



How to make the most of jogging with the dog

HERE WAS a flash of dayglo yellow and then the sound of heavy breathing... Someone had obviously been watching the London Marathon and now felt inspired to pound the streets with all the vigour of a budding Mo Farah. Cue Chariots Of Fire music.

In truth, the jogger in his shiny Lycra running suit and dazzling white trainers cut quite a dashing figure as he widened his stride with majestic ease. It was the poor cocker spaniel trailing in his wake on a lead stretched tight as piano wire that sent my pulse racing. If only I had the energy to run after him to bring him to heel.

Jogging with dogs is becoming a regular spectacle on Britain's streets, yet I am increasingly annoyed at the sight of poor creatures getting dragged along by over-energetic owners or, worse still, watching a breathless animal scampering for all its worth to keep up with a cyclist steering nonchalantly with one hand and pulling their pet on its lead with the other.

Obviously, exercising with dogs can be a force for good in our pet-friendly, keep-fit obsessive age. Combining the two pursuits simultaneously is certainly time-saving and, if done responsibly and with the pet's best interests at heart, will ensure both owner and animal get a healthy workout. Note my emphasis on the pet.

As Walk Your Dog Week comes to an end today, I asked the two leading canine charities, the

HEALTH CHECK: Make sure your pet is fit enough before you take it out running



Kennel Club and Dogs Trust, about the rights and wrongs of jogging with pets and what tips pet-owning runners should remember before taking to the pavement or park.

The Dogs Trust told me: "While we support the efforts of owners to keep their dogs healthy, some approaches can be less beneficial than others. "During running and cycling the pace of the exercise is dictated by the owner, whereas

enjoy exercising with their dogs but just need to remember to go at the dog's pace, stop regularly and bring plenty of water for both them and their dog."

The Kennel Club has seven points to remember before you begin pounding the streets with your hound, and they are:

- Certain breeds of dog are better suited than others for running so check with your vet before starting.
- You would not expect an unfit friend to happily join you on a 10-mile run, and it is the same with dogs. They need to be healthy to enjoy their running sessions, so start gently and build them up.
- Clean up even if it means bringing your jogging session to an abrupt halt. Always be sure to carry poo bags before you go for a run and follow the usual courtesies when exercising dogs.
- Keep your dog hydrated. Carry water for both of you.
- Remember the rules of the road. When running make sure that your dog is near to you so that you are not blocking the pavement.
- It is also important to realise that dogs are less tolerant of heat than humans. Keep an eye on your pet at all times and stop whenever they show signs of any discomfort, particularly overheating.
- Be aware that although you may be comfortable this may not be the case for your canine companion. Signs of overheating include panting, disorientation, excessive thirst, dark gums, vomiting and diarrhoea.

The Birdman

Robins get my vote in the search for our National Bird, and this is why...

THIS IS a party political broadcast on behalf of robins. As the most eagerly contested election of the age reaches its crescendo, voters across the land should exercise their democratic right and help choose Britain's National Bird.

The RSPB has given me the honour of joining a number of well-known birdwatchers and naturalists to champion my favourite bird in the ballot. While Springwatch's Chris Packham is calling on the country to vote for hen harriers and RSPB president and television presenter Miranda Krestovnikof supports puffins, I have gone for that embodiment of all things British, the robin.

Adjectives attach themselves to the much-loved robin with the same robustness that this most endearing of birds defends its territory. Chest-pumping, chirpy, cheeky, cocky... And these are just words that start with the letter C!

The robin has become a flying thesaurus with its devotees only too willing to find increasingly flattering ways to pay homage to its countless attributes. Characteristics that robins display so vividly as they brighten our gardens with their flaming breasts and sibilant song are those we value most in our island race: small of stature but big of heart; friendly, loyal and endearing yet belligerent and uncompromising to all those who dare extinguish its vitality or threaten its domain.

Robins are the avian embodiment of John Bull, Britannia and any other British hero or heroine you care to mention. Little wonder that one of our most legendary figures, the leader of Sherwood Forest's Merry Men and scourge of the Sheriff of Nottingham, was called Robin.

In 1961 the robin was chosen as our unofficial national bird after the British Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation were tasked with finding a suitable candidate, a challenge played out in the letter pages of The Times.

More than 50 years later it is time to honour the robin for time immemorial with official recognition as the National Bird of Great Britain; by Act of Parliament if need be.

Go to votenationalbird.com to vote for your candidate...

IN ASSOCIATION WITH CJ WILDLIFE

● For details of how to care for wild birds visit the CJ WildBird Foods website at birdfood.co.uk/SE or you can call 0800 731 2820 for a free Catalogue Of Garden Wildlife.



THINGS are all coming up now. Salad Bowl lettuce, beetroot, peas. The Salad Bowl lettuce and beetroot won't need attention, just an early thinning out of the beetroot. Just the seed leaves are showing through and I thin them at this stage so they are about an inch apart.

Shan't bother to thin the lettuces, I didn't last year and they grew nicely. As I said before this is a "cut and come again" lettuce and my half row will grow into a nice bush from which I will rip a handful or two as I need it.

The peas, half row of mange tout (eat all) and half row of shelling peas are those which Kris Collins from Thompson and Morgans sent me to try. I sowed 'em 10 days ago and they are just showing through, so I set to work and done what two little old ladies next door taught me to do 40 years ago. The birds love these new shoots so if they are not protected

you soon sure ain't gonna have any. So to foil 'em put a line of small sticks each side of the row (I sow my peas in a row of about 4 or 5 inches wide) then with black cotton, twine round the sticks, quite close to the ground up and down the row and crisscrossing as well.

When the birds land to have a peck at the tasty new shoots they don't see the black cotton but they feel it on their feet. It unnerves them and they fly off. It really works and it does them no harm at all.

Pulled my first onions for salad this week. These were from over-wintered onion sets. I always grow plenty of onions and use some when they are salad size, letting the rest grow on to maturity.

The small shallots from last year's crop that I planted to overwinter are doing really well too. Looks like I might have hit on an idea here. When this crop has ripened off later in the season I'll replant

a bunch of the smallest to overwinter again. If this new plan works I'll never need to buy shallots no more. I'll keep you posted.

I've got a rain barrel in the yard now. It's been there about a month and it's lovely. I fitted a pump handle on the top and it works a treat and fills the watering can in no time. The barrel seems to fill up in no time too after a reasonable cloudburst. I love rainwater and it is such a satisfying feeling watering the yard plants with the real stuff.

Gonna wash me barnet with it when we get a hot day and get Joan to pump the handle to rinse it. Be a bit Little House On The Prairie won't it?

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