

# Birding Tours Self-Assessment Checklist

A Practical Guide for Good Environmental and Social Practices



Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock (Foto-Natura)

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION  
*Georgetown, Guyana*



## INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The British High Commission, Georgetown, Guyana, developed the Birding Tours Self-Assessment Checklist as a practical tool for tourism companies that offer birding tours in Guyana, including tour operators, lodges and individual birding guides.

The checklist has been prepared in collaboration with the Guyana-based tourism companies, and as part of a broader project that includes workshops on environmentally and socially sustainable practices for tourism businesses operating in tropical forest areas. The purpose of the project is to support the establishment of Guyana's position as a sustainable tourism destination in order to improve Guyana's overall economic fortunes and prospects. The project is co-ordinated by Judy Karwacki of Small Planet Consulting, Canada.

The workshops and checklist are based on *A Practical Guide to Good Practice for Tropical Forest-Based Tours*, a guide that Conservation International (CI) released in 2008 in partnership with Rainforest Alliance and the United Nations Environment Programme. Under a partnership between the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and CI, a webinar was also developed that presented the tropical forest-based tours guide and checklist to tourism industry professionals as part of a series of web-based seminars designed to improve the environmental and social practices of international adventure tourism operators. The British High Commission project builds on the webinar concept to create a two-day interactive and classroom learning workshop which has been delivered in four locations in Guyana to date.

The British High Commission expresses thanks to Conservation International and its partners for providing permission to use the tropical forest-based tours guide and checklist, to ATTA for inspiring the interactive workshop concept, and to the Guyana-based tourism companies and birding guides that provided input into the development of the Birding Tours Self-Assessment Checklist.

Additional copies of the Birding Tours Self-Assessment Checklist can be obtained by visiting <http://ukinguyana.fco.gov.uk> or [www.guyanabirding.com](http://www.guyanabirding.com).

## USING THIS SELF- ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

This self-assessment checklist is designed to promote good environmental and social practices by tourism businesses and guides that offer guided birding tours in Guyana. It is structured to suggest a good practice in the form of a question that can be answered with a simple yes or no. The question may be accompanied by examples of specific good practices that fit the particular practice category. The checklist is meant to be used as a companion to Conservation International's *A Practical Guide to Good Practice for Tropical Forest-Based Tours*, a good practices guide which has an accompanying checklist developed to help tropical forest-based operators assess the level of environmental and social good practices demonstrated by their businesses.

Used together, the birding good practices and tropical forest-based tours checklists provide tourism companies with a practical 'toolkit' for assessing their conduct, as well as the conduct of their providers and suppliers. The toolkit covers a full range of key good practice areas: Good Business Practices, Good Environmental Practices and Good Practices for Specific Tour Activities, including birding and the closely associated activities of hiking, nature walks and camping, archaeological tours, and land- and water-based activities.

The two checklists may also be used by tourism companies to create their own good practices action plans, enabling them to set out goals, tactics and timelines for adopting good practices, and to measure continual improvements in their environmental and social conduct.

The checklists may also be used by visitors to evaluate and choose tourism operators that actively demonstrate and promote good environmental and social practices.

## A GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICE

### A1 VISITOR EDUCATION, INTERPRETATION AND MESSAGING

What actions do you take to improve visitor awareness of how to contribute to the conservation of birds and their habitats, and to provide visitors with a rich learning experience?

1. Do you brief visitors prior to departing on your programs (e.g., tour destination, duration, terrain type and difficulty, birds that will be sought)?  
 yes  no
2. Do your programs have an environmental education or interpretive component about each habitat type that:  
Provides information about physical characteristics such as climate, altitude and dominant type of vegetation for each bird habitat type you visit (e.g., tropical forest, dry savannah, wet savannah, mangroves, marshes)?  
 yes  no  
Explains the importance for and use by birds of each habitat (e.g. species composition, feeding, mating, reproductive and habitat occupancy patterns)?  
 yes  no  
Identifies and describes special bird species that occupy each habitat, such as near endemic, rare, endangered, range-restricted species?  
 yes  no

