Mammal Watching Report: Writing Guide

A guide to help write a mammalwatching report

The first and most important rule is this: Something is better than nothing! A trip report can have any format. Just write it!

Here are some tips from the mammal watching community that we hope will guide you to write a report that is helpful to others, as well as hopefully being a nice memory for you to look back on!

Basic Information

The basic info that every trip report should include is:

- Your name
- Dates of trip
- Trip location
- An annotated species list

Optional but helpful: your email address so people can contact you in case of questions. Alternatively, they can also comment on your post or reach you through the website).
Any information beyond this is greatly appreciated, especially information that can help other mammal watchers to plan their visit and find the mammals.

Structure

Format: As we said there is no single format. Common format includes:

- General section outlining trip organization and other trip-related planning
- Report of what they saw and how they saw it and any other details that might interest or amuse the community
- Species list

In this guide, we follow this outline as well. The most valuable reports are the ones that have a day-by-day or place-by-place structure. Which you choose is personal preferences. Day-to-day gives a good overview of how much time a species requires or a place is worth, place-by-place creates a helpful overview of potential places to visit.

General section

Language: Write in whatever language you feel comfortable. We all have google translate/deepl. Include Latin Names and, if you can, write at least a short summary in English with the dates, places, and top species. Most of the countries we visit are not within the English language region, and we strongly encourage regional mammal watchers to share their knowledge.

Summary: Many people include a short summary with:

- Dates
- Places
- Top species

It's important to include this also in the post on mammalwatching.com that accompanies the PDF report. This really helps people to find what they are looking for.

Map: A map can help to visualize a route and distances in-between. This is especially helpful if many places were visited, and the trip report is long. A future visitor that might only have time to

mammalwatch in the North of country X can quickly search for the relevant parts of your report. The service "Google My Maps" is a good resource to create a map showing your route.

Planning section: This could include the most useful trip reports, websites, and books to plan the trip. Especially helpful are local websites or research papers that helped identify some of the mammal species.

Guides: Please state if and where you used a guide, especially if you were happy with him or her. Honest reviews help the guides best, and it can be very useful both to them and the next mammal watcher. If you visit an exemplary conservation project, feel free to mention that as well.

