

The Saint John Naturalists' Club Guidelines for Safe, Enjoyable Field Trip Experiences

OUR FIELD TRIP PHILOSOPHY

First and foremost be safe and have fun! Birds, turtles, butterflies, rocks, dragonflies, trees, night sky, native plants, bees, fish, beaches, invasive species, snakes, spiders and salamanders are fascinating. By learning about our natural environment, we strive to increase our observation skills a comfortable notch or two! We focus on creating a positive group dynamic that makes each participant feel welcome, comfortable and informed throughout the trip. We model best practices in the field and interact with nature in a respectful manner.

FIELD TRIP LEADER

- The trip leader may choose to walk the trail beforehand to check the conditions.
- The trip leader will determine the date, time, starting location and description, the degree of difficulty walking, directions, participant pre-registration, and arrange carpooling. This information will be posted in advance on the SJNC website, Facebook page, in the bulletin and announced at our monthly meeting, etc.
- Description of the Degree of Difficulty Walking:
 - EASY: 1-3 km walking; no significant elevation gain; leisurely pace; well-maintained trails. Easy trips should not include difficult walking such as an icy trail in winter.
 - MODERATE: 3-6 km walking; trails may not be well maintained (uneven ground, gravel road); some elevation change is to be expected; trip could be a full day.
 - DIFFICULT: Participants must be in good physical condition. Walking exceeds 6 km; trails may be in poor condition; expect elevation changes. Special equipment may be required. Participants tend to move more quickly at times.
- Each field trip begins with introductions and a briefing by the field trip leader who might ask for a volunteer to record interesting sightings, etc. to be shared at the debriefing or for the club media page. Ensure basic first aid supplies are available within the group.
- The trip leader should consider new participants and encourage them to carpool with more experienced members so the new people get to know new friends and have the opportunity to learn as much as possible from the expedition.
- The trip leader may appoint a co-leader to bring up the rear of the group and to help keep the group organized.
- If deemed appropriate by the trip leader, s/he will have a copy of the club's field trip guidelines and may ask all participants to sign on the back of the guidelines indicating that they have read and agree to follow the guidelines.
- The leader will count the number of participants (cars if carpooling) and confirm at the end of the trip that all participants are accounted for.

ON THE TRAIL

Participants must recognize and acknowledge their responsibility for the following: appropriate clothing and equipment, adequate physical fitness and health, obeying directions of the activity coordinator, not separating from the group activity, exercising good judgement and paying proper care and attention.

- Do not bring dogs along without prior permission from the leader. Dogs must be on a leash at all times.
- Consider carrying a field guide, binoculars, camera, note book, emergency whistle, map, GPS, first aid supplies, water, snacks, rain gear, sunhat, sunscreen, walking stick, cell phone and wearing proper footwear.
- If carpooling with a person(s) new to the Club, make every effort to have them feel welcome and comfortable and to have the opportunity to learn as much as possible from the excursion.
- Stay behind the leader at all times. Stay with the group and remain on marked safe trails. Take “nature breaks” on a buddy system so no one gets left behind. Notify the trip leader if you are taking a “nature break” or leaving early. For many activities (and certainly when birding), it is important to move quietly. If you wish to converse with others, drop back behind the main group.
- Turn your cell phone off or to vibrate. If you must take a call, move away from the group and talk quietly. Keep the conversation short.
- Respect private property. Do not enter without permission.
- Help keep surroundings natural and when possible, pick up trash along the route.
- **Observe birds and other wildlife without disturbing them.** ONLY the trip leader will use a recording. If viewing from your car, stay inside as long as possible and take your cue from the leader. It acts as a viewing “blind” and the birds are less likely to fly if they don’t recognize you as a human. Walk around groups of birds on the beach rather than forcing them to fly. When walking, watch for and avoid ground-nesting birds near the trail or on the beach. Try to wear neutral coloured clothing and move slowly and quietly. Wear visible bright clothing if participating during hunting season if it is suggested in the description on the website.
- **Observe native plants without disturbing them.** Do not touch unknown botanical species as they may be toxic. Use a pen or stick to examine under the leaves. Walk on the same pathways as others in the group to prevent crushing plants in adjacent areas. Do not pick or dig up protected or endangered species.
- When carpooling, offer to chip in to cover the cost of the trip.

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