

Dog-on-Lead Designation at Ticknock & Tibbradden

Environment



Overview

Between 2021 and 2023, Coillte, in partnership with the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP), undertook a targeted programme of Sunday dog patrols across an upland section of the Dublin Mountains above 300 metres. This area—home to sensitive heath habitats, ground-nesting birds such as Red Grouse, Skylark and Meadow Pipit, and adjoining active sheep farms—had been designated as a dog-on-lead zone following repeated incidents of sheep worrying on neighbouring farmland. After seven dog attacks in one year, local farmers reported significant livestock losses, emotional distress and disruptions to daily life, prompting Coillte and the DMP to enhance dog-control measures, install new signage and gates, and strengthen boundary infrastructure.

A total of 129 dog patrols were completed over the three years. Coillte staff, clearly identifiable on the trails, engaged positively with walkers, explained the reasons for the lead requirement and recorded data on dog behaviour and compliance. The initiative resulted in a notable improvement: sightings of off-lead dogs fell from 51% in 2021 to 38% in 2023, though some concern remained around walkers carrying no lead at all. The programme has since transitioned to DMP Volunteer Rangers, who continue patrols and data collection, ensuring ongoing protection of wildlife, livestock and trail users.

Objective

The initiative aimed to protect livestock and wildlife from disturbance or harm caused by uncontrolled dogs. It sought to raise awareness among visitors about the risks off-lead dogs pose to farm animals and sensitive upland species, while reassuring farmers that responsible behaviour was being actively promoted. A further objective was to highlight how loose dogs can negatively impact wildlife, encouraging visitors to keep dogs on leads in this vulnerable area.



Location:
Co. Dublin



Project Lead:
Dublin Mountains
Partnership

Tags:
Trails, Walking trails,
Sustainability, Environment,
Communications, Education



Opportunities

The dog patrols created meaningful opportunities to strengthen responsible recreation in the Dublin Mountains. By having Coillte staff and DMP Volunteer Rangers regularly present on the trails, the initiative reinforced the dog-on-lead message in a friendly, approachable way. These positive interactions helped increase public awareness of responsible dog behaviour and supported the effectiveness of existing signage. The patrols also provided a valuable opportunity to explain the reasons behind the dog-on-lead requirement, encouraging behaviour change and fostering a stronger culture of shared responsibility among visitors.

Challenges

- **Lack of Legal Enforcement:** Because dog-on-lead requirements (outside restricted breeds) are not mandated by legislation or Coillte's Bye-Laws, compliance relies on voluntary cooperation rather than enforceable rules.
- **Signage Awareness and Vandalism:** A common challenge is getting visitors to read, understand, and act on signage, as well as dealing with signs that are removed or damaged.
- **Limited Patrol Capacity:** Staff and volunteer availability can constrain the number and frequency of dog patrols, reducing on-the-ground presence and engagement.
- **Negative Public Reactions:** Some walkers respond defensively or negatively when asked to put their dogs on leads, making public engagement more difficult and time-consuming.

Solutions

- **Voluntary Compliance:** Although the dog-on-lead rule cannot be enforced, most walkers put their dogs on leads when asked by Coillte staff or DMP Volunteer Rangers.
- **Improved Signage:** Signage has been refined with clearer, minimal text and explanations. Recent signs remain in place, and the DMP is collaborating with Leave No Trace Ireland to apply best-practice design.
- **Increased Patrols:** More DMP Volunteer Rangers since 2024 have enabled regular Meet & Greet duties, including dog patrols, which will continue.
- **Friendly Engagement:** Rangers use a positive, non-confrontational approach to encourage responsible dog behaviour.

Actions to support environmental sustainability

The project focused on raising public awareness about how off-lead dogs disturb vulnerable wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds such as Red Grouse, Skylark and Meadow Pipit. After a hill fire in March 2025 severely damaged heath habitats within the dog-on-lead zone, Coillte and the DMP intensified communication through social media and Volunteer Ranger Meet & Greet days to highlight the increased need for dogs to be kept on leads. These actions helped protect remaining habitat, reduce disturbance and support the recovery of sensitive species.

Feedback

At a meeting on 3 November 2025, representatives from Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP) met with the local farmer and an IFA representative. The farmer reported that the dog-on-lead area and regular patrols by Coillte and DMP Volunteer Rangers had improved the situation. He noted fewer dog attacks, possibly due to reduced dog numbers, and confirmed that there had been no incidents in the previous 12 months. While the worry of a potential attack remains, the patrols have provided some reassurance and support.

More information

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