided by the urgent need to turn the tide on biodiversity loss and the climate crisis across all Wildlife Heritage Areas and beyond. They understand that this is critical to sustain life on Earth because we are all interconnected. Each member uses their network connections to seek new and innovative ways to reduce carbon emissions and protect and regenerate biodiversity.

Have a zero tolerance for wildlife suffering in tourism

Each member has a zero tolerance approach to human-caused wildlife suffering and exploitation through irresponsible tourism. Members utilise the latest wildlife watching guidelines and learn from location- and species-specific experts delivering responsible wildlife tourism experiences. Tourism members have clear public facing policies that forbid the sale, promotion or celebration of cruel wild or captive wildlife tourism experiences or trade.

Support and celebrate local solutions

Each member believes in the power of local, grassroots solutions to curb the biodiversity and climate crisis and prevent animal cruelty. Recognising the rights of local people to protect and care for wildlife and habitats, network members harness the power and influence of the network to provide financial and technical support where it is most needed.

Respect traditional knowledge and academic research

Each member recognises the importance of traditional wisdom and modern day science in combating biodiversity loss, climate change, and human-caused wildlife suffering. Through cooperation, network members help each other to forge a more peaceful co-existence with nature.

Value our cultural heritage linked to wildlife

Members recognise the power of human cultures that celebrate wildlife, igniting passion, and driving meaningful change for people and nature. Members promote success stories and best practice examples within and outside the network to accelerate this change.

Show a willingness to collaborate

Each member aspires to play a leading role, inspire others, and believes that we can only achieve radical positive change in our relationship with nature through collaboration. Members commit to sharing knowledge and welcome open and honest dialogue to achieve better outcomes for wildlife and people across all Wildlife Heritage Areas and beyond.

Can you be certified as a Wildlife Heritage Area?

Wildlife Heritage Areas is not a certification scheme. Instead, we use simple, flexible, and holistic criteria to demonstrate rigour and continuous improvement. In addition, expert NGO partners support and guide communities towards outcomes that benefit people, place, and wildlife.

Can any community apply to become designated as a Wildlife Heritage Area?

Yes, any community that wishes to meet the standards required can bring together a group of stakeholders, agree to the guiding principles, and work through the requirements by completing their online listing. The process involves a mixture of fun and measured tasks as well as inspiring learning.

How are Wildlife Heritage Areas selected and measured?

Prospective Wildlife Heritage Areas apply online through our website to become part of the Wildlife Heritage Network and complete their listing on our web platform. Successful Wildlife Heritage Areas follow an agreed management plan based on the following:

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:

- 1.1 Cultural heritage links people to wildlife demonstrating an understanding and on-going respect for wildlife and habitats.
- 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.
- 1.3 Efforts are in place to continually revive, reimagine, and enhance cultural heritage linking people 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.

Criterion 2: Respectful human-wildlife coexistence

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

Indicators:

- 2.1 The community works collaboratively to ensure wildlife is protected through research, nature conservation, regenerating biodiversity, and safeguarding individual animals from harm.
- 2.2 The community raises awareness about the protection of wildlife, including ways for everybody to help contribute to solutions.
- 2.3 The community influences the protection of wildlife through strategies that are based on practical, scientific, or traditional knowledge.
- 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.
- 2.5 The community supports and implements sustainability and environmental initiatives that have a positive impact on local wildlife.

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

Criterion 3: Responsible wildlife tourism

The community providing wildlife experiences within the Wildlife Heritage Area uses collaborative management and ongoing research to put the needs of wildlife before commercial interests.

Indicators

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

3.2 The community promotes responsible wildlife experiences.

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.

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

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

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

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.

Criterion 4: Governance

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

Indicators

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

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

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

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.

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

If Wildlife Heritage Areas do not achieve their objectives on issues such as animal welfare and nature conservation what are the consequences?

Each Wildlife Heritage Area is expected to meet agreed short and long-term objectives with support from its NGO assessor. If the community consistently misses these objectives it will lose its Wildlife Heritage Area status.

How do Wildlife Heritage Areas benefit the travel industry?

The travel industry currently has no means of identifying the wildlife destinations that are meeting the highest standards of animal welfare, wildlife conservation, community well-being and sustainability, whilst also maintaining high tourism value.

Wildlife Heritage Areas solve this problem by working with responsible tour operators and experts to help design and celebrate experiences that enhance and fund the protection of nature.

How do communities work with other Wildlife Heritage Network members such as wildlife experts and specialist NGOs?

How do I form a steering committee?

To coordinate and facilitate the development of your Wildlife Heritage Area (WHA), we require you to have or form a steering committee. This body should be representative of the diverse stakeholders within your community. We encourage you to seek out enthusiastic, creative and passionate individuals who can serve on the steering committee and help apply, launch, steer, and sustain your Wildlife Heritage Area.

