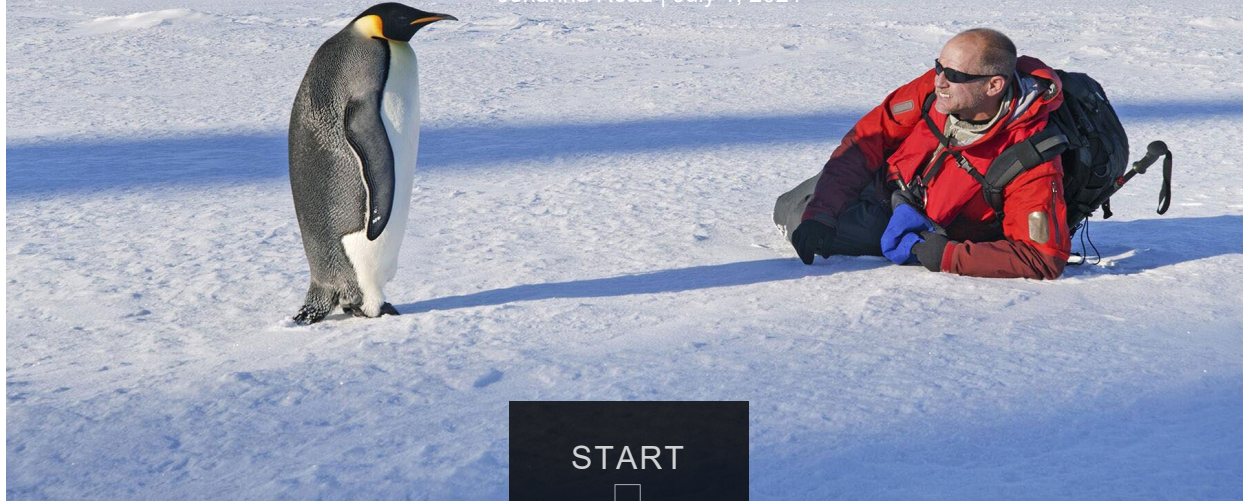# 10 Ethical Animal Encounters You Can Have in the Wild

Johanna Read | July 1, 2021

START

☐

In ways that help species at risk.

Wildlife and the outdoors are major drivers of tourism, but it's the rare traveler who hasn't seen places where this is to the detriment of the animals and their habitat. However, as described by the World Bank Group, tourism done right contributes to sustainable development. It can facilitate conservation, enhance the perceived value of wildlife, increase funding for protected

species and areas, create viable and more environmental land-use alternatives, and improve livelihoods and equality in rural communities.

Put simply, tourism can help create economies where wildlife is more valuable alive than dead. It makes conservation a good practice for individuals and businesses, increases willingness to comply with environmental laws, and intensifies demands for governments to enhance those laws. The plunge in travel due to the COVID pandemic has made it clear that tourism helps prevent poaching, is critical for protecting wildlife habitat, and for maintaining nature preserves and the animals that live in them.

If you want to see wildlife on your next vacation, make your tourist dollars count. Look for destinations and tour companies that provide good jobs to local people so they can rely less on poaching and activities detrimental to animals and their habitats. Ensure that some of the fees you're paying go directly to conservation. Ask about protection laws and make it clear you expect them to be followed. Support brands that support wildlife.

Here are ten examples of close encounters with wildlife that can help protect the species you're so keen to see.

Trekking to See Mountain Gorillas

WHERE: Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mountain gorillas live in only two places: Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and in the Virunga Mountains on the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC. Scientists aren't sure why, but the animals can't survive anywhere else, including zoos. While mountain gorillas are endangered, the population has grown from about 250 individuals in 1981 to over 1,000 at the last census. Tourism is essential for their protection.

As we explain in Gorilla Spotting 101: How to See Mountain Gorillas in Their Natural Habitat, tourism provides essential funds for employing park rangers, veterinarians, and trackers who protect the gorillas directly. The COVID-19 pandemic's tourism reductions meant increases in poaching, including that of Rafiki, a famous silverback in Bwindi. Gorillas' habitat is threatened by the need for land for housing, crops, and cooking fuel. Tourism helps provide nearby communities with clean water, food, healthcare, education, and jobs.

On a mountain gorilla trek, you'll need to stay at least 23 feet from the primates. But gorillas might choose to come closer to you in search of tasty leaves or, simply, because they're curious about you.

Watching Scarlet Macaws Transition to the Wild

WHERE: Honduras

The scarlet macaw is the national bird of Honduras. The endangered red, blue, and yellow birds are popular as pets throughout the Americas and beyond, with poachers taking eggs, chicks, and even adult birds from the wild. What began as a rescue center for abandoned birds where tourists could get their photo taken is now a rehabilitation center for the macaws, where they're ultimately released back into the wild.

Honduras' Macaw Mountain Bird Park and Nature Reserve is near the Copán Ruinas UNESCO site not far from the Guatemalan border. You can see rescued birds up close plus spot released free-flying ones in the 335-square-mile Sacred Valley of the Scarlet Macaw. As Smithsonian describes, Macaw Mountain's initiatives include an educational program for school kids to learn the value of protecting the birds. In partnership with the World Parrot Trust, they've done four major releases in the Copán Valley with more planned all over the country. Conservationists say protecting the birds is prompting additional rainforest protections, too.