3. Do your programs provide briefings or literature that identifies:  
Visitor behaviour that respects the sensitivities of each of the different bird habitats you visit?  
 yes  no  
Codes of conduct, protocols or rules that apply for gaining permission to enter the lands of communities for birding, as applicable to any Amerindian community involved in your programs?  
 yes  no
4. Is your visitor education and messaging delivered in a professional manner:  
Are your programs presented by trained and experienced birding guides?  
 yes  no  
Are your birding guides outfitted with the core equipment needed to lead a successful birding tour (i.e., binoculars, field guide, recording and playback equipment, and local and national bird checklists; telescope, GPS and two-way radios also recommended)?  
 yes  no  
Do you limit group sizes to keep the leader-to-visitors ratio low (i.e., 1 to 8 ratio, maximum 1 to 10 ratio, recommended for birding)?  
 yes  no  
Are your programs adaptable to different visitors (e.g. children, seniors, families, groups, speakers of other languages) of different birding levels and interests (e.g. beginner, intermediate, hard core and photographer)?  
 yes  no  
Do your programs include hands-on or participatory components for visitors (e.g. submitting species counts, observing and recording foraging, mating or parenting behaviour)?  
 yes  no  
Do you offer resources that help improve the visitors' educational or interpretive experience (e.g. field guides, bird books, CDs, videos, optics equipment)?  
 yes  no
5. Do you provide information regarding:  
Local, regional and national birding associations, societies and other groups (e.g., Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society, South Rupununi Conservation Society, Rupununi BIRDS, Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation Society, wildlife clubs)?  
 yes  no  
Local and regional bird conservation issues, especially those involving any threatened species and habitats?  
 yes  no  
Broader national and international bird-related threatened species, habitats or conservation issues relevant to Guyana?  
 yes  no

Local and other bird conservation projects in Guyana?

yes  no

Opportunities to participate in or donate to local conservation projects and groups?

yes  no

6. Do you have questionnaires, surveys or other methods for obtaining feedback on visitor satisfaction and other comments about your programs from visitors?

yes  no

**A2 INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

What actions have you taken to improve the birding-related infrastructure of the areas in which you conduct your programs?

7. Have you on your own, or in cooperation with other programs, guides, lodges, communities or other local partners taken steps to:

Identify locations where rare or speciality birds can typically be found, and which require infrastructure development or improvements to facilitate safe and ethical viewing of the birds?

yes  no

Develop appropriate infrastructure to access these locations in a manner that allows birders good viewing opportunities and personal safety, while keeping the interests of the birds foremost?

yes  no

Monitor, maintain and improve existing trail networks?

yes  no

Expand trail networks to add more and longer trails through diverse habitats?

yes  no

Ensure trail markers and trail maps are in place to aid visitors' use of trails, and to help with the collection of data for bird and mammal sightings?

yes  no

Ensure interpretive signage is in place to improve the educational and learning experience for visitors?

yes  no

Create self-guided trails through the addition of directional and interpretive trail signage?

yes  no

Improve ease of movement and safety of visitors by ensuring the presence and on-going maintenance of safety-related features (e.g., steps, handrails), where conditions warrant such precautions?

yes  no

8. If you have installed feeders, nesting boxes, perching poles, hides, canopy platforms or other artificial structures to give visitors better opportunities to view birds, do you ensure that:

Artificial structures are built and located in a manner that does not disturb birds or other wildlife, or expose them to predators, domestic animals or other risks?

yes  no

Feeders are properly maintained to protect birds from disease?

yes  no

Nesting structures are cleaned and maintained regularly?

yes  no

Canopy platforms, hides and other viewing structures are camouflaged to fit into the surroundings, and located at a distance that does not disturb birds?

yes  no

9. Where necessary, do you coordinate the timing of tours to sites used by multiple tourism or other local partner programs?

yes  no

**A3 HEALTH AND SAFETY**

What actions have you taken to consider and address health and safety issues that affect your programs?

10. Are your guides trained in first aid, preferably wilderness first aid?

yes  no

11. Do your guides carry adequate first aid supplies?

yes  no

12. Do your guides carry other survival goods, tools or safety supplies to provide relief in emergency situations (e.g., extra food, water, ponchos, waterproof matches, two-way radios)?

yes  no

13. Do you have established response protocols for your guides to follow in the event of an illness, accident or other emergency situation?

yes  no

14. Do you provide a health and safety briefing at the beginning of each program and periodically throughout the trip, as appropriate, which includes:

Explanation of the type, duration and level of physical activity involved in the program?

yes  no

Description of health and safety risks that may be encountered (e.g., dangerous insects and animals, trail hazards, heat exhaustion, getting lost)?

yes  no

Description of techniques, procedures and other actions that visitors can take to avoid and mitigate any identified health and safety risks?

yes  no

Asking clients to identify any medical or physical conditions which could impact their ability to participate in the planned activities?

yes  no

#### A4 ENGAGING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

What actions have you taken to engage local communities in birding tourism and conservation?

