

Facts informing the current position taken regarding dogs on leads on Tewkesbury Nature Reserve

Dogs and wildlife

- Dogs allowed to roam freely can harm wildlife including mammals and birds, by causing them to leave their nests, roosting places or safe overwinter habitats. This reduces their breeding success and may result in loss of important species and a wider impact on our natural environment.
- Many of the species of birds and mammals that use the Reserve are considered to be of national conservation concern and vulnerable to disturbance by dogs.
- Ground-dwelling species are particularly vulnerable to harm through dog disturbance.
- Even dogs wandering in and out of path edges can cause significant disturbance and loss of wildlife.
- Repeated disturbance caused by dogs running in and out of ponds erodes the bank, damaging plant life and releasing sediment into the water. This clouds the water, blocking out light for the plants and animals living below.
- Dog flea treatments added to the back of dog necks contain pesticides that can kill freshwater invertebrates. This treatment is very soluble and potentially harmful to animals such as dragonfly larvae, beetles and mayflies.
- Our Reserve is an important wintering area for wildfowl and habitat for small mammals and as such the impact of dog disturbance should not be underestimated.

Dogs and Grazing Livestock

- Grazing by livestock is a conservation technique employed on our Reserve and livestock may be present at different times of the year in a variety of locations.
- As the Reserve is intended to be a 'natural' environment control of livestock within its boundaries cannot be managed in the same way as on other farmland. This often means that dog owners will come across livestock unexpectedly and may not have sufficient time to put a dog off the lead on one.
- Dogs can easily cause distress or loss to stock and the law allows for the destruction of dogs worrying livestock.

Dogs and people

- Dogs off the lead can impact on visitors and Reserve staff and volunteers in an environment where they could quite reasonably expect dogs to not be able to approach them.
- Dogs not on leads can cause alarm or harm to visitors or dog owners who do have their dogs on leads.
- Dog fouling is harder to control with dogs off lead. It is unpleasant and can carry disease and, for wheelchair users, is easily transferred from wheel to hand. Children are particularly at risk from toxocariasis spread through infected dog faeces, causing permanent blindness.

Dog Safety

- Dogs themselves can come to harm on wildlife reserves as their primary focus is the conservation of wildlife and not dogs.
- There are plants in the countryside that are toxic to dogs. We try to keep such plants to a minimum but cannot guarantee complete absence. Keeping dog on a lead limits contact with harmful plants.
- Dogs off leads can become snagged on barbed wire, stuck in muddy areas, or caught up in vegetation.
- Dogs may be harmed by livestock, shot by farmers checking on their stock or ordered to be destroyed if proven to have been worrying livestock.
- Our Reserve is adjacent to busy roads and we cannot guarantee boundaries are dog proof.

No matter how well trained and passive a dog may be, they like all animals can behave unpredictably if startled, excited or threatened by wildlife, grazing stock or people. Keeping a dog on a short lead on our Reserve, where all these factors are present, helps reduce the risks described above.