

BC policy on access to nature reserves with dogs

Butterfly Conservation has a series of Nature Reserves across the UK managed for the conservation of butterflies, moths and other wildlife dependent on those habitats. Some have protected designations (SSSI) and protected species. Wildlife is sensitive to disturbance from dogs, and not just those roaming free. There can also be adverse impacts on vegetation from dog faeces as well as health hazards to people and livestock. Other visitors can have their enjoyment of the reserve upset by the activities of free-ranging dogs and even just their boisterous behaviour.

Many of our Nature Reserves need to be grazed by livestock, mainly cattle but also ponies and sheep, to maintain the grassland and other habitats. They are essentially farmland managed specially for wildlife conservation, not 'country parks'. In order to protect the livestock on our reserves and to minimise disturbance to wildlife we ask that visitors do not treat these sites as dog exercise areas.

The general public rights of access to the countryside apply to our nature reserves through footpaths and bridleways (where present) and those specific areas designated as Open Access land (The Countryside and Rights of Way 'CROW' Act 2000). Open Access land is not present on every reserve and won't necessarily cover all of a reserve. In addition we allow permissive access over other parts of some reserves. Details of access arrangements on individual reserves are provided on our web site pages and signage on the reserves themselves.

The requirements regarding dogs and rights of public access in the countryside:

Open Access land

You must keep your dog on a lead no more than 2 metres long on open access land:

- *between 1 March and 31 July - to protect ground-nesting birds*
- *at all times around livestock*

On footpaths (and other Public Rights of Way)

You must make sure that your dog does not stray off the legal line of a public footpath. Also ensure that you clean up after your dog when it fouls on a footpath.

As the requirements for 'close control' are not formally defined it can be a measure of personal perspective that is open to dispute. In respect of footpaths (and other Public Rights of Way) as dogs should remain on the defined route it is Butterfly Conservation's view that when that is not happening the dog is not under 'close control'.

It is also required by law under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 that dogs are on a lead or under similar level of close control at all times when in a field or enclosure in which there are sheep.

Signs, leaflets and Butterfly Conservation web pages set out the constraints on visitors taking dogs on to each reserve. For a number of reserves a 'Dogs on leads at all times' requirement has to apply and in some cases no dogs are allowed at all.

This is not a blanket ban - the circumstances of each case are determined by the types of access rights or permissions applying to the land, the stock grazing arrangements, the requirements of the landowner (where reserve is leased) and other factors including any history of problems with uncontrolled dogs, threatening behaviour towards Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers and exploitation by commercial dog-walking services. These are all factors that can change from year to year.

This policy is subject to review and our approach will draw on any new guidance and procedure resulting from the authorities and current national discussions. Butterfly Conservation has not yet sought to use any of the new laws (2014) set up to protect people from dog attacks but where reserves continue to experience increases in dog-walking those sorts of problems inevitably become more likely.

We ask all visitors to our reserves to follow the Countryside Code, to safeguard wildlife and grazing animals and be considerate to other people enjoying these marvellous places. A lot of volunteers devote a great deal of time and effort looking after our reserves and their selfless commitments are our priority. There will be alternative sites where dogs can be allowed to run freely – information can be provided by Local Authorities.

Code of Conduct for Dog Walking

- Please make sure you are allowed to walk a dog in the place you are visiting – check signs on gates and notice boards
- Please keep your dog under close control at all times and follow all signs and instructions for keeping dogs on leads. Please don't just follow the examples of others who might not be behaving responsibly.
- Pick up after your dog and dispose of correctly in bins where provided or take home.
- Respect other visitors, especially those with children – do not allow your dog to approach or jump up at them. Many people can be very upset by your dog's attentions no matter what you think.