15. Have you taken steps to build awareness amongst local communities of birding tourism and bird conservation issues by:

Interacting with local environmental and wildlife clubs or giving presentations to children or adults?

yes  no

Identifying community members who are appropriate to contact with information on birding (e.g., telling them about rare or special birds or bird features in the area that are sought by tourists, or bird conservation related issues)?

yes  no

16. Have you taken steps to help communities gain benefits and minimize negative impacts from birding tourism programs taking place in the area, including:

Understanding and complying with all community codes of conduct, protocols or rules (e.g., paying village or other land user fees, obtaining permission to enter community lands for birding, selecting birding sites that are appropriate to visit)?

yes  no

Providing visitors with guidelines on community codes of conduct, protocols or rules for birders?

yes  no

Hiring community guides to participate in programs taking place on community lands?

yes  no

Encouraging communities to undertake initiatives that will assist them to develop community birding tourism programs (e.g., developing checklists for their areas, staking out locations where sought-after birds are found, developing viewing structures and birding trail networks, training community members)?

yes  no

Supporting communities in their community birding tourism program development efforts (e.g., giving training in birding and guiding techniques, donating equipment or funding, paying communities to participate in your birding programs)?

yes  no

## B GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

### B1 INTERACTING WITH BIRDS

What actions have you taken to ensure that the interests and welfare of birds always come first in all of your programs?

17. Do you take regular action to improve your company's knowledge of national and regional birds (e.g., common and scientific names, songs, habitats, habits and environmental issues affecting them)?

yes  no

18. Have you adopted good practices for birding by your guides and employees, and do you promote ethical birding to your visitors including:

Being cautious about spreading news about presence of a vulnerable or rare bird, especially during the breeding season or if the bird has value for the illicit pet trade?

yes  no

Avoiding going too close to birds, nests, colonies, roosting sites, feeding areas, leks and other display sites, and having rules for minimum distances to be maintained by your birding guides?

yes  no

Viewing birds and nests at less obtrusive distances by using binoculars or telescopes?

yes  no

Staying on paths and roads where available to avoid disturbing habitats?

yes  no

Avoiding the flushing of birds?

yes  no

Never touching or removing eggs, nestlings, birds or nests?

yes  no

Encouraging visitors to wear neutral-coloured clothing, speak softly, and avoid loud noises and sudden movements?

yes  no

Limiting use of birdsong recordings or calls to encourage a bird to respond, and having rules to be maintained by your guides for using playback (e.g., not playing at individual birds for extended periods, around territorial birds or during breeding season, and in areas of high visitation where other birders may have used playback in recent past).

yes  no

Limiting use of spotlighting to seconds rather than minutes and using lower intensity lights to minimize interference with sleeping birds and with the night sight of nocturnal species?

yes  no

## **B2 PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND HABITATS**

What actions have you taken to contribute to building Guyana's regional and national ornithological knowledge and history, and to supporting the protection and conservation of birds, their habitats and breeding, nesting, feeding and other important sites?

19. Do you send records of your bird sightings, migratory bird occupancy patterns or unusual behaviour or events to relevant national and regional birding and conservation associations (e.g., Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society, South Rupununi Conservation Society, Rupununi BIRDS, Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation Society)?  
 yes  no
20. Do you provide training, briefings or literature:
- For employees to build awareness around good environmental practices for birding tours, bird conservation, and to ensure that the interests of birds always come first?  
 yes  no
- For visitors to understand the proper conduct to follow to respect and protect bird habitats?  
 yes  no
- For communities to explain the negative environmental impacts to bird habitats from practices such as fires to burn off the savannah grasses, and of logging or mining activities?  
 yes  no
- For wildlife traders, hunters and other consumptive users to explain the negative environmental impacts of trapping birds for the pet trade or harvesting them for food?  
 yes  no
21. Do you contribute to bird conservation and biodiversity protection in other ways, such as:
- Taking part in local, regional or national programs involving protection of bird habitat, monitoring or other conservation initiatives?  
 yes  no
- Discouraging visitors, employees and others from purchasing wild birds such as parrots and songbirds, or artwork or clothing or other products made from birds and their feathers and skin?  
 yes  no



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