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Parks, Dogs, and Beaches: Human–Wildlife Conflict and the Politics of Place

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Introduction

Parks and protected areas provide important habitats for wildlife in an otherwise increasingly settled and urbanized world. They also provide people with a connection to nature (Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Frumkin, 2003) and for urban dwellers are a source of ‘restoration’ (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1990; Kaplan, 1992; 1995) and outdoor recreation. Although park mandates try to balance ecological integrity with visitor experience and satisfaction, these interests can compete with each other. An issue that has gained growing attention is spatial conflict between wildlife and the behaviour of park visitors’ dogs, including on beaches in protected coastal areas.

This chapter reports highlights from a study exploring what the barriers are to keeping dogs on leash on beaches in protected areas. The study is theoretically grounded within the context of Lefebvre’s (1991) notions of the production of space, and recent work in animal geography that addresses the changing role of our canine companions in modern society. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the literature covering the relationship between dogs as pets and modern society. The next section looks at the beach as a contested space between efforts towards wilderness protection and use by humans for recreational purposes, including allowing pets to run free. We then introduce the case study site of Long Beach in Canada’s Pacific Rim National Park Reserve as well

as the study and its underlying methodology. This is followed by a highlight of some research findings, a discussion, and some conclusions.

Dogs and modern society: The pet-human relationship

Dogs, as pets, are argued to occupy a liminal or 'in between' space and status in modern society, as both human and animal (Sanders, 1993; Fox, 2006). Our canine companions are perceived on one hand as 'wild' and a part of nature that should be allowed to run free and 'be a dog', but also socially constructed as family members and close companions (Fox, 2006; Power, 2008). In Canada, 83% of people who own pets describe them as family (Ipsos-Reid, 2001), as do 49% of those polled in the USA (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007) and 88% in Australia (Franklin, 2006).

The pet dog's close relationship to family derives from a long history of domestication in human culture and the dog's role as a companion animal (Serpell, 2002; McHugh, 2004). 'Man's best friend' has co-evolved with people. As we have become predominantly urban, canines have similarly gone through their own urbanization process (Holmberg, 2013; Urbanik & Morgan, 2013). Dogs have transcended the wilderness (and wildness) of their ancestors, and have moved into our homes and hearts where they are embedded in our daily lives. Beyond their historical utilitarian roles as protectors, hunters, herders, and rescue animals (McHugh, 2004), dogs and other pets promote physical and mental health (Cutt et al., 2007) social support (Bonas et al., 2000), social capital (Wood et al., 2005), and sense of community (Wood et al., 2007). The wide variety of pet products and services available on the market for dogs today (Nast, 2006), and the high levels of pet ownership (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, 2008), are examples of evidence of the importance of pets in modern society.

Tuan (1984) comments on the role of dominance and affection in the pet-human relationship where pets are symbolic of a human desire for control over nature. However,

Haraway (2003) suggests that the pet–human relationship perhaps is more about negotiating an understanding between two different species. Fox (2006: 531) adds that: ‘Living intimately with animals on a day-to-day basis means that pets and owners come to know each other’s individual personality quirks and traits, viewing their animals as subjective beings and attributing them with human-like characteristics.’ Pets are commonly anthropomorphized (Serpell, 2003), and other research has suggested pet-owners recognize their pets as close companions and part of the family (Sanders, 1993; Power, 2008). This engagement in social relationships affords pets a ‘personhood’ status (Fox, 2006), capable of subjective thought, individuality, personality, and emotion (Sanders, 1993). However, Fox (2006: 529) notes that pets often occupy a ‘dual status as both a person and possession’. Haraway (2003) adds that the pet–human relationship requires ongoing attention to the pet’s well-being, and concern about what the animal is thinking or feeling. Power (2008) suggests that dogs become part of a family as (a) ‘furry children’ that require a considerable time commitment for their care; (b) members of a tightly formed hybridized ‘pack’ that blends both people and its ‘more than human’ canine members; and (c) by meeting the particular needs of dogs, such as food, exercise, toys, schedules, and recognizing ‘dogs as dogs’.

Keeping pets transcends the boundaries of our human relationships to include a ‘more than human’ (Urbanik & Morgan, 2013) ‘other’. In a ‘post-human world’ that blurs boundaries between nature, society, humans, and animals (Instone, 1998), this trans-species social bond seems to be driven by a variety of factors including a desire for power, control and affection, kinship, and companionship, which promote a wide host of benefits. Humans and their pets are also negotiating a new form of family and relationship (Power, 2008) in an increasingly urban lifestyle. Exploring this phenomenon, Urbanik and Morgan (2013) note that beyond the closed doors of ‘furry families’ (Power, 2008) in suburban split levels, bungalows, hip downtown lofts, condominiums, and apartments, urban dwellers increasingly demand spaces outside the home for ‘dogs to be dogs’. This is evidenced by the emergence of urban places such as dog parks where pets

can run free, unconstrained by leashes, and where pets are able to ‘socialize’ with other animals (Urbanik & Morgan, 2013).

