

## Dogs on the Trail, Even on a Leash, Give Birds a Fright

Dog walking: good for you, good for your pet.

Not so good for birds, apparently.

Australian researchers have found that walking leashed dogs along woodland paths leads to a significant reduction in the number and diversity of birds in the area, at least over the short term.

Peter B. Banks and Jessica V. Bryant of the University of New South Wales surveyed birds along woodland trails near Sydney shortly after dogs were walked on them or after people walked alone. All kinds of dogs were involved, big and small, purebred and mutt. As a control, they also surveyed birds on trails that no one, human or canine, had recently walked on.



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Dr. Banks said the study was an outgrowth of his interest in predator-prey interactions. "Here you have a predator that is being walked through the bush quite regularly," he said.

The researchers chose trails in places where dogs were banned and in other areas where dog walking was common, expecting different results in each. "We thought that where there was reg-

ular dog walking birds would get used to it," Dr. Banks said. "Well, they didn't."

Regardless of the type of area, dog walking led to a 35 percent reduction in the number of bird species and a 41 percent reduction in overall bird numbers, compared with the control. (People walking alone caused some disturbance, but less than half that caused by people with dogs.)

The study, published in *Biology Letters*, provides support for park managers and others on the same side of what can be a heated debate over dogs in natural areas.

"The problem is there are other uses for an area" besides dog walking, said Dr. Banks, who described himself as "not a dog hater." "If dogs walk throughout an area, you're just not going to get the same bird-watching experience or ecotourism experience."