



Wildlife Trust for  
**Beds, Cambs  
& Northants**

## **Dogs on Reserves Policy**

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## DOCUMENT CONTROL

A version number with a zero after the decimal point (e.g. 1.0) indicates a formal issue.

A version number with a letter after the decimal point (e.g. 1.1B) indicates a draft version.

A version with a non-zero digit after the decimal point (e.g. 1.1) indicates a minor revision to a formal issue.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

If there are any questions relating to the policies and procedures set out in this document then please contact the relevant staff member below.

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## DOGS ON RESERVES POLICY

### 1 Introduction

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Dog walking is a popular activity through much of the countryside<sup>1</sup>, and many Trust members and visitors to our nature reserves are dog owners. In many cases, the majority of visitors are well informed and inclined to do their best to behave responsibly when exercising their pets<sup>2</sup>. Many are also interested in wildlife and have a connection with a regularly used and well-loved site, making them potential supporters of the Trust's work, and current or future members<sup>3</sup>. However issues may arise, leading to conflict between staff, dog walkers and/or other users of our sites<sup>4</sup>.

Some of the issues across the Trust include dog attacks/worrying of livestock, dog fouling (with both ecological<sup>5</sup> and visitor enjoyment and potential health impacts), dogs disturbing wildlife<sup>6</sup> and dogs intimidating or injuring other dogs or people. Contributing factors to these issues include:

- Lack of knowledge about the impact of dogs on nature reserves
- Unclear guidance from the Trust about expected behaviour, including on reserves and on the website etc<sup>7</sup>
- Confusion amongst staff about what our approach and guidelines are
- Lack of dedicated resources to investigate and mitigate any possible impacts at a reserve, local and three counties level
- Established populations of dog walkers (particularly near larger urban areas), who may have been using the site before the Trust became involved, or before the level of staff input increased due to funding or changing priorities.

Such issues need to be addressed, in order to achieve one of the Trust's three primary objects:

"To undertake, promote and advance the creation, conservation, maintenance and protection of wildlife and its habitats for the benefit of the public."<sup>8</sup>

This policy aims to set out, in a clear and simple manner, messages for the public as to the behaviour the Trust expects from dog owners and their dogs, and to enable conservation and community staff and volunteers to take appropriate action to ensure the integrity of our reserves.

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England visitor survey 2013: dog walking is the top reason for visiting the countryside (47%)

<sup>2</sup> West Berkshire Living Landscape partnership research, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Research done in 2012 from Welcome Calls: 14% of new members joined to get outdoors, including walking the dog. This was the third most popular reason for joining the Trust.

<sup>4</sup> WT West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Visitor Survey Report 2013 – 60% of visitors were walking their dogs, and 59% of these had their dogs off a lead.

<sup>5</sup> DeFrenne, P., Cougnon, M., Janssens, G.P.J., & Vangansbeke, P. (2022). Nutrient fertilization by dogs in peri-urban ecosystems. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 3, e12128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2688-8319.12128>

<sup>6</sup> English Nature report number 649, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Hampshire County Council research, 2006

<sup>8</sup> Articles of Association, 2011

Many pieces of legislation cover the issue of control of dogs around livestock. These need to be taken into account when making decisions about dog walking on our nature reserves.

### **2.1 Dogs and Livestock**

It is illegal to allow a dog to worry livestock, or to allow a dog to be 'at large' (not on a lead or under close control) in a field containing sheep (Dogs [Protection of Livestock] Act 1953).

### **2.2 Dog fouling**

Failing to clean up dog mess is also covered by several pieces of legislation. Dog mess can be defined as litter, and it is an offence to not clean it up if it contributes to defacement of the site (Environmental Protection Act 1990).

### **2.3 Access land**

Several of our reserves are defined as access land, under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. CROW rules state that dogs should be kept on a lead of no more than 2m long between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> July, and at any time of year when livestock are present. At other times, dogs should be under effective control – defined by Natural England as:

- Keeping the dog on a lead, or
- Keeping it in sight at all times, aware of what it is doing and be confident it will return promptly when commanded
- Ensuring it does not stray from areas where you have right of access (footpath or non-CROW land).

