

List of references to “dogs” in [High Park – Terrestrial Biological Inventory](#)

Prepared by Environmental Monitoring and Data Management, TRCA November, 2019

[https://s3-ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/trcaca/app/uploads/2020/01/10093444/High-Park\\_Terrestrial\\_Inventory\\_Report\\_2019\\_Final.pdf](https://s3-ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/trcaca/app/uploads/2020/01/10093444/High-Park_Terrestrial_Inventory_Report_2019_Final.pdf)

...

### **Current Disturbances to Vegetation Communities**

pg.26

Several rare and sensitive flora species have disappeared in recent decades from this area. Much of the soil in the northern half of the Spring Creek ravine is bare and eroding. **Dog walking is a major contributor, with off-leash dogs spreading from the official fenced areas on Dog Hill and Spring Road into the surrounding vegetation.** In areas along the trail from the allotment gardens to Spring Road the fences are too low and **dogs** easily jump over them out of the designated off leash area.

pg.46

**In another study, dog-walking in natural habitats caused a 35% reduction in bird diversity and a 41% reduction in abundance, with even higher impacts on ground-nesting species (Banks and Bryant 2007).**

**The lack of sensitive ground- or low-nesting breeding bird species are a consequence of heavy pressures exerted on such species at a busy urban recreational area such as High Park. Recreational trails coupled with dog-walking and off-leash dog activity, along with other pressures such as urban subsidized predators such as raccoon, domestic/feral cats and unleashed dogs have evidently impacted ground nesting species to an extent to which they are represented by minimal territories in a given year.** A fenced off-leash dog area located in the centre of High Park at Dog Hill (Map 2) is designed to concentrate off-leash dog activity into one area and hence reduce pressure on wildlife elsewhere in the park. **However, during inventory work, off-leash dog walking was regularly encountered outside the designated zone. If dog activity was effectively restricted to Dog Hill it is possible some ground nesting breeding bird species may return to the Study Area.**

pg.49

All five of the herpetofauna species of concern and five of the seven mammal species of concern score highly for patch isolation sensitivity. Common snapping turtle (Figure 15), midland painted turtle, American toad and eastern gartersnake undergo annual migrations to and from either terrestrial nesting areas with suitable substrate (for both turtles), breeding wetlands (for the toads) or communal hibernacula (for the snakes). **As long as traffic on trails within the Study Area is not too high and restricted to foot traffic only (no bikes), these species are less likely to be impacted. However, heavy visitation to the area increases the threat of predation and/or disturbance by off-leash dogs. Trails with bike traffic or off-leash dogs may result in herpetofauna and small mammal fatalities (Burgin and Hardiman 2012; Weston and Stankowich 2014).**

pg. 52/53

### **5.1 Site Summary**

**8. The main disturbances affecting High Park at present are intensive trampling from park visitors and off-leash dogs** in upland habitats, and storm water runoff in the wetlands and riparian areas causing nutrient loading and flash flooding. Other threats include storm damage to forests that are lacking native regeneration, insect outbreaks, and invasive species.

11. A single ground- or low-nesting breeding bird species was recorded in 2018: spotted sandpiper. Common yellowthroat was recorded in 2012 to bring the 10-year total for this nesting guild to 2 species, both on single territories. **The abundance of dogs-off leash found outside the fenced in dog park at Dog Hill may be contributing to the lack of ground nesting birds.**

## **2. Manage Public Use pg. 55**

High Park is nestled in a highly urbanized landscape and is therefore extremely influenced by urban matrix influences. Such influences negatively affect natural systems and the park has lost many of its original flora and fauna species since the 1880s. It seems unlikely that sensitive ground-nesting bird species will be able to thrive at the site. However, it is important to consider the significance of High Park's waterfront location for dispersal and migration. Such urban habitats – especially those as extensive as High Park – feed and shelter significant numbers of migrating songbirds in both spring and fall, even though only very few of these birds stay to attempt nesting. **At the Study Area, visitor pressure is currently high and is expected to increase. Strategies for managing human-use are needed if ecological health is to be maintained, or enhanced.**

**a. Some areas should be left as refuges for flora and fauna with minimal access**, especially Species of Concern; they are generally sensitive to human presence. Key habitats needing protection include the mixed and hardwood forests along Spring Creek as well as the oak woodland and savannah communities; these habitats support the more sensitive flora and fauna species (Maps 10, 11a, 13). **Restricting the number and width of informal trails should help without affecting public enjoyment due to the high density of trails elsewhere within the park.**

**b. Hikers and dog-walkers are intensive users of the site. The fenced dogs-off leash area on Dog Hill is well constructed and accommodates and manages many dogs**, however many owners walk their dogs off-leash outside this designated area. Leash laws may need be enforced outside designated areas. **Where off-leash dog use occurs (regardless of whether it is officially permitted or is not), there is a considerable risk of disturbance to low and ground-nesting birds and herpetofauna such as American toad and gartersnake in upland foraging habitats.** Trampling has also had a severe impact on the Spring Road Ravine, which has sensitive forest plants along the east side between Howard Pond and High Park Blvd (see Map 11a). Such disturbance would result in reduced abundance and possibly eventual extirpation of these species. **If resources are limited for enforcement of leash laws, the patrols can be targeted in areas where there are high concentrations of L1-L3 species and communities.**

**c. Fences should be improved both in terms of security and aesthetics in places where they have deteriorated or been breached: for example, along the east side of Dog Hill and along Spring Road.**

**d. High Park already has an impressive record of community involvement.** Involving the local community in any restoration efforts at High Park will enhance a sense of good stewardship,

which in turn will result in more ecologically positive behaviour, e.g. responsible gardening practices including proper disposal of yard waste; planting of native species adjacent to the site; removal of encroachments, and **responsible dog-ownership**.

Pg. 61

## 6.0 References Pg. 61

-Banks P.B. and Bryant J.V. 2007. ***Four-legged friend or foe? Dog walking displaces native birds from natural areas.*** Biol. Lett. 3:611-613. Available on-line at:

<http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/3/6/611.full.pdf>

[Accessed 24 January 2019]

-Weston M.A. and Stankowich T. 2014. ***Dogs as agents of disturbance.*** In: Gompper ME (ed) **Free-ranging dogs and wildlife conservation.** Oxford: Oxford University Press

<https://wilderness-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Dogs-as-agents-of-disturbance-Michael-A.-Weston-and-Theodore-Stankowich.pdf>

LH comment – this link was added by myself for completeness