

Use of Drones, Quadcopters and Terrestrial UAVs

The use of drones is prohibited in wildlife areas and National Parks as it is felt that they would disturb the game, and other people on safari, thereby negatively affecting the experience for all. As many wildlife areas are situated near international borders, the local defence forces do not take kindly to any activity of this sort, irrespective of how innocent, and as such the importation of such instruments will not be allowed by customs authorities.

Position paper on unmanned aerial vehicles

Frequent modern advances in photographic technology are a boon for the safari and ecotourism industry. Spectacular, dramatic, unusual and evocative wildlife images help promote awareness of, and travel to, the African continent and to remote, wildlife areas. This travel and awareness in turn helps promote and fund the conservation of these areas.

Nevertheless it is occasionally the case – usually once the technology moves beyond the pioneer/s and into the mainstream – that certain advances are potentially in conflict with our ethics and the wellbeing of the wildlife that they seek to capture on film.

Advances in digital SLR cameras and their ability to film in High Definition, high performance and affordably priced unmanned aerial vehicles (aka drones or quadcopters), very effective gimbals allowing stable footage and the rising popularity of safari and wildlife photography have all necessitated the adoption of a policy in this regard by Wilderness Safaris and Wilderness Collection, and many other operators in these areas.

We believe that so-called drones and the photographic opportunities that they allow can be beneficial for all the above reasons. We also believe however, that the ethics around utilisation of these devices are paramount, and that unethical use can and has led to unacceptable levels of disturbance of wildlife and other elements in our areas.

Operated irresponsibly and unethically drones can:

1. Disturb wildlife and conflict with our ethics in this regard,
2. Impact on the experience of other guests,
3. Produce images and video that are widely published and set a bad precedent and example for amateur and aspirant wildlife photographers.

In addition, because of security concerns around rhino poaching, and safety concerns because of inadequate civil aviation laws, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles is illegal in some of the areas we operate.

As leaders in the African ecotourism industry, Wilderness Safaris and Wilderness Collection are often looked to in terms of ethics and operational principles. We take this responsibility seriously and do not want to encourage the possibility of irresponsible behaviour through not expressing our perspective.

In the case of unmanned aerial vehicles being used for wildlife photography, we have decided to prohibit this activity on our concessions in Botswana, Congo, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This extends to terrestrial UAVs, as well as to aerial UAVs, so-called drones. We apply this policy to our own staff, to our guests and even professional photographers. Exceptions to this are possible in locations where wildlife and guests will not be disturbed and where landscape photography is the aim (for example in remote areas of the Kulala Wilderness Reserve, Namibia), and of course where such activity is permitted by law.