

Dog walking on Park Island – way forward.

With the end of the year fast approaching, the temporary ban on dog-walking on Park Island is set to expire and dogs will be allowed back on to the Island from 1 January 2021, under certain conditions. In light of this, I would like to take the opportunity to outline the way forward as well as what actions were taken during the “no-dog” period.

On 9 November 2020, users of Park Island reported to have witnessed a dog running around with a deceased Cape grysbok lamb in its mouth. The carcass was recovered and the owner of the dog identified. An ‘on-leash’ rule had been in place and this user’s animal was not on-leash at the time, nor under control. Following this sad news, a decision was taken to temporarily close the Island to dog-walking, to allow the faunal populations time to recover from the predator pressure that had been experienced. “Predations” are not unnatural to these types of systems, they are however generally spread out over a longer course of time. With the levels of dog-walking on the Island- the scents, sounds and activity of dogs have the effect of altering herbivore behaviour. This is exacerbated when dogs are allowed off-leash and there are no areas of refuge for these animals to shelter in during the day.

Given the seriousness of the incident, the carcass of the Grysbok lamb was sent to the State Vet for a post-mortem autopsy to confirm that the cause of death was indeed from a dog and not a natural cause. The results of this autopsy conclusively confirmed that the cause of death was due to a canine mauling- i.e. that an off-leash dog had caught and killed this animal. The autopsy however also revealed a degree of decomposition. The stomach of the lamb had been ruptured, which speeds up decomposition, however the level was too high for us to be able to conclusively assign the death of the grysbok to the dog that was witnessed to be carrying it in its mouth on the morning of 9 November 2020. It is our belief that it is likely that the lamb was killed the previous evening/day and that the suspected dog had come across it in the veld. As such, we were unable to pursue any further action against the dog-owner in question.

The temporary ban on dogs on Park Island was a drastic yet necessary step, and for the most part- users of the Island have been incredibly understanding and supportive of the move and I would like to thank dog-walkers for respecting the temporary ban. We have conducted patrols on the Island with Law Enforcement in order to fine non-compliant users, however we did not encounter a single instance of non-compliance. There have however been recent reports of users bringing dogs on to the Island and we shall be conducting further patrols before the end of the year. We ask that dog-walkers be patient in the interim.

As mentioned, dogs will be allowed back on the Island from 1 January 2021, however under certain conditions. The primary restriction is that dogs are to be strictly leashed at all times. Dog-walkers entering the Island are to obey the dog-walking code of conduct at all times, which is as follows:

ZANDVLEI NATURE RESERVE

DOG-WALKING CODE OF CONDUCT

RULES

- **Dogs must be leashed at all times**
- No more than 3 dogs per dog-walker
- Dogs must be kept out of No-Go areas (Milkwood Forest and Labyrinth)
- Signage indicating designated areas is to be obeyed at all times
- All dog-walkers must carry a short leash (<2m) for every dog
- Dog-walkers must strictly remove any dog faeces produced by their animals
- Strictly no wild animal is to be chased, harassed or injured
- Give right of way to people unaccompanied by dogs.

ENFORCEMENT

Users who fail to adhere to the Code of Conduct shall be liable to a fine, impoundment of their animal and/or a Reserve ban

The Reserve may, at any time, close any section of the Reserve down to dog-walking (permanently or temporarily), if, in their opinion, the ecosystem requires time to recover from too many interactions between local fauna and dogs



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Further to the above, dogs will no longer be allowed into the Milkwood Forest or Labyrinth areas of the Island, please see the map below (**the area in red is henceforth a NO GO area for dogs**):



Dog walking on Park Island (or any section of the Reserve) is a privilege, not a right and non-adherence to the above code of conduct will result in further action being taken. Recreational usage of our natural spaces needs to be balanced against the local faunal and floral needs and if further non-compliance and disregard for the rules is witnessed, the Reserve will be forced to take further actions which are deemed necessary- this may include further temporary or even permanent bans to dog-walking on the Island.

If you choose to walk your dog on Park Island, ensure that you carry a plastic bag to remove any faeces that your animal produces- this has been a significant issue in the past. It is unfair on fellow users of the Island and carries an ecological impact. Non-compliance in this regard shall be viewed in a similar light to off-leash walking.

In terms of compliance to the rules, Law Enforcement have been of great help and will be assisting with the issuing of spot fines. The City's Nature Reserve By-law is also due to be promulgated soon, which will provide officials with more specific measures and fines which may be issued. Officials cannot be present on the Island at all times however and we encourage users to help self-police each other.

Park Island is a community asset both in terms of its value as an ecological asset and as a well-utilised and enjoyed recreational space- these two concepts are not mutually exclusive but in order to protect all competing interests, compromise and respect must be maintained. This has been an unprecedented year on many fronts but we look forward to 2021 and the change that it will bring. There are many exciting new projects in the works for the Reserve and I look forward to sharing these in the coming months. Zandvlei Nature Reserve would like to wish all a safe and joyous festive period.

Kyran Wright

Reserve Manager: Zandvlei Nature Reserve.