Despite a growing trend towards urbanization, humans also continue to need to be close to nature and to have an intimate bond with the natural world, a phenomenon referred to as biophilia (Wilson, 1984; Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Frumkin, 2003). Wilson (1984) contends that our close relationship with our companion animals is evidence of the modern urban dwellers’ need for such an ongoing bond with the natural world, even if this relationship is negotiated as a new form of family structure (Power, 2008).

The contested space of the beach

It is recognized that parks and wilderness spaces play an important part in allowing people to reconnect with the natural world, and that these spaces can be restorative, particularly for urban dwellers (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1990; Kaplan, 1992; 1995). This applies to beaches in parks, which in many instances are argued to occupy a liminal space between nature and society in a similar way as already argued is applicable for dogs as pets (Holmberg, 2013). The oceans and their beaches commonly are perceived as wild and very much a part of nature (Fiske, 1989; Brown, Fox, & Jaquet, 2007), invoking a sense of freedom. Beaches also often represent important habitat for wildlife. In the context of the Pacific Northwest, the beach is an open area between heavily forested regions and the ocean, and plays an important role as a wildlife corridor for large carnivores such as wolves, bears, and cougars, and is critical foraging habitat for shorebird species that depend on the ocean foreshore for food. But this natural ‘wildness’ of the beach is juxtaposed with urban qualities we have added to the beach environment that are a part of our urbanized culture, such as roads, parking lots, toilets, groomed access paths, and signage (Fiske, 1989), and they are associated with recreational activities such as sunbathing, hiking, and surfing. Urban style facilities, ease of access, and often close proximity to resorts invite throngs of park visitors with their families, friends, and companion animals to descend upon the beach when visiting coastal

protected areas. Urban visitors and their pets may well think of the beach as the ultimate urban dog park. Spatially vast, long, and linear are design goals underlying urban dog parks (Lee et al., 2009). These are also key features offered by beaches, and when combined with the natural setting, are perceived by many to be an ideal environment for dogs to run free and ‘just be dogs’.

The focus of the study on which this chapter is based concerns control over pet dogs while they are on the beach. Owing to increasing urban dog ownership, environmental concerns, including negative interactions with wildlife (Zharikov, 2011) and conflict between people and off-leash dogs (Beckoff & Meany, 1997; Manning et al., 2006), many parks require that dogs be leashed, and in some places, dogs are entirely prohibited (Lee et al., 2009) from access.

Inappropriate behaviour with respect to control over pets in parks and wilderness areas where their presence is permitted, according to Hendee et al. (1990), is manifested in five different ways: (1) actions which are deliberate and illegal activities such as violating laws that require dogs to be on leash; (2) actions which are careless like allowing dogs to bother other people; (3) lack of skill, such as the inability to adequately control poorly trained animals; (4) actions which are uninformed such as letting dogs run free, being unaware of leash laws and why they might exist; and (5) unavoidable impacts on wildlife, for example disturbance of shorebirds on the beach by people and/or their dogs, and high visitation during peak migration. Bradley (1979) suggests that inappropriate visitor behaviour impacting natural areas and wildlife in parks and protected areas is not usually intended but that it occurs rather from lack of awareness or knowledge.

The research presented in this chapter draws upon key insights from French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) about contestations over public spaces and subsequent research where certain ‘resistant and subversive practices take place in, and produce, spaces that challenge dominant social and political assumptions’ (Horton & Kraftl, 2014: 274) in everyday socio-spatial relations. Lefebvre’s (1991) insight into the production

space is primarily used in urban contexts. It has, however, gained some attention in national park settings (e.g. Morehouse, 1996). A particularly salient example is Holmberg's (2013) work on the contested space of the 'beach as a dog park', whereas other work has considered skateboarding (Stratford, 2002; Chiu, 2009), graffiti (Brighenti, 2010), street youth (Valentine, 2004), punks (Hebdige, 1979), and youth and shopping malls (Matthews et al., 2000).

According to Lefebvre (1991), we perceive or conceive physical and built environments in three interrelated ways. Soja (1996) has termed this the 'trialectics of space'. According to Lefebvre (1991) 'conceived', or representations of space can be found in the rules, laws and regulations that, in the context of the present study, require dogs to be on leash in parks at all times. Following suit, 'perceived spaces', or spaces of representation, are concerned with how people feel about these spaces and the daily experiences of park visitors and their pets. Both of these notions of space are often intertwined and embedded with conflicting viewpoints. The third interrelated way we conceptualize space is through 'spatial practices'. These are manifested in the daily activities of dog-walkers on the beach that shape and reshape material space and structure the realities of park visitation. Spatial practices are sometimes referred to as 'third spaces' (Soja, 1996) where secluded, or out of view places (e.g. Matthews et al., 2000) in the park landscape enable behaviour that may be considered as subversive, inappropriate, or deviant.

Study context

The case study reported here is based in the Long Beach Unit of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve located in British Columbia, Canada, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The park and its beaches are bookended at either end by the villages of Ucluelet and Tofino (Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 Location of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

Source: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Parks Canada, 2014

One of the primary features in this area is Long Beach, a 16 kilometre long sandy beach of Wickaninnish Bay (Figure 8.2). Other popular beaches on the edge of the park include Mackenzie and Chesterman Beaches, and Cox Bay. These beaches host a mix of private residences, condos, and resorts. Situated within indigenous Tla-o-qui-aht and Yuułu?il?ath traditional territories, the park is intersected by the Tla-o-qui-aht communities of Esowista, located within the park boundary.

