



GSTC Animal Welfare Glossary

version 1.0

17 February 2026

Document History

Version	Date of Approval	Description of Amendment	Affected Section/Page
1.0	16 February 2026	New Document	N/A

Document Control

This is Version 1.0 of the GSTC Animal Welfare Glossary. This document is published for the first time and serves as the official reference for standardized animal welfare terminology used within GSTC standards, guidance, and related certification and assurance activities.

Document Approval

February 16, 2026

GSTC Chief Assurance Officer

To make comments on this glossary, please email the GSTC at: futureslab@gstc.org

© The Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2026, All Rights Reserved

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

www.gstc.org

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1. The purpose of this glossary is to provide clear, concise, and standardized definitions of terms related to animal welfare within the GSTC framework.
- 1.2. While definitions from internationally recognized sources have been considered, the focus is on providing clear and context-specific definitions relevant to the interpretation, implementation, accreditation, and certification of GSTC standards.
- 1.3. This glossary supports consistent understanding and application of animal welfare terminology across GSTC standards, accreditation activities, certification processes, auditor training, and related guidance materials.
- 1.4. The glossary applies to tourism activities, facilities, supply chains, and operational contexts involving animals, including wildlife, domestic animals, and animals under human care.
- 1.5. The definitions provided herein are intended to enhance clarity and consistency within the GSTC system and do not replace applicable national or international legal requirements.

2. Normative Reference and Associated Documents

- 2.1. The following accreditation documents and international standards have guided this Glossary:
 - 2.1.1. GSTC Hotel Standard (GSTC-H)
 - 2.1.2. GSTC Tour Operator Standard (GSTC-TO)
 - 2.1.3. GSTC Attraction Standard (GSTC-A)
 - 2.1.4. World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, formerly OIE)
 - 2.1.5. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
 - 2.1.6. World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)
 - 2.1.7. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
 - 2.1.8. ANIMONDIAL
 - 2.1.9. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
 - 2.1.10. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
 - 2.1.11. World Animal Protection (WAP)

- 2.1.12. UN Tourism (formerly United Nations World Tourism Organization) (UN Tourism)
- 2.1.13. Five Domains Model for Animal Welfare (Five Domains Model; Mellor et al.)

3. Terms and definitions

Animal-based activity: Any tourism-related activity that involves animals, including observation, interaction, performance, handling, transport, or participation in experiences involving live animals [SOURCE: GSTC; WAP].

Animal under human care: Any animal whose living conditions, health, welfare, movement, or management are directly controlled or influenced by humans within a managed setting [WAZA; WOAH].

Animal welfare: The physical and mental state of an animal, reflecting how well it is able to cope with the conditions in which it lives, including its health, comfort, behavior, and emotional experiences [SOURCE: WOAH; Mellor et al.].

Animal welfare monitoring: The ongoing observation, documentation, and evaluation of animal welfare conditions to identify risks, non-compliance, or opportunities for improvement [SOURCE: WAZA; WOAH].

Animal welfare risk: The likelihood and severity of harm to animals and their welfare arising from tourism activities, facilities, visitor behavior, supply chains, or operational decisions [SOURCE: GSTC; WOAH].

Animal welfare training: Structured training to ensure an understanding of the animal welfare principles, species-specific requirements, ethical behavior around animals, and legal obligations [SOURCE: GSTC; WOAH; ANIMONDIAL].

Animal-based entertainment: Any performance, show, ride, or activity using animals for amusement purposes, requiring strict welfare safeguards or avoidance where welfare cannot be ensured [SOURCE: GSTC; WAP].

Attraction: A place of interest owned and/or managed by an identifiable entity for the purpose of attracting visitors and delivering services or experiences, including recreational, leisure, natural, cultural, educational, spiritual, or religious experiences [SOURCE: GSTC; UN Tourism].

Behavioral needs: Innate and learned behaviors that animals are motivated to perform to maintain physical health and psychological wellbeing, such as foraging, social interaction, rest, and exploration [SOURCE: WOAH; Mellor et al.].

Biodiversity conservation measure: An operational or management action designed to protect species and halt and reverse biodiversity loss, including those affecting animal welfare [SOURCE: IUCN; GSTC].

Captive: Refers to animals living in environments where freedom of movement and natural behaviors are restricted and where survival depends on ongoing human management [SOURCE: IUCN; WAZA].

Captive Breeding Programs: Managed breeding initiatives for animals under human care aimed at maintaining or increasing population numbers and genetic diversity, sometimes with long-term conservation or reintroduction objectives [SOURCE: IUCN; WAZA].

CITES: The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international agreement regulating the trade, transport, acquisition, and documentation of listed species to ensure wild populations are not threatened with extinction [SOURCE: CITES].

Crisis response involving animals: Procedures to protect animal welfare during emergencies such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, facility failures, or visitor incidents [SOURCE: GSTC; WOAH].

Domestic animals: Species that have been selectively bred over many generations to live alongside humans and depend on human care, such as dogs, horses, cattle, or poultry [SOURCE: WOAH; FAO].

Duty of care: The obligation (can be legal) to safeguard others from harm while they are in your care or exposed to your activities [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

End-of-life management: The humane planning and implementation of care, treatment, retirement, euthanasia, or palliative measures to minimize suffering when an animal's quality of life is irreversibly compromised [SOURCE: WOAH].

Enrichment: Environmental, social, sensory, or cognitive enhancements designed to stimulate natural behaviors, reduce stress, and improve the mental and physical wellbeing of animals under human care [SOURCE: WAZA; IUCN].

