

# ‘He won’t do anything’

Why letting your unsupervised dog run the place is not OK

By Laure-Anne Viselé, March 2010

So here I was, walking my dog off-leash as usual, when I saw two middle-aged ladies around the bend. They seemed to be getting agitated at the sight of my dog, so I greeted them with a smile, and called my dog to me until they were ‘safely’ past. Why anyone should be scared of my dog is beyond me, but hey. I run through my little routine as often as courtesy dictates, calling my dog whenever he could cause discomfort: a family with kids, a leashed dog, a horseman, elderly people, you name it... We all win in this. He gets a treat each time (dog = happy), which strengthens his recall (me = happy), and fellow park users most move on with a somewhat restored faith in the dog-owning kind. A lot of good for not so much hassle.

The crunch is that, in our karmically unjust world, the courtesy is rarely returned to me. If I had a penny for every huge dog bolting towards me with no owner in sight, I could buy the Uithof Park and another ten of its kind for my quieter walks.

Here is my pickle with the absent owners: my dog does not like to be jumped on, harassed, or otherwise pushed over. He growls at dogs who invade his personal space, I find it quite unpleasant as I cannot predict how far he will need to take his warnings to get the boisterous beast off our back, with the chance that one of them really loses its temper. My dog likes quiet, civilised, gentlemanly encounters. Sadly, I cannot protect him from the hordes of unsupervised dogs who ‘just want to play’.

Imagine now that my dog actually bites when harassed. Despite the fact that I would dutifully walk him on-leash, I would still have to be on the look-out for a potentially violent encounter with the umpteenth unsupervised, over-enthusiastic dog. Worst of all, it is my dog who would get the dirty looks should he end up biting.

Regardless of dog-dog problems, there is also the issue of not everyone liking dogs. As a matter of fact, a lot of people, especially children, are

downright petrified of them. If I was uneasy with dogs, I wouldn’t be thrilled at the sight of an terrifying large beast charging towards me with no owner in sight. It’s bye-bye relaxing Sunday strolls and hello anxiously scanning the horizon for the next unwelcome visitor.

Finally, a lot of dogs, bless their padded socks, are incorrigible chasers. Imagine being a jogger, a cyclist, a horseman or whatever regular target to our furry friend’s chasing instincts. How quickly would you lose your goodwill and start complaining to the authorities? Complaints are the single most influential factor on the ever-shrinking off-leash areas, thus spoiling it for the well-behaved dogs too.

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won’t do anything’), after they eventually bother to make an appearance behind

their sixty-kilo Belzebuth. At that stage, I invariably think: “He has already ‘done it’: He has muddied up my trousers, scared the wits out of my dog and half the passers-by, and given off-leash dogs all around a bad name.”. But, being incorrigibly dog-obsessed myself, I am more likely to gush at the oaf once its owner is safely by, because I am at once too much of a dog person, and not Dutch enough, to voice my disapproval.

So what’s my point? I think walking offleash is a fabulous privilege, but it implies that your dog is under control no matter what. So horses, joggers, food, other dogs or your dog’s age are no excuse. Please give the rest of us a passing thought next time you lose sight of your large, enthusiastic dog.