Here are some tips for forming an effective steering committee:

- Include staff, volunteers, and community members
- Ensure that the membership is diverse and inclusive
- Assign leadership
- Keep it simple and meaningful
- Meet on a regular basis
- Establish sub-committees / working groups for specific tasks

What is a steering committee?

A "steering committee" is a "governing device" used to organise key project stakeholders and empower them to "steer" a project (or group of projects) to a successful conclusion.

And "steering" is the key word. Steering is not managing. Managing gets the job done, but steering determines what the job is. We all know that every project must be led by an underlying purpose and a vision. To deliver required results, that purpose and vision must be clearly defined, it must be monitored and it must be maintained. That's the role of the project steering committee; to deliberate, make decisions, advise, provide strategic oversight, and to serve as the primary "advocate" for all the assigned initiatives.

What is the application process like?

The Wildlife Heritage Area application process is run through an easy-to-use web platform, which will guide applicants through initial registration, uploading evidence to meet the Wildlife Heritage Area criteria, and creating a listings page.

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.

As part of this process, each Wildlife Heritage Area will be matched with a specialist wildlife NGO. This organisation will support the Wildlife Heritage Area through the application process and, once evidence has been uploaded, including a Management Plan and Steering Committee details, assess the evidence and designate the Area once the required standards have been met.

An Independent Review Panel, made up of people from designated Wildlife Heritage Areas, will review designations every six months to sense-check the process.

To maintain designation, each Wildlife Heritage Area will provide updated information and evidence every three years. This will be reviewed by the Independent Review Panel.

In the interest of transparency and best practice sharing, all information provided by a Wildlife Heritage Area for application will be publicly available, however a more prominent listings page will showcase key facts and stories. These pages are designed to appeal to travellers, travel businesses, and anyone passionate about wildlife and conservation.

If filling out an online application form is not possible for a Wildlife Heritage Area, an offline version is available.

How long does it take to be designated as a Wildlife Heritage Area?

The time needed to complete the application is different for every area and depends on many factors including the size of the area, the level of collaboration already achieved, and how much work is required to meet the criteria. Some areas are able to meet the standards required in a few weeks, but for most it takes a minimum of several months.

How long is the designation valid for?

Wildlife Heritage Areas are designated for three years provided that standards are maintained and annual reports are submitted. After three years a new management plan must be submitted and approved in order for the Area to be designated for a further three years.

Do government authorities need to be involved?

Most applications involve collaboration with government authorities. This might include local governments, local councils, tourist departments, wildlife and conservation departments, national park authorities and others. Involvement ranges from active participation on the steering committee to a letter of support or endorsement. However, involving government authorities in an application is not a requirement for designation because in some places this involvement can be ineffective or counterproductive. In these situations, the applicant must be able to show that the community is capable of influencing positive changes for wildlife and people within the Wildlife Heritage Area.

How much is the fee and what is charged for?

Application to become a Wildlife Heritage Area is free. However, to meet the standards required, communities must link up with a specialist wildlife NGO assessor affiliated to the Wildlife Heritage Network. Some NGOs may provide this service for free whilst others may charge a fee.

How will the designated area be promoted?

Wildlife Heritage Areas are supported by Wildlife Heritage Network members, including NGOs, wildlife experts, tourism operators and storytellers, who work together to promote areas and assist with wildlife-friendly tourism opportunities. The Wildlife Heritage Area listing page is designed with travellers, travel businesses and journalists in mind, providing inspiring and engaging content to showcase the project.

Does the Wildlife Heritage Area team make technical visits?

No. However, the Wildlife NGO assessing your area may choose to visit as part of their assessment. We also plan to conduct independent on-site assessments for a proportion of Areas periodically to ensure that standards are being met and maintained.

Does the area need to meet all the criteria to be designated as a Wildlife Heritage Area?

The steering committee must meet all criteria. Evidence is provided for indicators under 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.

Does each Wildlife Heritage Area have its own website and an email address?

No. Wildlife Heritage Areas are given a listing page on the Wildlife Heritage Areas website. This page provides engaging content, videos, and images to generate interest in your Wildlife Heritage Area from travel businesses and the travelling public. In addition, Areas are often featured by partnered wildlife NGOs. It is therefore not essential to have your own website.

What happens after the Wildlife Heritage Area is designated? Is there an annual assessment?

Yes. Each Wildlife Heritage Area completes a short form annual assessment with information about progress related to the management plan.

Who can use the logo?

Logos are licensed to the Wildlife Heritage Area steering committee. The steering committee can sublicense the use of the logo to other stakeholders within the Wildlife Heritage Area as agreed internally.