Conservation and Sustainability: Including this can inspire others to be more conservation minded. If you offset the carbon emissions of your trip, supported a local charity, left some equipment, reported your sighting or did anything where the mammals and locals profit from your trip, please do share that in the report.
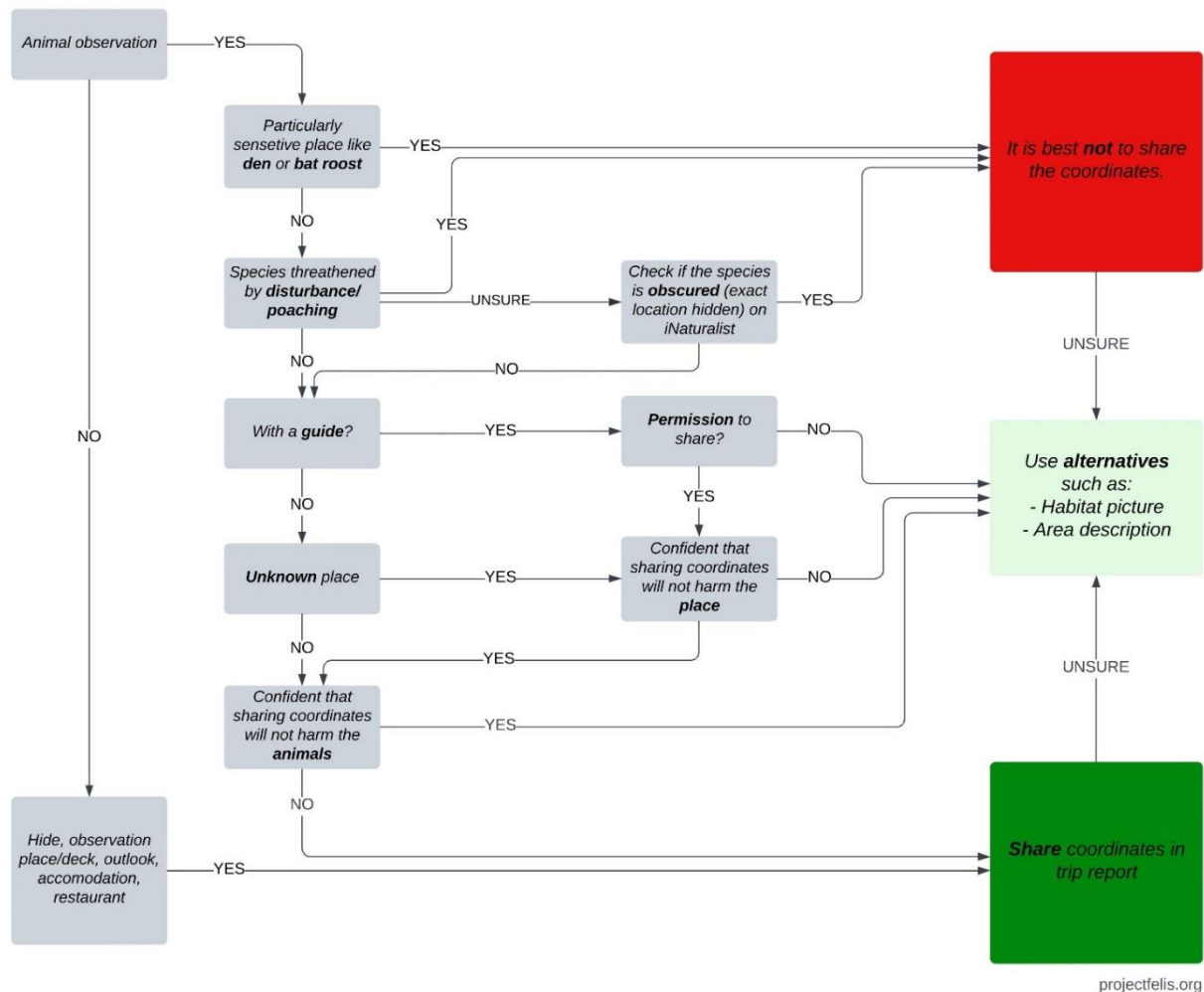
Miscellaneous: In some country's information from security and road safety to cell phone service and money can be very helpful. It can also be very useful to let the readers know key words in the local language – how do you say "Where are the Bush Dogs?", navigating police and army checkpoints, custom policies (such as hassles with equipment like thermal scopes) and guidelines on tipping (for example India is a tipping culture).

Misses: Writing about misses is as important as writing about successes! It helps set realistic expectations and might lead to improved search techniques or new locations etc. For some people the most useful advice can be in a report just about missing! So much is still to be learned about our hobby and we are often on the frontier of discovery. So detailing misses and possible reasons could encourage the next person to try something new.

Coordinates: Coordinates of specific observations in a trip report are a controversial topic, as they carry the risk of a report doing "more harm than good" (e.g. if lots of people visit the exact same place and stress the animals). However, coordinates are also of exceptionally high value to plan a trip, and can encourage people to visit successfully which can help protect the species. We suggest you use your own judgement on the pros and cons of how much detail you share and who you share it with (Figure 1). If you are unsure how a species might be reported best, you can go check to see if a particular species is "obscured" on iNaturalist as a guide. An alternative option is to take a picture of the typical habitat for the species and include that in the trip report together with the general location. People can still contact each other for the exact coordinates.

Please also respect information you get from others. If a local guide has taken you to see a species then that information belongs to them. They may, understandably, not want it shared publicly. This information might have taken them years to discover and their income might rely on it.

Should I share coordinates in my trip report?