Figure 8.2 The Long Beach unit of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

Source: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Parks Canada, 2014

The Pacific Rim National Park Reserve as well as the adjacent communities are often construed by visitors as a ‘last frontier’ and considered to be ‘wild’. These themes are evident in place-based ‘end of the road culture’, cultural memes that proliferate in destination marketing, surf culture, beachside cafés and eateries, and by sheer virtue of the park’s geographic location, on an island that is 20 kilometres from the coast of mainland British Columbia, on the western edge of Canada. The pace of life is laid back, and the pounding of the surf, lingering fog, frequent rain, and the briny tang of salt in the air permeate the landscape. It is not at all uncommon, surprising, or out of place to see dogs roaming freely and unattended in Tofino, Ucluelet, or surrounding areas, including the beaches.

Historically a resource-based region making it’s living from declining fishing and forestry industries, this area is in transition to an economic focus on tourism. Today the area is an epicentre for whale watching, wildlife viewing, sport fishing, sea kayaking, and surfing. Concerning surfing, the area offers some of the best and most accessible waves in Canada. Employment in the various forms of nature-based tourism and the many restaurants and hotels located in Tofino and Ucluelet has resulted in the establishment of a youth-oriented amenity-based subculture. This youth culture combines with what is often thought of as one of the oldest demographics in a post-industrial Canada, of well-heeled baby-boomer retirees who flock to Vancouver Island because of its moderate climate, compared to the rest of Canada. A counterculture feel and history of activism

also remain vibrant from a legacy of civil disobedience and the largest act of protest in Canadian history to halt logging activities on Meares Island in Clayoquot Sound in 1992. Amid the throngs of tourists, retirees, fishermen, kayakers, surfers, loggers, and activists there is a sense that this is a special place. Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations have made Clayoquot Sound their home for thousands of years. Traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht, Hesquiat, and Ahousat people, Clayoquot Sound has some of the largest, unaltered watersheds and stands of ancient rainforest in Canada. Overlain with tourism and resource extraction interests, the park and its surrounding region is the epitome of 'contested space'.

Beaches in the park and adjacent coast play an important role as wildlife corridors and wildlife foraging habitat. Notable for the purpose of this study are the use of beaches by shorebirds (notably sanderlings (*Calidris alba*) and western sandpipers (*C. mauri*)) and Vancouver Island wolves (*Canis lupis cracidon*). As background for this study we explore the use of the park by wolves and shorebirds in more detail.

Wolves

When people and wildlife, including predators such as wolves, share the same spaces, the potential for negative human-wildlife encounters escalates (Linnell et al., 2002). Wolves are characteristically shy and wary of humans (Yellowstone National Park, 2003). Consequently, problem animals and negative interactions with people are rare (Yellowstone National Park, 2003). However, some wild wolves have demonstrated aggressive behaviour towards people (Linnell et al., 2002; McNay, 2002; Windle, 2003; Yellowstone National Park, 2003), and there exists a history of conflict between wolves and visitors in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve (Windle, 2003; Edwards, 2005; LaCombe, 2005; Pacific Rim National Park Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist Personal Communication, 2011)

Since 1999, a significant and progressive increase in wolf activity in the park and the surrounding region has been noted. In 2011 there were two fatal attacks on off-leash

dogs in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, and one fatal attack in a nearby provincial park. Wolf activity also increased considerably the following year (2012), with two more fatal attacks on dogs in March of that year. Retaliation for the fatal wolf attacks on dogs, by angry community members, led to the death of two wolves that were killed and left in a dumpster in Tofino. The incident made national news and an upset community railed against the perpetrators. Members of the aboriginal community were shocked and in disbelief at the insensitivity, disrespect, and ignorance of this violent act against wolves, a prominently featured being in their spiritual and cultural life. January 2014 witnessed the emergence of an additional pack of wolves in the park, and on 4 March 2014 a dog was attacked and dragged off in a residential area during daylight hours. The attack was captured on video footage filmed by a local resident and broadcast on the evening news. In March 2015, wolves attacked two dogs on popular Wickannish Beach, in front of their owners, a couple and their small child, during a morning walk on the beach.

As animals lose their fear of humans and become habituated to people, there is an increased risk of attacks (Linnell et al., 2002; Orams, 2002). Habituation, defined as ‘the loss of an animal’s fear response to people arising from frequent non-consequential encounters’ (McNay, 2002b: 833), has preceded the majority of negative interactions between wolves and people (Linnell et al., 2002; McNay, 2002a). Particularly salient is the potential for wolf attacks in highly modified environments (Linnell et al., 2002), created by industrial development and urban encroachment into natural habitat, as evident in Clayoquot Sound. Off-leash dogs have also been shown to disturb wolf behaviour and elicit a predatory response towards canines (Sime, 1999). When wolves begin to identify dogs as ‘food’, this can lead to habituation in which wolves begin to view dogs as easy prey (Pacific Rim National Park Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist Personal Communication, 2011; 2012). In a study conducted in Finland, seasonality and food availability were linked to a greater frequency of wolf attacks on dogs in people’s yards (Kojola & Kuittinen, 2002). In urban/residential environments and popular parks with high levels of visitation, it seems reasonable to suggest that dogs can play a role in conflicts and encounters with wolves and people. Many Canadians are well versed in

etiquette around large carnivores. Although bears and cougars are present in our wilderness vernacular, we are really only beginning to understand our impact on and associated behavioural adaptations of wolves to people. According to a park official, ‘dogs are to wolves, are what garbage is to bears’ (Pacific Rim National Park Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist Personal Communication, 2013).

