

How to practise low-impact dog walking

- ▶ When you want your dog to run free, use a designated off-leash area. Be sure to follow the Code of Conduct for Off-Leash Areas. Even then, it's important to stay close to your dog and observe its actions closely to minimize risks.
- ▶ Everywhere else in a park, your dog must be on-leash and under your control at all times. (See Bylaw 608-34 for more details.)
- ▶ Never let your dog chase wildlife.
- ▶ Avoid going close to waterfowl and other birds. Keep your dog out of wetlands, creeks or bodies of water.
- ▶ When you walk through natural areas, be as quiet as possible. Stay on the trail to avoid trampling plants and compacting the soil.
- ▶ Always pick up after your pet and dispose of the poop in the proper receptacle.
- ▶ Respect other park users. Some people don't feel comfortable around dogs, even on-leash.
- ▶ Be the eyes and ears for the park. Contact 311 to report park abuses and other concerns, such as dead animals.
- ▶ If you see an animal in distress, call the Toronto Wildlife Centre at 416-631-0662. For all other emergencies call 911.

We all share the responsibility of being good stewards of wildlife and their habitats in Toronto's parks and ravines.

How to report an incident

Call **311** or email **311@toronto.ca**
You can call anonymously!

- ▶ **Give details** e.g. date, time of day, location, type of incident, description of the person/dog, vehicle license if available.
- ▶ **Contact your local councillor** (even if the park is in a different ward). You can also contact the mayor. It is up to City Council to ensure that our parks are adequately protected.
- ▶ **Speak up** If you speak out about your concerns, the City is more likely to act. Reports to 311 help bylaw officers plan their work more effectively.
- ▶ If you give your name to 311, it will be kept **in confidence** and only given to the bylaw officer. You can also call 311 anonymously.
- ▶ **Do not engage in direct conflict** with other park users.



ProtectNatureTO is an umbrella group advocating for the protection of wildlife and natural areas across the City of Toronto. For more information, visit www.ProtectNatureTO.org

Love nature? Love your dog?

Learn how you can enjoy and help care for both!



 **ProtectNatureTO**

Keeping your dog safe

Taking your dog to a park is a wonderful way to exercise, train and socialize your pet. Toronto's parks have more than 60 designated off-leash areas that provide a controlled and protected place for your dog to be off-leash.

Letting your dog run loose anywhere else in Toronto's parks and ravines is not permitted and exposes your pet to many hazards, such as:

- Being hit by vehicles
- Running into sharp objects or holes
- Ingesting toxic vegetation and fungi
- Developing serious skin problems from nettles and burrs
- Coming into contact with poison ivy and passing the rash-inducing oil on to you
- Developing digestive problems and serious infections from hazardous waste and bacteria in the water
- Picking up parasites from plants, grasses, wildlife and other dogs or their feces
- Contact with wildlife increases the risk of injury to the dog (e.g. coyotes) and disease transmission to/from wildlife (e.g. canine distemper and rabies), as well as transmission to humans (e.g. contact with black-legged ticks carrying Lyme disease).



Keeping your dog leashed and close to you on the trail can almost eliminate these dangers.

How dogs affect wildlife

Keeping your dog on-leash, on-trail and under your control is also very important for the survival of wildlife and their habitat. Otherwise, dogs can cause serious harm in many different ways:

- Wildlife see dogs as natural predators. Disturbance by dogs causes stress, interferes with feeding and breeding activities, and triggers reactions that can lead to harm and/or death.



- Dog urine "marks" the territory, which can make it undesirable or uninhabitable for wildlife.
- Dogs can disturb nesting areas and damage sensitive wildlife habitat. Ground-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable.
- Unleashed dogs can chase and injure (or even kill) squirrels, ducks and other wildlife.
- Dog traffic, digging and urine/feces inhibit the growth of young trees and ground layer plants, leaving the bare earth open for invasive plants such as dog-strangling vine and garlic mustard.
- Dog fur and paws pick up seeds, which can spread invasive plant species.
- Groundwater and water bodies can become contaminated and sensitive shorelines can be eroded and degraded.

"If no one else is in the park early in the morning, why does it matter if my dog is off-leash?"

Even if you don't see people, the wildlife are still around and at risk. In fact, many species are most active during the early morning hours, while others hunt, forage or travel at night. In the low light it can also be harder to keep track of your dog.

"Why are dogs a problem for birds? Can't they just fly away?"

Many birds, such as thrushes, feed on the ground. Others, such as killdeers and meadowlarks, build nests, incubate eggs, and hatch chicks on the ground. Many ducks and other waterfowl feed and breed along the shoreline. If these birds are disturbed, they may feed less or even abandon their nests. Young hatchlings and birds passing through on migration can be especially vulnerable.

"Why single out dogs? What about other people who disturb natural areas, such as off-road cyclists, foragers and hikers?"

All park users need to respect park rules and be aware of how their activities can harm wildlife and habitat. As a dog owner, you can make a big difference by observing the rules and setting a good example for others.

"Surely just one dog off-leash is OK."

Through the day there are likely many dogs running off leash and the impacts are cumulative. People walking their dogs are one of the biggest user groups of Toronto's parks and ravines, so it's not surprising that their behaviours can have a big impact.