

CAVERSHAM WILDLIFE PARK ASSISTANCE ANIMAL ACCESS POSITION STATEMENT

Introduction

Caversham Wildlife Park (CWP) aims to provide visitors with the opportunity to encounter Australia's native wildlife.

Caversham Wildlife Park has a legal duty of care to ensure the welfare of the biological collection and comply with biosecurity laws.

Caversham Wildlife Park proudly promotes equal opportunity and access for visitors with disabilities.

In Australia, disability access is protected by the Australian Human Rights Commission, under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992).

Assistance Animals, such as Guide Dogs or Service Dogs, provide assistance to individuals, by providing them with independence and safer mobility, and assistance to alleviate the effect of the disability.

Background

The option to restrict the access of Assistance Animals from entering our grounds, or part of, is based on biosecurity and animal welfare risks. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Section s54a (Amendment Act 2008) states:

“it does not render it unlawful for a person (the discriminator) to discriminate against the person with the disability on the ground of the disability, if:

- (a) the discriminator reasonably suspects that the assistance animal has an infectious disease; and
- (b) the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect public health or the health of other animals.”

Wildlife is vulnerable to the disturbance of, and potential predation of, domestic animals.

A close encounter with a domestic animal, especially a dog, can cause Stress Myopathy, which is when the muscle fibres cease function resulting in muscular weakness. The damaged muscle tissues then break down, ultimately resulting in kidney failure (this process is known as Rhabdomyolysis). Myopathy presents along a spectrum over a period of time, varying from sudden onset resulting in collapse and death within hours, to 2-4 weeks of heart muscle necrosis, kidney failure, paralysis and eventual death. Treatment of myopathy is not usually successful – prevention is the only responsible resolution.

Stress Myopathy (also known as Capture Myopathy) is common in mammals, birds and hoofed animals. Just some examples (there are many more) of concern of Stress Myopathy are;

- Ground-dwelling bird species such as Emus, Black Swans, Pelicans, Stilts, Bustards, Magpie Geese and Cape Barren Geese who would be eye-to eye with Assistance Dogs as they walk along main pathways.
- Macropods (the kangaroo and wallaby group of animals) are particularly susceptible to Myopathy; there are approx.15 Macropod species housed in various locations around the park, and they are present at some encounter areas.

Some carnivorous species, such as Dingoes and Foxes would perceive Assistance Dogs as a threat, triggering their Fight or Flight response.

It is important to note that the friendliness, calmness, and health of the Assistance Dog is irrelevant. We acknowledge the training that goes into an adequately assessed and certified Assistance Dog; however our concern is how our wildlife will perceive the Assistance Dog, not how the Assistance Dog will perceive the wildlife.

In addition, CWP adhered to strict protocols for the introduction of animals into the collection to reduce any biosecurity risk. To allow an Assistance Animal full access to the park, CWP would no longer be compliant with these protocols.

Position Statement

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of the wildlife in our care, and to reduce potential biosecurity risks, Assistance Animals are freely permitted in the non-exhibit common-areas of the park, which includes the entrance area of the park, gift shop, kiosk, picnic area and toilet blocks.

Assistance Animals are prohibited from all other areas of CWP (*with one exception as follows*).

Therapy Dogs and Companion Animals are considered a pet, and are therefore prohibited from entering CWP.

Alternative Support

Assistance Animal owners, who choose to proceed with a visit to CWP, are asked to note the following considerations carefully:

- A guide can be made available, in place of the Assistance Animal, to accompany the visitor and assist them to enjoy the park
- A secure holding area can be provided for an Assistance Animal for the duration of its' owners visit around the park
- When an Assistance Animal is brought into the restricted common-areas of the park, it is expected that:
 - ✓ The animal is adequately trained to meet standards of behaviour and hygiene that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.
 - ✓ The animal remains under the control of their approved handler at all times
 - ✓ The animal is 'dressed' in their relevant jacket and/or harness
- The normal entry fee applies
- It is appreciated when prior notice of the visit is provided to CWP. Without notice, a guide cannot be guaranteed.

In addition to the common-areas, CWP will arrange access to meet and have a photo taken with a Koala. This needs to be arranged prior to the visit, with a minimum of 24 hours notice. The Assistance Animal owner will be met at the park entrance and escorted to the back of the Koala section. A Koala will be brought to them for a photo. The Assistance Animal will be able to walk to the gate, and will remain visible to its owner at all times, but will be kept approx 2-3 metres from the Koala. It is expected that the Assistance Animal will remain still and quiet for the duration of the Koala photos. Upon completion of the photos, the owner and dog will be escorted back to the common-area. The owner's family/friends may join them for the photo, to a maximum total of 5 people (due to space limitations).