Shorebirds

Migratory shorebirds use the Pacific coast as their flyway between arctic breeding grounds in Canada, the US, and Russia, and wintering grounds in South and Central America, and southern North America, with beaches an important part of their migratory habitat (Zharikov, 2011). A recent study (Zharikov, 2011) found 90% of all shorebirds recorded on Long Beach were sanderlings (50%) and western sandpipers (40%), and that these birds spent 6% of their time flying, 19% roosting, and 75% foraging. This demonstrates the importance of Long Beach as a roosting and foraging habitat (Zharikov, 2011). The 2011 (Zharikov) study of beach use by park visitors and their interactions with migratory shorebirds came to the conclusion that dogs running off leash are one of the strongest sources of disturbance on migratory shorebirds. Other studies have also noted the impact of off-leash dogs on shorebirds (e.g. Lafferty, 2001; 2001b; Thomas et al., 2003; Borgmann, 2011; Meager et al., 2012). When migratory shorebirds lose time on their journey and/or compromise meagre energy reserves, this can have a negative effect on survival and breeding success (Van de Kam et al., 2004; Colwell, 2010). The sanderling in particular is a globally declining species specializing in sandy beach habitats (Payne, 2010). Today the sanderling is rarely found in other coastal and wetland areas (Payne, 2010). Zharikov’s study (2011) left no doubt that human visitors and the presence of dogs dramatically affect shorebird distribution on the beaches of the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.

Leashing to manage dog–wildlife encounters

Pacific Rim National Park Reserve management instituted on-leash regulations after recognizing the conflict between wildlife and off-leash dogs well over a decade ago. However, efforts to reduce the number of off-leash dogs on Pacific Rim's beaches have had little success, regardless of education and prevention measures. This is exacerbated by the vast expanse of the area and the number of visitors and dogs. According to Parks Canada law enforcement staff, enforcement of the dog on-leash regulation essentially remains ineffective (Esrom, 2004; Pacific Rim National Park Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist Personal Communication, 2011; Zharikov, 2011). The research presented here seeks to address the question why it is that visitors with pets continue to opt to ignore on-leash regulations when visiting the beaches of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve?

Study details

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of 22 'on-leash compliers' and 20 'non-compliers' on Long Beach, the longest of all the beaches in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve (Figure 8.2) from June to September 2013. Thirty-five respondents were visitors, primarily from nearby locations on Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia. However, some were from the British Columbia interior, Montana, USA, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Seven of the interviewees were local residents from Ucluelet and Tofino. We observed that theoretical saturation was reached after the 42 interviews. Theoretical saturation is the point at which any additional information does not provide further insight into the phenomenon. Prior to interview, prospective participants were unobtrusively observed on the beach either with their dogs on leash, or allowing them to run free. Respondents were asked open-ended questions about: (1) Social norms surrounding off leash dogs on the beach, (2) awareness and knowledge of the park regulations and wildlife issues, and (3) attitudes towards and perceptions of leash laws. Interviews were recorded on an iPhone and accompanied by field notes to document mood, atmosphere, and expression (Shank, 2002). After being transferred to a computer, the audio files were then transcribed into Word documents.

The aim of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of a social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Creswell, 2003). To accomplish this goal, interview transcripts and field notes were searched and arranged to discover emerging themes (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005) and to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). The iterative process of analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2003) moved back and forth to the transcripts for many subsequent readings to clarify the meaning and context of words, statements, and phrases (Neuman, 2003). Writing and rewriting allows for reflection on the narrative text and a deep level of interpretation of the phenomenon (Caelli, 2001).

Following Tesch (1990), field notes and transcripts were reviewed to get a general feel for the material. Data were imported into NVivo, which enabled particular phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that represented topics of interest to be highlighted and saved with the coding feature of the program. This was completed for all interviews from which universal categories or codes were developed, after similar topics were clustered and organized into a manageable number of topics that represented common patterns and themes.

What we heard

The following common themes emerged. Attitude and behaviour with respect to leashing of pets looked to be established by watching the behaviour and attitude of others in the communities and on the beach, the promotion of behaviour by local business, the physical environment of the beach, and the apparent lack of enforcement of the on-leash regulation. These contributing factors were underscored by themes of responsibility of pet ownership, the perception of and reaction to the regulation as an indiscriminate rule, lack of knowledge of the rules, the limited options of spaces to let pets run free, with 'nowhere else to go' but the beach, and the importance of education expressed by the 'power of information'. But attitudes towards pet behaviour and leashing also look to have been well developed before beach visitation by more general urban societal attitudes

towards pets as members of the family and associated expectations of a pet's rights and privileges.

