Outdoor Ethics

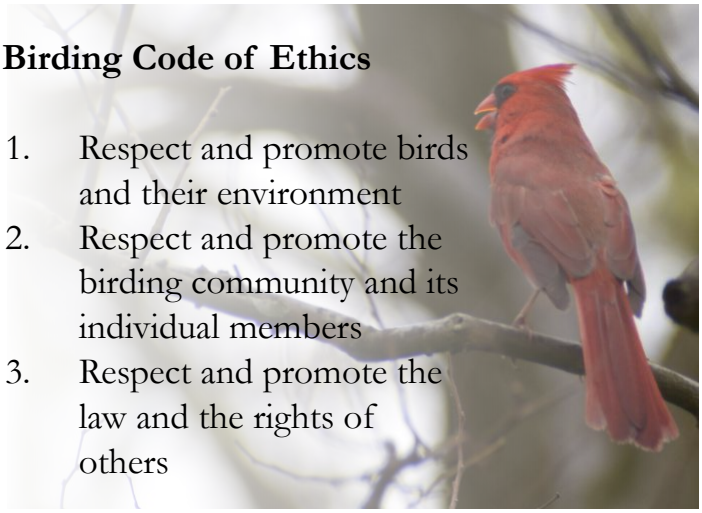
Season Three, Episode Five

Spending time outside and connecting with nature and wildlife can be a great joy for many people. That privilege of being outdoors comes with a great responsibility: learning and abiding by a proper set of "outdoor ethics." By understanding the effects of all of your actions, and doing your best to prevent those actions from having negative consequences on wildlife and the environment, you are being a responsible recreationist. Knowing that you are a guest in the wild, and in the homes of wild animals, is a great first step in curating a positive outdoor ethic.



Leave No Trace Principles

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors



Birding Code of Ethics

1. Respect and promote birds and their environment
2. Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members
3. Respect and promote the law and the rights of others



Take Only Pictures …

… and Leave Only Footprints

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Writing Prompts

These writing prompts are designed to inspire critical thinking and promote an understanding of the big impacts that are caused by day-to-day actions of humans on the environment. Questions may require additional research and can be answered individually in writing, or discussed out loud in a group setting.

You and a friend spend the morning birding at a local lake. There are several different species of waterbirds that come and go during your visit. As you are heading to the parking lot, you spot a nest with eggs on the ground. The nest is right behind a bike rack that is used frequently throughout the day, making you concerned for the safety of the eggs. What should you do?

While having a picnic at the park with your friends, you notice empty bottles and wrappers nearby, indicating that other people may also be utilizing this spot for picnics. There are no trash cans or recycling bins on this side of the park. What actions can you take to ensure the park remains clean and litter-free today and in the future?

When out fishing at a catch-and-release lake, you observe someone placing caught fish into a cooler. There is no one else around to observe this interaction, but signs are clearly posted for proper recreational fishing instructions. What would you do in this situation, and if you choose to speak to the individual, what can you speak to them about as potential educational opportunities?

While fishing at the river, you notice a father and his son are nearby feeding ducks on the bank. You realize that they are tossing bread and crackers for the birds, which are very unhealthy and unsafe for waterbirds. How can you share with them in a positive way what you know about the negative effects this food has on the birds?

You and your family are camping in the mountains. You notice there are bear-proof trash cans around the campground as well as signs notifying campers that black bears may be present in the area. For dinner, your family roasts hot dogs and hamburgers and eats around the campfire. What should you do after dinner is over in order to keep the campground bear-safe?

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Litter Collection Activity

Everywhere in the world around us is evidence of human activities that are damaging to the Earth. One very visible example is litter. Choose a specific location in your community and spend an hour (or other set amount of time) collecting as much litter as you can. Be sure to wear gloves and stay in safe areas. Take a few photos of your location and the litter you collect before disposing of it properly. The following questions can be completed as a writing exercise or as a class discussion.

What location did you choose? Why is this place important to you?

Generally, what types of litter did you find? Based on where you were located, what do you think are the primary sources of the litter you collected?

Estimate the proportion of each material in your collection. Use fractions or percentages to express how much of each material you found. What were the most common items you found? What were the most surprising items?

Plastics: _____ Paper/Cardboard:_____ Glass:_____

Metal: _____ Other:_____

Compare your collection photos and proportions of materials with classmates. Since everyone spent the same amount of time collecting, the volume of trash collected in each location is related directly to the density of litter present. Which location(s) have the highest density of litter? Which location(s) have the lowest density of litter? Why do you think these differences exist?

If your town or neighborhood asked for your help in identifying ways to reduce litter in the environment, what actions would you recommend and in what locations should those actions be focused?

During your collection, did you notice any other examples of human impacts on natural spaces that could be reduced? How would you suggest the people contributing to these impacts change their actions?

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