

Dogs and wildlife: message guide

July 2022

Introduction

This guide provides recommendations on how to communicate in ways that motivate dog owners to keep kiwi and other wildlife safe. It was commissioned by Predator Free NZ and Capital Kiwi, and developed with input from a range of stakeholders with an interest in dogs and wildlife in Aotearoa.

The recommendations draw upon best practice values-based messaging techniques, a review of current discourse around dogs and wildlife in Aotearoa and beyond, research into behavioural motivations and barriers for dog owners, and stakeholder experience of what has helped and hindered dog owner behaviour change in practice.

The guide is for all those who have an interest in encouraging responsible dog ownership, including conservationists, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations, Councils, DOC, community groups and dog owners interested in reaching other dog owners.

Context

The guide focuses on **pet dogs** in peri-urban areas, such as areas of Wellington near Capital Kiwi's proposed kiwi release sites.¹ Similar communication principles would likely apply to farm dog and hunting dog owners (e.g. connecting with care values and engaging owners as messengers). However, the behavioural solutions and accompanying messages would need to be quite different for these groups, and so would require further research and audience engagement to develop.

For our broad audience of pet dog owners, the main behaviour change we focus on in the guide is **walking dogs on-lead**. This is an action available to all dog owners, no matter where they live, how close an off-lead park may be, or how well or poorly suited their dog is to off-lead parks. In recent DOC research examining a range of possible behaviours, dogs on-lead was ranked highly by kiwi conservation experts as having a positive impact on kiwi conservation, by vets as improving dog welfare, and by dog owners as having a high likelihood of adoption.² It complements other high priority behaviours such as obedience training, using off-lead dog areas, keeping dogs secure on-property, and reporting wandering dogs.

On universal versus tailored messaging, note that quantitative message testing on other topics typically reveals a few key ways of expressing ideas and asks that resonate with most people. These are our existing **supporters** who already support our asks, and the **persuadables** who toggle between supportive and oppositional ways of seeing the issue but are open to being persuaded. Universal messaging to appeal to a wide range of people is required on websites, news media and

¹ For simplicity, this guide refers to “kiwi”, which could be substituted for “wildlife”, “kākā”, “penguins”, “seals” or other animals.

² Aley, J. and Neff, M.B. (2021). *Prioritising dog owner behaviours: Identifying the effectiveness of dog welfare behaviours for kiwi conservation*. Department of Conservation.

signage. The messaging tips presented here provide guidance for universal messaging as well as a foundation for tailored communications that you can adapt for specific audiences as needed.

The discourse analysis revealed that many owners of pet dogs already identify as *responsible dog owners*.³ They value exercising their dog and would be concerned if their dog wandered. Many owners undertake responsible behaviours such as exercising their dog on-lead or in a designated off-lead area and keeping their dog secure at home. Motivations for these behaviours include:

- Care for their dog
- Care for other people, who may not like dogs or may be inconvenienced or hurt by their dog
- Care for wildlife, again not wanting their dog to cause harm (although some owners prioritise their pet over native species).

Barriers that demotivate dog owners from undertaking such behaviours include:

- Walking a dog on-lead can be unpleasant if the dog is untrained or poorly trained
- A belief that their dog is an 'angel' who wouldn't harm anyone or anything
- An ingrained habit of walking the dog off-lead, which to date hasn't caused any problems for others or for wildlife
- A lack of suitable off-leash areas closeby
- A sense of entitlement ('it's my right to let my dog go off leash here') or a distrust or aversion to authority ('I won't be told what to do').

What might motivate dog owners to change:

- Priming their care values, including understanding why it's important to keep all dogs away from wildlife
- Working with dog owners' identity, in our choice of message tone and messengers
- Social norming, showing through our words and images that it's normal and expected for owners to keep their dog secure at home and walk on-lead
- Making it easier for owners to take these actions.

The remainder of the guide outlines a set of six messaging tips, followed by steps we can take to help dog owners take action, and a summary of words and images to replace and embrace.