Dogs (and people) cannot be excluded from public rights of way or CROW access land, without recourse to lengthy legal procedures, usually carried out by authorities such as Natural England. The one exception to this is when lambing takes place on access land, in which case dogs can be excluded for up to six weeks.<sup>9</sup>

### **2.4 Dog Control Orders**

Dog Control Orders are a means by which various restrictions can be placed on the way in which the public use land open to the air which they have access to. This may or may not include Trust reserves. Under an Order, the following can be made an offence:

- failing to remove dog faeces
- not keeping a dog on a lead
- not putting, and keeping, a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer
- permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded
- taking more than a specified number of dogs onto land – the number will vary and is determined by authority putting the order in place.

Only local authorities (such as district councils and parish councils) have the jurisdiction to put these into place.

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<sup>9</sup> This must occur in a single period in within any calendar year, and the enclosure must be no bigger than 15 ha.



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## **2.5 Accuracy of notices**

Under section 57 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 it is an offence for anyone to put up a notice on or near a right of way if it contains false or misleading information likely to deter people from using the path.

## **2.6 Assistance dogs**

Under the Equality Act 2010, people with disabilities have the same right of access to services (including recreational facilities) as everyone else, and to make reasonable adjustments to ensure this is the case. Where people with disabilities use recognised assistance dogs<sup>10</sup>, such adjustments would include allowing assistance dogs into areas normally designated 'no dogs.' Assistance dogs and their owners cannot be excluded from CRoW access land where dogs have otherwise been excluded during lambing.

## **2.7 Pursuing prosecution**

As a Trust, we should reserve the right to use legislation to prosecute the person responsible for the dog if a dog attack (including worrying) occurs on one of our nature reserves. This will be particularly relevant if there are persistent issues or offenders on our reserves. However, the individual circumstances of attacks will vary, and we may not always wish to follow this course of action.

# **3 Dogs on Reserves Policy**

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The policy below sets out the requests and requirements which will be placed on members of the public walking their dogs on our land. The determining factors are set out below, and the choices made may apply to whole reserves or compartments thereof. Dog owners will be requested to clear up any dog fouling on our reserves.

We ask dog owners to keep their dogs on a lead while within our nature reserves, except in identified dog friendly areas, or unless the dogs are working dogs acting on behalf of the Trust or its graziers.

Where there is a high risk of disturbance to wildlife (for example ground nesting birds or feeding/roosting populations of wintering wetland birds), or dog attacks on grazing livestock are frequent and/or severe, dogs will be excluded from the reserve or compartment if there are no legal rights of access allowing dogs. If necessary and practical, further compartmentalisation should be undertaken to make this possible.

Whenever grazing livestock are present, dogs should be on leads, or under effective control, dependent on the circumstances of the site.

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<sup>10</sup> Defined as one trained by an accredited member organisation of Assistance Dogs International or International Guide Dog Federation. See [www.assistancedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk)



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### **3.1 Dog friendly areas**

These areas will be provided by the Trust to facilitate dog-friendly access to the countryside, where there is no conflict with nature conservation. We will seek to provide such areas where there is an existing high level of public access, often along rights of way networks. In some circumstances zoning of sites may be possible, where there are resources available to inform and manage public activity within zoned areas. Dog friendly areas may in some circumstances help divert disturbance from sensitive areas, although care must be taken that they do not inadvertently increase disturbance by attracting higher levels of usage.

### **3.2 Public Rights of Way**

Although the Trust cannot insist on it, we ask that dogs are kept on leads on public rights of way that pass through nature reserves unless they are within identified dog friendly areas. Any signage will reflect that this is a request not a legal requirement.

### **3.3 CRoW Access land**

Under the CRoW legislation, dogs must be on leads whenever stock are present, and between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> July inclusive, for the protection of ground nesting birds, and our policy will reflect this.

Further legal restrictions (for example exclusion of dogs, or dogs on leads outside the routine requirements above) can only be put in place by a relevant authority, such as Natural England, but the Trust will still request that dogs are kept on leads where appropriate.

### **3.4 Commercial Dog Walking**

Commercial dog walking (defined as any person(s) whose purpose was walking a dog(s) for gain) on our nature reserves causes a number of problems for wildlife, livestock and other site users, and is contrary to our charitable objectives, where a private individual or company receives commercial gain from a Wildlife Trust nature reserve. For this reason, we do not allow commercial dog walking to take place on land we manage, except where the public has a legal right of access (public rights of way and CRoW access land). In these circumstances, dogs must be kept close to you and in sight, or on a lead.

### **3.5 Determining the Risk**

The level of risk of disturbance is not always apparent. To determine the impact of access for dogs the Trust may exclude dogs on a temporary basis to allow us to assess the impact, where there is no statutory requirement for access to dogs to be provided.