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Wildlife's worst friend: Dogs 'wreak havoc on habitats and threaten endangered species'



By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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Man's best friend is a formidable enemy to wildlife, scientists have said.

Feral and free-roaming dogs are wreaking havoc on wildlife, especially endangered species, by preying on or harassing them and by transmitting diseases, according to a study.

While widely accepted that the introduction of non-native species can be harmful to natural ecosystems, dogs are not usually viewed in that light.



Watched by vultures, a feral dog excavates a sea turtle nest. Dogs are harmful to endangered species by preying on them and transmitting diseases, scientists say

Dr Julie Young of Utah State University, who led a team of researchers, said: 'Dogs occur where humans occur, but we have tended to overlook their impact on wildlife mostly because we think of them as our companions.'

Dr Young co-authored a report - *Is Wildlife Going To The Dogs?* - published in the journal *BioScience*.

The study tracks the harmful effects of loose dogs on other animals.

Dr Young cited examples from Idaho, where research showed the presence of dogs diminishing some deer populations, and in Colorado, where a study showed that wildlife-like bobcats are shunning trails where people hike with pet dogs.

On the Navajo reservation in north-east Arizona, packs of feral dogs are chasing livestock, decimating populations of small mammals such as rabbits and acting as a disease vector for rabies among people and other animals, she said.

Loose dogs are also the suspected culprits in a distemper outbreak linked to a catastrophic die-off of endangered black-footed ferrets in north-west Wyoming in the 1980s.

The issue came to Dr Young's attention while studying three endangered species in central Asia - wild sheep, gazelles and antelope.

The steep rate of injury and death inflicted on those animals by free-roaming dogs prompted Dr Young and her colleagues to take a closer look at the phenomenon globally.

'We have tended to overlook the impact of dogs on wildlife mostly because we think of them as our companions'

What they found is that dogs, their worldwide numbers estimated at 500million, can cause more damage to wildlife and livestock than wolves and other apex predators.

One study cited by Young concluded through genetic testing that dogs - not wolves, as originally suspected - were responsible for a rash of livestock killings in the mountainous Basque country between Spain and France.

Investigators also found that feral dogs were behind most domestic sheep kills tracked in the French Pyrenees in the mid-1990s.

Authors of the new study said the problem is likely to worsen as communities sprawl.

Despite widespread dog-lead laws and local legislation permitting prosecution of dog owners whose pets chase wildlife, violators are rarely punished because enforcement agencies are understaffed and underfunded, according to the paper.

Although dog lovers may have a bone to pick about the findings, Dr Young said low-cost, common-sense solutions are at hand. Those range from public dog-training programs to vaccinating dogs against rabies and distemper.

She said: 'Some people might think it's cute to watch their dog flushing sage grouse but the grouse might abandon its nest because of it.'

'It's better for people to make the change instead of having it imposed on them.'

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Oh right and which species left these dogs to fend for themselves and has bred them into all kinds of shapes a sizes they would never have been? And which species causes more damage to the planet than dogs could do in a million years?

- Marie, Lancs, 09/2/2011 20:21

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Dogs need to be banned..NOW!! Thats not me saying that, thats what conclusion 70% of readers who comment seem to come out with. I even put the capital letters in for full effect.

- brad, uk, 09/2/2011 11:56

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I would like to see a proper study made of the mink that were released into the wild by so called activists - you want devastation to the animal and bird population - go to an area where the mink are living - all you have to do is stand still and listen - you won't hear a thing apart from the wind - they kill anything - and before some bright spark says about deer and the larger mammals, these mink kill the new born - when they have run out of things to kill, they then move en masse to a new area - perhaps the DM could set-up a study and then they would have a UK relevant story

- Rich S, The Boro - UK, 08/2/2011 11:11

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The fact that humans can write an article about another animal destroying the wildlife around us, really does highlight just how stupid we are as a race. We have ruined this planet, not dogs, or anything else.

- Chris, England, 08/2/2011 09:43

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Meanwhile cats roam freely killing indiscriminately in their millions and nothing is ever done. They go otyo any land they want and the owners take no responsibility. The dog problem is rlatively new but cats are not. Please, pelase, please will owners and governments put a halt to it.

- Nigel Alltimes, Stroud, England, 08/2/2011 07:11

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They not done a study on Homo sapien's impact on wildlife? Think you'll find they're a bit worse, and also the source of the feral dogs.

- Charlotte, UK, 07/2/2011 21:15

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