Messaging Tips

To achieve our goal of keeping both dogs and kiwi safe and well, all dog owners need to keep their dogs away from kiwi. Our key ask, though not necessarily in this wording, is: *Keep kiwi safe and well. Keep your dog secure when at home and walk them on-lead or in designated off-lead areas.*

The following tips will help you frame this message in ways that motivate owners to be responsible for their dogs in this way and to encourage others to do the same. Examples of suggested wording are shown in *blue italic font*, with direct quotes in [square brackets].

Tip #1: Connect with care values

Focus on care more than compliance, carrot more than stick. Connect with owners' deeper motivations for caring for their dogs and other animals.

Most owners love their dogs and already think of themselves as *responsible dog owners*. We can build upon this with the idea of the dog and owner as a **team**. Use this foundational idea to link to training (see Beyond Messaging later in document for more on training). For example: *"You and your*

³ Department of Conservation (2022) *Barriers to effective dog behaviours for kiwi conservation*.

dog are a team. Training helps your dog bond with you, listen to you, and work with you, walking by your side on-lead."

Vets, zoos and SPCA can model love of dogs extending to love of all animals: *"Just as we love dogs and want them to live long and happy lives, we also want the same for kiwi and other animals."* *"Responsible pet ownership is about all animals"* [Wellington Zoo].

Or in short form, *"Love dogs, love kiwi."*

Our messaging can connect to dog owners' deeper motivations for protecting wildlife. For example, *"our legacy"* is mentioned by conservation volunteers and dog owners in social media. It's the hope for a better tomorrow – which is already here where people have worked together to welcome kiwi home. We can evoke the senses and what it feels like when the vision becomes a reality: *"Imagine falling asleep to the sound of kiwi calling"* [Capital Kiwi].

Our messaging and community engagement will best connect when we **assume that dog owners are good-willed but unaware** of their potential impact on kiwi and other wildlife. This may mean including a phrase such as *"What you might not realise is..."*, followed by an explanation of why it is so important to keep *all* dogs away from kiwi. Examples include:

"Because kiwi don't fly, they don't have a breastplate to protect their internal organs. That means even a nudge from an inquisitive dog can be fatal."

"Kiwi live in all sorts of places, including in our backyards"

"Many types of bird nest on the ground – kiwi, penguins and dotterels. Just disturbing the birds while they're nesting can lead them to abandon the nest."

It means reminding our audience that *"dogs are innate hunters with an instinct and curiosity for things that smell."* This suggests it's nothing to feel guilty about as a dog owner, no judgement of your dog, it's just a natural part of being a dog that we need to acknowledge and manage. For example:

"Any dog can kill a kiwi, whether it means to or not – even a dog being inquisitive or playful."

"The biggest threat that adult kiwi face is dogs. In fact, even the smallest, cutest, friendliest dog has the potential to kill a kiwi. That's because even an inquisitive sniff could fatally damage the kiwi's incredibly delicate chest." [Save the Kiwi].

In signage, rather than just stating "dogs must be on lead" and the penalty for non-compliance, remind people of the important reasons *why* dogs must be on lead. It could be as simple as saying, *"Kiwi live here. All dogs on lead"*.

Remember: **signs** are like shorthand, condensing all our other messaging on dogs and wildlife into a simple reminder for owners. Signs are most effective when the rest of our messaging and community engagement works to raise awareness and bring people on board.

Tip #2: Home is where the heart is

Use the idea of a home for kiwi, and show that kiwi and dogs can co-exist if we do the right thing.

Building on tip 1, we can make use of the powerful concept of **home**: we are bringing kiwi back home, keeping them safe and well in their home, able to live their lives and raise their young in peace. For example:

“Kiwi live here. This is their home.”

“Aotearoa is their home – their only home”.

Terms that go with the concept of home include *“homelands”, “homecoming”, “lay out the welcome mat”, “be good neighbours”* and *“be good guests”*.

Part of our messaging task is to help people understand that ‘home’ for wildlife extends well beyond the bush: *“Kiwi could be anywhere, including in our backyards”*. We can tell the story that **times have changed** and how exciting and precious this is:

“For the first time in a century, rare birds like kākā and tīeke (saddleback) are living amongst us in Wellington’s suburbs.” [Capital Kiwi].

“We’re so lucky to have kiwi in Wellington’s backyard again. We want to welcome more kiwi home.”