The behaviour and attitude of 'locals' and others

Interview respondents observed that off-leash dogs appear to be the norm in the study area, both in the park and in adjacent communities. This norm looks to have been expected by the visitors upon arrival as evidence of an end-of-the-road culture for which the area is reputed. As one non-complying local resident stated:

[I]n the city of Tofino itself, I don't think a lot of people put their dogs on the leash. It's like when I grew up in the 60s, your dog just wandered around, so I think that a lot of that is still going on ... I think that having a leash law in town is weird for these people...

Regardless of a City of Tofino by-law that requires dogs to be on leash in town, off-leash dogs were observed by a non-complying visitor to be all around the community and 'most of the people have their dogs off [leash] ... [at] Mackenzie beach' and dogs at 'Cox [Bay] and Chesterman's [Beach] are off leash most of the time', according to a visiting complier. Another visiting respondent with their dog on leash commented that '[t]here's also a lot of nobody's dogs ... and they're just down [on the beach] moseying along'.

The norm established by local behaviour is verified and supported by a strong presence of a surf culture in the area, including surfers who leave their dogs running free on the beaches while surfing. One visiting non-complier noted: 'Surfers who have their dogs, their dogs sit on the beach and watch them, so if they couldn't leave their dog there, they'd have to leave it at home.'

Behaviour shaped by watching what goes on around them is summarized by one non-complying visitor's comment: 'The reason we let them [our dogs] off [leash] is because we saw other dogs who were already off ... so we're gonna [*sic*] ignore the signs too.' This is verified by anecdotal evidence provided by park wardens who suggested that

people who had their dogs off leash influenced those who would have otherwise had them on leash (Zharikov 2011).

The suggestion is that it is common for people visiting the beach with their pets not to rely on signage or on-leash regulations in or outside the park, but to self-determine whether to have their pet on a leash depending on what they observe around them.

Observed by a visitor with their dog off leash, one respondent concluded:

[People] ... have them off leash for a while and when they see someone, they put the leash on ... I don't know if this is what everybody does, but I think some people might take them out to a spot where there are not many people and let them run for a while, then put them back on the leash ... to some degree it always seems like a dog town.

According to a non-complying local, there also appeared to be the attitude that '[u]sually, when you see people with their dogs on a leash, it's somebody from out of town'.

Combined, all of this creates a palpable sense of a 'dog friendly place' driven by an off-leash social norm.

Promotion by local business

A place-based destination marketing for a beachfront hotel and restaurant adjacent to the Pacific National Rim Park Reserve featured in a British Columbia magazine (*BC Home and Garden*, 2013) serves as a good illustration of how local businesses portray the beach as an off-leash area. In the advertisement, an attractive colour image of the beach shows visitors with their dogs running off leash to communicate a 'typical' day on the beach in peak tourist season. Its languid imagery reflects the social norms of a dog-friendly canine 'nirvana' in which people and their pets can roam freely, shaped by the large white, sandy beaches characteristic of the region and its *raison d'être* as a popular tourist destination and subsequent high park visitation (Edwards, 2005). Text accompanying the image informs the reader that:

On a Blissfully warm Friday in May, dogs sprint every which way among families exploring the shoreline ... Despite the spirited action, the sprawling beach is so vast it's easy to feel alone. (*BC Home and Garden*, 2013)

According to one visiting couple with their dog off leash, who were staying at a resort adjacent to the park: 'You know the interesting thing ... [is that where we are staying] ... those people specifically said: It's fine to have your dog off-leash on the beach...'
Furthermore, 'I saw one person with a dog on a leash out of ... about sixty people that I've seen with dogs.' '[I]t's not like when you book a place to stay and they're like, oh and also [you have to keep your dog leashed at all times] ... as a visitor you don't... [think of this] as a place that you cannot have your dog off leash.'

Physical environment and the space to be a dog

The wide expanse of white sandy beaches characteristic of the region are the featured attractions of the park and perceived as the ideal environment for a 'dog just to be a dog'. We learned from a local complier that: 'Dogs [and their people] love the beach' and 'the west coast, the fresh air ... the ocean and everything'. For a visiting complier, this creates the ideal environment for dogs 'because [they have] ... the freedom to run...' in the wide expanse of the beach. According to a local resident walking their dog off leash, '[dogs] should be able to run around. Would you like to have a leash on all the time? When you're in your [natural] element and ... somebody puts a leash on you ... that's not right.' In addition, 'there's [*sic*] no roads [and] there's [*sic*] no cars...', which contribute to the perception of the park's beaches as a 'wild space', 'wilderness', which evoke a sense of 'freedom' and facilitate the ability to let dogs run free. With respect to the park's beaches, another non-complying visitor claimed, 'we go into the wilderness ... for freedom ... probably which is why we don't leash our dogs'. One visiting non-complier commented that '[we] let the dogs have freedom on the beach just like people like to do ... and he does his happy dance ... when he sees the big beach and big ocean'.