Flowchart:

- **Animal observation** — YES → **Particularly sensetive place like den or bat roost**
  - NO → down
- **Animal observation** — NO → **Hide, observation place/deck, outlook, accomodation, restaurant**
- **Particularly sensetive place like den or bat roost** — YES → It is best **not** to share the coordinates.
  - NO → **Species threathened by disturbance/poaching**
- **Species threathened by disturbance/poaching** — YES → It is best **not** to share the coordinates.
  - UNSURE → **Check if the species is obscured (exact location hidden) on iNaturalist**
  - NO → **With a guide?**
- **Check if the species is obscured (exact location hidden) on iNaturalist** — YES → It is best **not** to share the coordinates.
  - NO → **With a guide?**
- **With a guide?** — YES → **Permission to share?**
  - NO → **Unknown place**
- **Permission to share?** — YES → **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the place**
  - NO → Use **alternatives** such as: - Habitat picture - Area description
- **Unknown place** — YES → **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the place**
  - NO → **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the animals**
- **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the place** — YES → **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the animals**
  - NO → Use **alternatives** such as: - Habitat picture - Area description
- **Confident that sharing coordinates will not harm the animals** — YES → **Share** coordinates in trip report
  - NO → Use **alternatives** such as: - Habitat picture - Area description
- **Hide, observation place/deck, outlook, accomodation, restaurant** — YES → **Share** coordinates in trip report
- It is best **not** to share the coordinates. — UNSURE → Use **alternatives**
- **Share** coordinates in trip report — UNSURE → Use **alternatives**

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Pictures: Pictures can be the cherry on top of a great report. And not even the prettiest pictures, but the ones that have an added value for the mammal watcher. Have a blurry picture of a rarely observed mammal? This is the place - nobody will appreciate it more than your fellow mammal watcher! Interesting species interactions are always appreciated, or shots that show certain characteristics that help to identify a species. Habitat shots are also especially valuable: They help us to find the right sort of place to target certain species more directly. This could be a picture of a certain type of vegetation in which you saw a species multiple times or a photo of a lookout from which you saw species. Written instructions to a place, no matter how clear on paper, can often be confusing in the field. Photos help!

Format: The use of **bold** and *italics* can help to guide a reader who might just be skimming through. Many people highlight **species** in bold. Words or categories that you might want also want to highlight could be *places*, <u>lifers</u> or special experiences; some people write misses of species in *italic*. Of course, you can find your own style, but in generally some form of standardization helps for people who want to scan reports to plan a trip.

Species list

Check out the tutorial video on the [Mammalwatching Youtube channel](#)!

Basic form: The basic form of a species list includes the columns:

- Common name
- Latin name
- Place(s)
- Comments

The more desirable/rarer the mammal is, the more information readers might appreciate. Sometimes people give numbers of the animals seen, or how often, e.g. ''numerous, singles, plenty, all-over, rarity, large herds, 3 times in 6 days''. This all helps us to understand how common a species is. Another useful piece of information is how you found a species: thermal scope, spotlighting etc.

How to create the list: Check the video on the mammalwatching youtube channel. Different methods exist. The easiest method is just to do it out of memory/field notes or with the summary on your favorite reporting platform. If you use an excel life list such as Jon's, you can modify the excel to allow to sort it, create a new column for the trip, mark the species in this new column (with a 1) and finally sort the excel. Then you just need to copy/paste and it is even in a consistent taxonomical order. There are also specific listing software's such as Scythebill which might have an option to export a species list from a certain trip.

Link to sightings: Some reporting platforms like www.observado.org and www.iNaturalist.org allow to generate a link to access the sightings. If you use these platforms including a link can be very helpful.

Written by Valentin Moser with inputs from Jon Hall, Janco van Gelderen, Kelly Siderio and Lorenz Achtnich with ideas from the mammalwatching meeting and community. If you have feedback, think something is missing or have another trick to compile the species list, please get in touch with us at info@projectfelis.org