Because times have changed, *“we could meet a kiwi anywhere, that’s why we always walk our dogs on-lead.”*

The concept of ‘wildlife home’ needs to be used sensitively so that it is inclusive. Emphasise **co-existence** and being welcome if you do the right thing. In the vein of ‘guests welcome, leave your shoes at the door’, the message is: *“Dogs welcome – on a lead”*. It’s the attractive proposition that *“we can have our cake and eat it, with happy dogs and thriving wildlife.”*



Tip #3: We’re in this together

A diverse range of people are working together to keep kiwi and other wildlife safe in their homes, while also keeping dogs happy and safe. Use trusted messengers to tell dog owners: we can help you.

Typically, mainstream media in Aotearoa portray a “fight” or “battle” frame that pits people against each other, with dog owners on one side and conservationists and government on the other. In reality, there is significant overlap between these groups – many dog owners are conservationists so there is no “us and them”. The media also talk of “outrage” at any new requests or requirements of dog owners, while in truth, most owners are supportive of requirements to walk dogs on-lead and already do this. With the right tone, message and messenger, combined with the right tools to make

action easier, many owners in the outskirts of Wellington, who for years have walked their dogs off-lead, have now switched to on-lead.

To sum up the approach, we can bring many more dog owners on board by being **civil, helpful and inclusive**.

Be civil: Use words such as “welcome”, “please” and “thank you”, as in the image below.



Be helpful: We can help dog owners understand more about the creatures they share their neighbourhood with, and why it’s so important to keep *all* dogs on-lead. We can also help owners do the right thing by offering or pointing them to dog training (see the Beyond Messaging section).

Be inclusive: Show dog owners that you also love dogs and acknowledge the important role they play:

“We love dogs.”

“Dogs are loved members of many families.”

“Walking the dog is an important way for dogs and their guardians to get some fresh air and exercise.”

If you or your colleagues own a dog, you can build a connection with your audience by letting them know *“I’m a dog owner”* or *“many of us are dog owners”*, and *“we love taking our dogs for walks – on lead”*.

In images, show a diverse range of dogs and owners to get across that this is for *every* dog. This could be you and your dog.

Avoid the ‘dogs banned’ red strikethrough sign, which feels ‘anti-dog’. Some alternative ways of communicating ‘no dogs’ include:

“Home for wildlife – no dogs” or *“Kiwi live here – no dogs”*

“No dogs in our home, thanks. We live on the ground and dogs could hurt us!”





Being inclusive also means showing the diverse range of people working to welcome kiwi home. This is the idea that *“it takes a village”* to look after our wildlife, from the stoat trappers to the pig hunters, dog walkers and cat owners. We can also tell the story of the care and dedication of thousands of volunteers and others working to raise young kiwi and make habitat safe for them again. For dog owners, this means *“you don’t want to undo all the hard work”*, and *“it’s really upsetting when kiwi are hurt or worse, because we care so much for them”* (tip #1).

Being inclusive

Where local and tailored community engagement is possible, the general principle is to *speak the language of your audience*.

A note on iwi input and portraying kiwi

As there is no one ‘voice’ for all iwi, it is best to consult and involve iwi mana whenua (local iwi) in your community engagement and messaging (obviously if you are mana whenua and reading this guide, then ka pai!)

More generally in your messaging, be mindful of respecting kiwi as elders and ancestors. Portraying kiwi as cute and cuddly may overstep this line. Instead, portray kiwi encounters and volunteering as building a deeper connection and appreciation, with the ultimate purpose of serving kiwi and their future.

Trusted messengers

A recent CANZ survey found that vets are by far the most trusted source of pet-related information and advice, followed by the SPCA, internet sources, pet shops and dog trainers.⁴ While fellow dog or pet owners were not included as a potential source in the survey, the experiences of Capital Kiwi in Wellington and Backyard Kiwi in Northland show that dog owners do heed the advice and requests of fellow owners, for example to walk their dog on lead. In practice, dog owners also see fellow owners modelling and normalising walking on-lead (or not).

We can encourage dog owners to have positive interactions with fellow dog owners by engaging care values and the idea of co-existing in the home of kiwi (tips 1 and 2), and focussing on what we would like owners to do rather than chastising them for doing something wrong (tip #4). This may sound like: *“Isn’t it awesome that kiwi live here, and we can still walk our dogs as long as they’re on lead”*.