Knowledge and awareness

Most respondents agreed that they had seen the signs about keeping dogs on leash. They noted that the rationale and details surrounding the reasons for this regulation however were not really clear. There appeared to be a greater awareness and understanding of the issues with wolves than shorebirds. Some people had a solid grasp of the shorebird issue. For example, a compliant local commented ‘Just the sheer amount of animals, people, dogs ... There’s certain times of year when all the birds are coming through and it’s ... around now it’s going on. Like there’s tons of shorebirds...’ However, others appeared to not understand that the beach was an important wildlife habitat for shorebirds. Some respondents drew on examples from their experiences back at home to communicate an awareness of the impact of dogs on birds, but this did not appear to transfer to the current context, according to a complying visitor:

I think we saw one bird on this beach and he was a small bird flying over the ocean but, there’s, there are no birds whatsoever. Like where we live in Comox they have ... restrictions out at Goose Spit. No dogs off-leash from this time to this time because of the Brant geese; that type of stuff. That’s understandable. But you know, other than that, this is not where the birds hang out, you know let’s be honest, they’re at the estuaries and things like that where there is food.

Others had no idea what a shorebird was. When a non-complying couple were asked if they had seen any shorebirds, they responded that ‘No, we haven’t seen [any] really, I don’t know what a shore bird is, we’ve only seen robins.’ Although the couple did previously mention particular areas on freshwater beaches at home where dogs were banned for exactly the same reason (shorebirds), they were out of context in the immediate environment. Given the latter statement, there perhaps is some merit to the following statement by a local resident:

I think it’s more for tourists because they’re ignorant ... they let their dogs chase birds ... because they don’t know ... the other day there [were hotel] guests on Chesterman’s [beach] ... [for] twenty minutes ... [their dog] was chasing the

shorebirds and I went and told the people, can you stop your dog? And they were like: really? Do we have to? ... So it's people that don't understand that they're in a natural environment ... they're the ones that don't understand [about] being respectful.

However, in the same regard, one local resident walking with their dog on leash thought that Chesterman's Beach was an off leash area, despite the Tofino by-law and ample signage at the beach entrance areas and parking lots, and stated, 'It is nice ... occasionally ... going to ... Chesterman's ... because the dogs do get to interact. So I do like going there you know, [where he's allowed to be off-leash] ... he gets to sniff all kinds of ass and play.'

Lack of enforcement

Lack of evidence of enforcement of on-leash regulation also looks to promote non-compliance. According to one non-compliant visitor 'If they don't have a park ranger down here to tell people put your dogs on the leash, then why have the rule?' Another non-complying visitor commented, 'I see the signs ... it definitely says don't chase the shorebirds...' But at the same time it created a sense that letting dogs run free is unofficially sanctioned behaviour: 'but I also thought you were allowed to have your dogs' off leash on the beach here ... if you don't enforce it, no one's gonna [*sic*] follow it...'

Indiscriminate rule

Other respondents felt that the on-leash law was more of an 'indiscriminate rule'. One complying visitor elaborated.

... that way, they can appease both sides of the group. I mean if they wanted to enforce it, they would be down here ... I'm sure they know people have them off leash but I don't see anyone enforcing it. It gives them the ability to enforce it if they want to.

[I]t's too often a case of you know, one size fits all and it's easier for them to say no dogs off leash, than to say [to] owners [to] use common sense [and] control your dog.

Nowhere else to go

If dogs must be on leash when in the park and in the towns, where do they have a chance to run off leash to 'just be dogs'? Respondents, whether local residents or visitors, were asked where exactly they were supposed to go to let dogs off leash. A visiting non-complier stated, 'When we're ... [at home] we just go to the dog parks. But here? I would hate to have to leave him at our place and we're down here at the beach when he's out there in the water right now...' According to another non-complying visitor:

I agree that it should be regulated, but I think that people need a beach that they can go to with their dogs to let them run ... I also believe that they should maybe limit [beaches in] ... certain seasons when the birds are migrating ... I think that if it was more regulated in that way people would listen ... [but] also ... have a beach that they can go to that can be a dog beach.

In another instance, a visiting non-complier commented:

If there was a way to say: You can have your dog in this space, not in that green space, that's the space for the birds ... and there would be a third option [of] somewhere to bring your dog ... that would feel more comfortable for me, because then I could make an educated decision about whether my dog would fit into that...

Information, knowledge and awareness are power

'Information is power ... knowledge is power so ... the more people are educated ... I had no idea there was an impact on shorebirds' stated a complying visitor. However, despite extensive efforts to promote dogs on leash, one non-complying visitor commented, 'there are so many signs everywhere you go that you just kind of ignore [them]...' Conservation appeared to be a salient issue, and the same individual stated, 'if

it's particular to conservation, your attitude would change and a lot of people would [comply]'.

Some forms of education appear to be more powerful than others, which speaks to the effectiveness of personal communication through the park interpretive programmes. According to one visiting compliant father:

I know my kids saw the interpretive centre is closed ... which is a shame because we were excited about it ... last year when we were here, there was an information piece on ... a person walking their dog and showed these wolves ... [and] photographs somebody had taken of these wolves chasing somebody walking their dog ... it had an impact on my kids ... They were like, wow wolves in the morning on a walk like this, near the forest ... [S]o now that I'm aware of that when I'm walking in the morning, especially when there's not that many people around, or in the evening, I keep my eye for it. [I]f you know that your dogs are gonna [*sic*] have an impact on other birds, or if there's a hazard of wolves or anything around, it makes it a lot easier to justify in your mind [to] keep your dog on a leash, [be]cause you'll forget the rule to keep your dog a leash, but you'll remember the impact ... of pictures of wolves trying to eat somebody's dog, or the knowledge that they're having an impact on shorebirds.