Ethical wildlife interaction: Interactions with animals that avoid causing harm, distress, disruption, neglect or exploitation and prioritize animal welfare, safety, and natural behavior over entertainment or commercial gain [SOURCE: GSTC; IUCN; WOAH].

Fitness for purpose: The suitability of an animal's age, health, physical condition, training, and temperament to safely and humanely perform a specific activity or role [SOURCE: WOAH; WAP].

Five Domains Model: A science-based framework for assessing animal welfare across Nutrition, Environment, Health, and Behavior, and Mental State, emphasizing both physical conditions and emotional wellbeing [SOURCE: Mellor et al.; WOAH].

Humane handling: The management, restraint, training, or movement of animals in a manner that minimizes fear, pain, distress, and risk of injury [SOURCE: WOAH; FAO].

Illegal wildlife trade: The harvesting, transport, trade, sale, or use of wildlife or wildlife products in violation of local, national, or international laws, including CITES listings [SOURCE: CITES; GSTC].

Invasive species control: Actions taken to prevent the introduction, spread, or impacts of non-native species that threaten animal welfare, ecosystems, or biodiversity [IUCN; CBD].

IUCN: The International Union for Conservation of Nature, a global authority on biodiversity conservation and ethical wildlife interactions [SOURCE: IUCN].

Managed: Refers to animals whose care, feeding, reproduction, movement, training, or activities are guided or controlled by humans, either fully or partially [SOURCE: WAZA; IUCN].

Natural behavior: Behaviors that animals are biologically motivated to perform, reflecting species-typical activity patterns such as social interaction, grooming, exploration, play, and rest [SOURCE: WOAH; Mellor et al.].

No-contact wildlife policy: A formal policy prohibiting direct physical contact between visitors and wild animals to prevent stress, injury, disease transmission, and exploitation [SOURCE: GSTC; IUCN].

Positive welfare: An approach to animal welfare that goes beyond preventing suffering and aims to provide animals with opportunities for comfort, choice, agency, pleasure, and positive experiences [SOURCE: Mellor & Beausoleil; WOAH].

Responsible wildlife viewing: Observation of animals conducted at appropriate distances and durations, without feeding, touching, chasing, restraining, or altering animal behavior [SOURCE: GSTC; IUCN].

Sanctuary: A permanently sited facility exclusively administered for on-site, long term or lifelong, individual animal care. A sanctuary is a facility that rescues and provides care for animals that are in need of appropriate care, or have suffered abuse, injury or neglect, or have been abandoned or confiscated. Sanctuaries do not breed, buy, sell, or trade animals and do not allow public contact with animals in their collection. Animals are only taken offsite for medical treatment or emergencies [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Species: A group of living organisms consisting of similar individuals capable of exchanging genes or interbreeding, and includes any sub-species, cultivar, variety, geographic race, strain, hybrid, or geographically separate population [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Species-specific: Refers to care, housing, handling, enrichment, and welfare measures that are tailored to the unique biological, behavioral, and ecological needs of each species [SOURCE: WAZA; IUCN].

Stress (animal): A physical or psychological response that occurs when an animal is unable to adequately cope with environmental, social, or management-related challenges [SOURCE: WOAH].

Under human care: Animals that are maintained, protected, housed, fed, or medically treated by humans, either temporarily or permanently [SOURCE: WAZA; WOAH].

Unnatural behavior: Behavior not observed in wild settings. Not all unnatural behaviors are regarded as abnormal, however, as they may promote success within the captive environment [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Visitor behavior guidelines (animals): Documented instructions provided to visitors to prevent actions that could harm animals, wildlife habitats, or animal welfare during tourism activities [SOURCE: GSTC].

Well-being:

Physical Wellbeing: The extent an animal's biological processes can cope with their environment (e.g., their physical health).

Mental Wellbeing: An animal's emotions and how they feel (e.g., fearful, in pain, stressed, happy [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Wild (place): A network of species and habitats functioning under natural ecological and evolutionary pressures. Maintaining its integrity is critical for biodiversity, animal welfare and ecosystem services, and human interactions must be carefully managed to avoid disruption [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Wildlife: A collective term for non-domesticated animals (and plants) of native species from a region [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Wild animals: Any animal species that has not been living in a state of nature and not under human control and care [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Wildlife disturbance: Any human-induced activity that alters an animal's natural behavior, movement, feeding, breeding, or resting patterns, potentially causing stress or long-term harm [SOURCE: IUCN; WOAH].

Wildlife rehabilitation: Measures taken to avoid degradation, fragmentation, or disruption of habitats used by wild animals, including breeding, feeding, and migration areas [SOURCE: IUCN].

Wildlife rehabilitation: The treatment and temporary care of orphaned, injured, confiscated, diseased, and displaced indigenous animals, and the subsequent release of healthy animals to appropriate habitats in the wild [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Wildlife supply chain due diligence: The process of verifying that animals, animal products, or animal-based experiences offered by suppliers comply with animal welfare standards and legal trade requirements [SOURCE: GSTC; CITES].

Wildlife trade: Any sale or exchange of wild animal and plant resources by people [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].

Working animals: Animals used to perform tasks or provide services for humans, such as transport, carrying loads, agricultural labor, or tourism-related work [SOURCE: WOAH; WAP].

WAZA: The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, a global alliance promoting high standards of animal welfare, conservation, education, and ethical management of animals under human care [SOURCE: WAZA].

WOAH (formerly OIE): The World Organisation for Animal Health, an intergovernmental organization developing international standards on animal health and animal welfare [SOURCE: WOAH].

Zoonosis: A disease that is communicable between vertebrate animals and humans (Zoonoses – plural) [SOURCE: ANIMONDIAL].