Consider hosting community engagement events that bring together dog owners and provide tips for talking to other owners (see Beyond Messaging: relationship building). You may also be able to facilitate local dog owners telling their story in the media, online, and at engagement events.

Portraying the characters in our story

Following is a summary of how we can portray the main characters in our responsible dog ownership story, in ways that are civil, helpful and inclusive.

⁴ Companion Animals New Zealand (2020) *Companion Animals in New Zealand 2020*.

<p>Dogs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loved family members, who also have a natural curiosity and hunting instinct - Therefore, dogs and kiwi don't mix 	<p>Dog owners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible, but unaware of their impact on kiwi - Love their dogs and care for the wellbeing of other animals 	<p>Kiwi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pack a powerful kick against stoats and possums, but they're no match for curious dogs - Kiwi thrive when people control predators
<p>Kiwi protectors (NGOs, vets, dog trainers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care for the wellbeing of all animals - Part of the community, working with dog owners to help them do the right thing 	<p>Iwi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kiwi kaitiaki (custodians) - Partners with kiwi protectors 	<p>Government (Councils & DOC)</p> <p>Play a dual role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kiwi protectors, including helping dog owners - Rule-making and enforcement

Tip #4: Show what we want (not what we don't)

Both in words and images, show what we want, not what we don't want.

By showing what we want – happy dogs on-lead and thriving wildlife – we model and normalise responsible dog ownership and co-existence. We want to avoid showing dogs off-lead unless fencing or signage makes clear they are in a designated off-lead area. We should also avoid showing dogs attacking wildlife, as this suggests it's inevitable that dogs will continue to attack wildlife. Even if we say “*don't* do this”, it still tends to reinforce the unhelpful idea or behaviour.⁵

Show:

- Dogs being walked on loose leads
- Dogs in off-lead dog parks, e.g. showing a fence, sign or play equipment to make clear it's a designated off-lead area
- Dogs wearing a collar or Y-shaped, front clip harness, recommended by SPCA for brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs and those with eye conditions where increased pressure from a collar could be harmful
- A diverse range of dog owners and dogs, including small dogs to show this applies to *all* dogs.



⁵ For more on this, see *Don't Think of an Elephant*, by George Lakoff.

Avoid showing:

- Dogs being walked off-lead
- Dogs tugging on the lead
- Dogs wearing a choke chain, prong collar or back clip harness
- Dogs attacking wildlife, or dead wildlife as a result of dog attack.



Kiwi that have been killed by dogs

Avoid mythbusting!

Avoid repeating unhelpful or untrue information in order to negate it (“it’s not true”). Many studies show that mythbusting actually reinforces untruths – people tend to remember the myth more than the fact-based statements that explain and debunk it.

To avoid this unhelpful scenario, simply state the facts without the myth.

Showing what we want also means focusing on the **positive outcomes** of keeping dogs away from wildlife, more than the negatives of doing the wrong thing or the resulting punishment. In other words, more carrot than stick, while recognising that there will likely be a small minority of people who won’t be persuaded by our messaging. (However, bear in mind that a compliance and enforcement tone and approach doesn’t necessarily lead to compliance either. It may simply build further resentment of authority and rule-breaking in less obvious places.)

Currently, mainstream media focuses on bad news such as kiwi deaths. This unhelpfully normalises what we don’t want, as well as making deaths seem inevitable and the mission futile. One way we can turn this around is to **tell good news stories** of dogs, people and wildlife happily co-existing. Find ways to make your stories newsworthy to mainstream media and sharable on social media. For example, they may feature owners or volunteers who are quirky, high profile or otherwise notable in some way such as being very old or very young.

Tip #5: You can make a difference

Agency is motivating. Let dog owners know the huge difference they can make by keeping their dog on-lead and secured at home.

Across many issues, research shows that most people do care and want to do the right thing. What may stop them from taking action is either not having the required knowledge, skills or facilities available (see Beyond Messaging), or believing that their actions don’t make much difference – that the impact of one dog is negligible, or that kiwi and other wildlife populations are in inevitable decline. When stuck in this line of thinking, it’s easy to believe there is no point in taking action.