My dog is a part of my family

As noted earlier, many people attribute human-like qualities, emotions, wants, and needs to dogs. They are thought of by many as members of the family and often referred to as children. Dogs are often assumed to have the same rights and privileges as children: 'A dog's kinda [*sic*] like a child, [yet] at the same time ... having an animal.' When asked why they brought their dogs to the beach, one complying visitor stated 'they're part of our family ... so if they come with us ... it's like bringing your kid to [the] beach'.

Another local non-complying resident stated in a logical tone: 'Well, the dog is part of our family and we're doing a family outing on the beach at the moment, so this is where we're walking,' as if it could be any different. For the visiting dad with his kids and their young, pure-bred German Shepherd that was on leash, 'I could not have brought the dog ... my wife wanted a break and to her, a break would be taking the kids and the dog.' At

a different life-cycle stage, a baby boomer ‘mom’, with an empty nest at home, commented about her two off-leash mixed breeds: ‘these are my boys. I had girls so these are my boys.’

According to a local surfer, who had just walked back from a surfing session to his loyal dog waiting off leash for him by his gear,

I’m not gonna [*sic*] leave her at home ... I spend a lot of time on the beach and ... she virtually goes everywhere I go and has since I’ve had her ... Great beach dog ... she’d hang out at ... the beach all day and that’s how she grew up... it’s healthy for her to be outside, enjoying life like everybody else. I kinda [*sic*] treat her like she’s part of the family, you know I’m not just gonna [*sic*] leave her on the boat or in the vehicle or anything like that.

Discussion

Our conversation with both on-leash compliers and non-compliers yielded evidence of deeply ingrained social norms driven by the widely shared and common-held belief that Long Beach is a dog-friendly place. These social norms suggest that how people behave is often a response to the behaviour of those around them. An excellent example of this phenomenon was demonstrated by Asch’s (1951) classic study on social norms. In this experiment, study participants were shown the length of four lines, to which answers reflected what other people had previously identified, as opposed to the actual length of the line.

The social norm that the study area is a dog-friendly place looks to be established by watching the behaviour and attitude of others in the communities and on the beach, the promotion of behaviour by local business, the physical environment of the beach, and the apparent lack of enforcement of on-leash regulations. These contributing factors were found to be underscored by themes of responsibility of pet ownership, the perception of and reaction to the regulation as an indiscriminate rule, lack of knowledge of the rules, the limited options of spaces to let pets run free with nowhere else to go but the beach,

and the importance of education expressed by the power of information. However, general urban societal attitudes towards pets that view them as family members with the same rights and privileges as people appear to drive social normalization, even before people get to the beach.

Statements elicited from open-ended semi-structured interviews confirmed that the dog as a pet looks to occupy a liminal space in contemporary society as both human and animal (Fox, 2006), being socially constructed as a member of the family (Fox, 2006; Power, 2008). Described with such terms as ‘child’ and ‘kid’ participating in a ‘family outing’, just as a family member would not be left at home or in the car, our ‘furry family’ members (Power, 2008) are included in the family vacation, a stroll on the beach, or a surf session. The suggestion is that we have perhaps moved from the ‘family dog’ to ‘dog as family’. This implies a much more intimate relationship than mere ownership, perhaps even as replacement ersatz children for the empty nest boomer couples or companion with personhood and family member status for the surfer.

In modern society, the close relationships that people have with their pets negotiate a new form of family (Power, 2008), with the dog given the dual status of pets as both person and possession, domesticated and wild, human and animal (Fox, 2006). This hybridity transcends both nature and culture. There is recognition of the dog’s ‘wildness’ and its need to run free and ‘be a dog’ to give it ‘the best life possible’. Yet the personhood status (Fox, 2006) granted to our companion animals imbues them with human emotions, thoughts, and feelings such as happiness and love and physical expressions of joy (Sanders, 1993; Fox, 2006), such as ‘dancing’ in response to the freedom of the beach, which must also be accommodated and attended to by their human companions (Haraway, 2003; Power, 2008). This status entitles them to empathy from their human companions, to the notion of how it would feel to be leashed, and special concern for what the animal may be thinking or feeling (Haraway, 2003).

We argued that just as dogs occupy a liminal space in modern society, so can the beach in a park context if managed and construed as an ‘urbanized wilderness’ for what

Holmberg (2013) terms a trans-species urban crowd of people and their pets. Long Beach is a wild and natural area but, at the same time, subject to the same rules, laws, regulations, and restrictions found in urban environments to manage the throngs of visitors during summer months. On easy access beaches, dogs that run free thus become mired in spatial conflict 'where [they] inhabit a contested role as liminal creatures roaming in a liminal place' (Holmberg 2013: 40).