To move our audiences to act, we need to get across two key points:

- What we are asking is simple and easy (and dog training makes it easier). Keep your dog secured when at home, and walk your dog on-lead or exercise in designated off-leash areas.
- When we do this, it makes a huge difference for kiwi.

We can show dog owners that where we've taken action, the vision is a reality. *"Where we walk our dogs on-lead and control predators such as stoats, rats and possums, kiwi are thriving. They just need a helping hand – which is where you come in."*

"At Whangarei Heads, our kiwi are doing well because we keep our dogs on a lead and watch for kiwi on the roads at night." [Backyard Kiwi]

"A generation ago it was rare to see tūi in the city. Today they're a common backyard bird. Kākā – on the threatened species list until recently – swarm our western suburbs in the dozens and are tagging trees on The Terrace. Kererū are a daily sight on sagging power lines, kārearea – our endangered native falcon – are nesting behind the Beehive." [Capital Kiwi]

"Their lives are in our hands" works both literally (we hold the lead in our hands) and figuratively (it's up to us to protect kiwi).



The existing slogan *"Take the lead"* is useful because of its associations of leadership and responsibility. As mentioned in tip #1 (care), we want to bring these to the fore in dog owners' minds, building on their existing desire to be responsible.

Tip #6: Use a Vision-Barrier-Action story structure

Bringing together all the above tips, we recommend structuring your message in a Vision-Barrier-Action format. This story structure is particularly effective at boosting support from people who are undecided or persuadable. It has been shown to boost support for everything from new walking and bike riding paths, to taxes on sugary drinks, to gender quotas in politics and business.

Key to the Vision-Barrier-Action framework is leading with an attractive **vision** that stems from care values (tip #1) and shows the positive outcomes we seek (tip #4). This sets a positive tone to the message while establishing common ground with your audience. This is followed by an explanation of the **barrier** that stands between your audience and the vision. The message concludes by outlining the **action** needed to overcome or remove the barrier so the vision can become a reality.

Currently, some communications about dogs and wildlife dive straight into the barrier (problem) and action (solution). However, leading with the things we want less of sets a negative tone to our message ('you're doing the wrong thing') that persuadable audiences understandably find off-putting. Instead, we need to open messages by describing the things we and our audience want more of – our shared vision. This positive vision will help sustain people's motivation to keep making the effort required, through training and practice, to enjoyably walk their dog on-lead.

Following are some examples of vision, barrier and action statements that you can adapt and build upon to suit your own messages.

Story elements	Example
<p>VISION: what we want and why it matters</p> <p>- <i>Happy dogs and thriving wildlife</i></p>	<p>We all want both happy dogs and thriving wildlife.</p> <p>In Aotearoa, we love our unique and special native species found nowhere else in the world. It's up to us to look after them and welcome them back to their homelands.</p> <p>Imagine our forests and backyards once again brimming with life, with native birds, plants, bats and lizards. Where people, pets and wildlife live side-by-side. Where we've welcomed kiwi home again, to roam our hills and yards. This is our legacy.</p>
<p>BARRIER: The barrier to what we want</p> <p>- <i>Dogs can harm and kill wildlife</i></p>	<p>We'd like you to join us in making this happen all across the country. To do that, we need to keep our dogs away from kiwi and other wildlife.</p> <p>Kiwi may pack a powerful kick against stoats and possums, but they're no match for dogs. Kiwi have a delicate chest with no protective breastplate, so even a friendly dog that's being curious or playful can fatally injure a kiwi.</p>
<p>ACTION: How we address the barrier and achieve the vision</p> <p>- <i>Responsible owners keep their dogs away from wildlife.</i></p>	<p>As responsible owners, we keep our dogs away from kiwi. That means keeping your dog well-secured at home, and walking your dog on-lead or exercising them at a designated off-lead park.</p> <p><i>Variations on the theme of walking on-lead:</i> If you have a canine family member, be neighbourly with our natives by walking your dog on a lead. On-lead walking is easier with a well-trained dog – here's where to find training. Spread the word – talk to your friends and neighbours about why you walk on-lead and why they should too.</p>

Beyond Messaging: making action easier

By taking the following steps, Councils, DOC, animal advocates and wildlife protectors can make it easier for dog owners to do the right thing.

1. Clarify rules: There may be some scope to streamline and make dog rules more consistent, to help dog owners form strong habits with no room for excuses that 'I didn't know the rules here'. Currently, some areas are on-lead only, others are off-lead, while others are subject to seasonal rules that differ according to the wildlife species being protected, the Council involved, and even the specific beach or reserve (e.g. some come into effect at the start of Daylight Savings in late September, others on Labour Day in late October). At the very least, be very clear about the rules in signage, and ensure consistent signage at every entrance to a beach or reserve.

2. Provide options: Provide a range of options for people to exercise their dogs, on- and off-lead. Off-lead dog parks work well for some dogs and owners, and not for others (such as people who want to exercise by walking or jogging, who want to go into the bush away from other people, or who have

dogs that are reactive to other dogs.) Currently, the best generic solution for dog owners to keep wildlife safe is to exercise their dog on-lead – hence the focus of this guide.⁶


The discourse analysis suggested that some dog owners who would like to use off-lead areas do not have one near them (or at least they are unaware of one). For dogs and owners suited to off-lead dog areas, there may be a need to create and/or advertise more of these in more locations, ideally fenced areas with clear boundaries and signage.

3. Dog training: Our message is that it’s simple and easy to keep wildlife safe by walking your dog on lead, which is made even easier with training. Offer or point people towards quality training that is good for dogs’ welfare, as certified under the Companion Animals NZ (CANZ) accreditation scheme. SPCA, CANZ, Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa (VAWA) or NZ Veterinary Association (NZVA) can provide further advice on training.

4. Relationship building: Put in the effort required to create a community of trusted messengers and ambassadors for responsible dog ownership, which could include dog owners themselves as well as vets, SPCA, pet shops and dog trainers. In community engagement events, remember the 3F’s of Friends, Food and Fun to attract a wide range of dog owners and create enjoyable experiences. Invite people to meet kiwi, for example at zoos, captive breeding sites or release days, to deepen the connection and make the abstract ‘why’ more tangible and personal.

Words and images to replace and embrace

Below is a ready reference list of words and images that advocates sometimes use but that are unlikely to lead dog owners’ support and behaviour change (replace these), alongside more helpful options (embrace these).

Replace	Embrace	Why
“When dogs are free”, “allowed to roam free”	“When dogs are off-lead”	Avoid the “freedom for dogs” frame. (However, wildlife should be free to wander in their own homes, e.g. “free-ranging kiwi”.)
“Dogs must be on-lead” “Penalties apply”	“Dogs on lead” “Welcome”, “please”, “thank you”	Use the enforcement tone sparingly. Be civil and emphasise working together: we’re with you, not against you.
“Control your dog”, “uncontrolled dogs”	“Dogs on-lead”, “dogs off-lead”	“Control”/“uncontrolled” are open to interpretation. They may also evoke the unhelpful “freedom for dogs” frame.
“Restrictions”, “restrain” 	“Dogs welcome – on a lead!”	Help people feel good about being out and about with their dogs on-lead, rather than being restricted / restrained / banned.

⁶ Overseas, we are aware of off-lead areas that can be booked in individual time slots for reactive dogs, but this system is not currently available in Aotearoa.

<p>Red strikethrough sign (dogs banned)</p> 	<p>Convey 'no dogs' without the red strikethrough. Emphasise the reason for no dogs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Home for wildlife – no dogs" - "No dogs in our home, thanks. We live on the ground and dogs could hurt us!" 	<p>The red strikethrough feels draconian. Banning is rarely popular with those being banned; looking after wildlife is more positive and inclusive.</p>
<p>Showing dogs off-lead in bushland</p> 	<p>Showing dogs being walked on a loose lead</p> 	<p>Show and thereby help to normalise what we want, not what we don't want (tip #4).</p>
<p>Myth: It's very rare for dogs to hurt or kill kiwi. Fact: Dogs are the biggest threat to adult kiwi.</p>	<p>State the fact, without the myth: Dogs are the biggest threat to adult kiwi.</p>	<p>Mythbusting only serves to reinforce the myth in people's minds.</p>