The perceptions of the beach by interviewees are embedded with 'freedom,' 'wildness' and the *raison d'être* for both people and pets to be there as an 'ideal environment' for dogs to run free. Yet dogs running off leash are in direct conflict with the laws, rules, and regulations that require dogs to be on leash at all times. Those responsible for managing the park and the beach note that: 'You may think of your pet as a member of your family, but at the end of the day, a dog is still a dog' (Personal Communication, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Human-Carnivore Conflict Specialist, 2011). Visitors look to address this tension by choosing to abide by their own set of inherent rules and norms governed by the responsibility of dog ownership and the recognition that they ought to maintain control over animals just like their children. There seemed to be a sense that the leash laws were indiscriminate and blanket sanctions that did not consider the individual needs of different animals, tinged with a sense of entitlement among owners to make their own decisions about when and where to let their dogs run free, or not. Inherently knowing when to leash up around other people, other dogs, and wildlife, and using common sense to manage their pets, illustrates the 'dominance' of the pet-human relationship suggested by Tuan (1984) and Power's (2008) leader of a family 'dog pack'. Invariably, common sense, responsibility, and control are subjective, and there was always a sense that 'it was somebody else's dog' that was the problem.

The attitude and behaviour of locals towards on-leash rules, combined with savvy destination marketing that targets dog owners and the laid-back end-of-the-road culture from which an overarching sense of freedom permeates, all send out and reinforce the

message that off-leash behaviour is tolerated, if not the norm. The notion that ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’ therefore suggests that it is accepted if not expected to let dogs run off leash, whatever the posted regulations which clearly are not enforced, and whatever the posted information seeking to educate both visitors and locals about the impacts of off-leash dogs on wildlife.

They say that information is power. Although information distributed about ecological reasons proved to be more powerful than social reasons (Marion & Reid, 2007), any signage and subsequent messaging for keeping dogs on leash in the park appear to remain mainly ineffective (Zharikov, 2011). A well-developed information programme to manage people’s behaviour in parks is recognized to be crucial (McCool & Braithwaite, 1992), but just increasing the amount of information and how often it is delivered (i.e. increased signage and messaging) does not necessarily result in success (Rizzo, 1999; Timmerman et al., 2001, Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). Our findings confirm other studies that conclude that letting dogs run free is habitual behaviour that is resistant to attempts at persuading people to engage in desired behaviour (Hughes & Brown, 2009).

Work in community-based social marketing suggests that a personal approach to promote desired behaviour can be an effective strategy to change deeply ingrained norms (Mckenzie-Mohr, 2011). With an additional focus on outreach and interpretation outside the park (Parks Canada, 2006), there is potential to have a powerful and enduring impact on visitor behaviour. But perhaps the targets for behaviour change should first be the local communities and local business. If social normalization by visitors is influenced by local behaviour and local messaging, then educating and persuading locals to leash their dogs and advocate for on-leash behaviour may see visitors follow suit.

Conclusion

Is there space for a dog just to be a dog in a national park beach setting? From a legal standpoint, perhaps no, but in the absence of regular patrols and enforcement of law in the park, and the ineffectiveness of signage, owners do allow dogs to run free on the beach. With ‘nowhere else to go’ for a dog to just be a dog, the beach emerged as a ‘third space’ (Soja, 1996) that captured the rhythm of daily life of both locals and park visitors to beach-going, surfing, walking, exploring, walking their dogs, and letting them run free. Management might consider identifying some parts of the beach near the settled communities and tourism resorts where off-leash behaviour is allowed, at the same time as more rigorously enforcing on-leash behaviour in key and heavily used adjacent beaches.

A reflective, qualitative approach created a deeper understanding of experiential dimensions of human behaviour and acknowledged the social context of behaviour. Social norms, driven by local behaviour and the role that dogs play in the lives of people in modern society and the pet–human relationship, have made the beach emerge as a contested space in which the off-leash social norm becomes reinforced by perceived spaces. Observed behaviour reflects the personal feelings that people have towards the park’s beaches and the daily experiences of park visitors and their pets. Although off-leash behaviour comes in direct conflict with the rules, laws, and regulations set in place by Parks Canada and the municipality of Tofino, it may continue to prove to be resistant to change. Consequently, shifting deeply ingrained social norms may require a different approach than those previously employed, and attention should perhaps be paid to identifying some beach areas where dogs are explicitly allowed to run off leash, and in the first instance to focus on the behaviour and attitude of the local community (including businesses), with anticipation that if there is a local change in behaviour, visitors may follow suit.

Beyond the context of this study, growing urban populations combined with increased pet ownership and the evolution of the ‘more than human’ family in post-industrial societies, and all the rights and privileges that are extended to our canine

companions, provide insight into people, their pets, and potential impacts on parks and protected areas, however unintended. Whereas pets and their right to be a dog has been explored in an urban context with respect to urban dog parks, little attention is given to compliance behaviour in a front-country national park setting, particularly in the contested space of the beach. Understanding a seemingly harmless behaviour such as letting dogs run free and unrestricted from leashes in natural areas reveals much about park visitors, local residents in nearby communities, and an increasingly urbanized society. Further research could help to develop effective strategies to produce new social norms that mitigate non-compliance behaviour. However other efforts could also be directed to better understand our tenuous relationship with wilderness and nature through our pets and places like the beach, both of which transcend the nature/culture divide.

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