
Advice for Pet Owners moving to East Arnhem Regional Council Communities

When considering relocating to one of the East Arnhem Regional Council (EARC) communities with your pet, there are various factors for your consideration. Northern Australia's extreme climatic conditions as well as the nature of dog populations in many Indigenous communities means some quite significant changes for your pet including lifestyle changes and health risks to be aware of prior to making the shift.

Dogs & Community Life

The nature of dog populations in indigenous communities is quite different to that of mainstream society. Indigenous Australians own dogs for many of the same reasons as non-indigenous Australians, i.e. companionship and protection, but in addition to this, dogs will often help with hunting, and more importantly, in some communities dogs are seen as sacred animals – being part of dreamtime stories. Dogs are part of tradition song-lines and dances, and the dog is one of the recognised totems in Yolngu culture. Some dogs are a part of kinship and are given a skin name that identifies their relationship not only with their direct family, but also with Yolngu people across Arnhem Land.

The lack of fencing in many communities also means that dogs are free to roam. Many camp dogs are protective of their territory and family so can appear quite aggressive when threatened by newcomers. Once one dog displays protective behaviour, it's quite common for other dogs in the area to react as well. In some communities, dogs can behave so aggressively to strangers who enter their area, that it is best to avoid walking in these areas altogether. Dog bites are not an uncommon incident in EARC communities, so it is worth being cautious and familiarising yourself with dog behaviour and strategies for avoiding conflict.

With EARC Animal Management Programs and Veterinary services, companion animal health and welfare in EARC communities is improving. All EARC communities have a



veterinary visit every 3-4 months where a veterinarian and sometimes a veterinary nurse visit to conduct an animal management visit. Whilst the animal management team strive to continually improve the animal welfare in our communities, it not uncommon for some dogs to still be in quite poor condition, sometimes affected by worms, fleas, ticks and scabies mange. Mange is a condition to be aware of – if humans come into frequent contact with dogs carrying this mite, transient transmission to humans is possible resulting in itchiness and possible sores.

Given the over-population of dogs and the difficulty that many pet owners have providing food for their dogs, some are malnourished and will depend on scavenging food for survival. This sort of 'humbug' from random dogs often results in them being hit with stones, sticks, machetes or unfortunately even have boiling water thrown at them – resulting in severe injuries that can create significant suffering.

It's also common to find sick, weak or abandoned pups or dogs in the community. Many people are compelled to help these dogs by feeding them or 'adopting' them. It's important to remember that if you are going to intervene and start providing for a camp dog, that this may well be a life-long commitment. The dog will quickly develop a dependence on you, and is likely to be ostracised from other camp dogs - never finding its place in their well-balanced hierarchy. **Only ever take on a dog if you are prepared to commit to it for life, and take it with you when you leave the community. This means ensuring the dog will be able to adapt to mainstream society. If not, you are potentially contributing to the animal welfare problem in the community.**

Pet Health Considerations

Responsible Pet Ownership

Given the situation with roaming camp dogs and overpopulation, all dogs (and cats) relocating to EARC communities should be desexed. This assists in reducing the number of breeding dogs in the community, but will also prevent your pet from other potentially dangerous situations – entire male dogs in a fenced yard are known to be lured out of their yard by in-season female camp dogs or dingoes; it's not uncommon for dogs to be lured into the bush, and then attacked by pack of territorial dingoes. Entire females in a well-fenced



yard are still very likely to attract male camp dogs or dingoes into your yard when in-season, which is unpleasant for your dog, and likely to result in yet another unwanted pregnancy.

Interbreeding of larger breed dogs or hunting dogs with camp dogs and dingoes is a huge concern. The introduction of these genetics into the camp dog or dingo gene pool could have devastating effects on community safety. These dogs should be surgically sterilised prior to arrival in communities – particularly for the long-term safety of the community.

Ticks

Bush ticks are very common, especially in the more humid months when eggs hatch. They feed on the dog's blood causing blood-loss and are the carrier of the dog disease Ehrlichiosis. Ehrlichiosis is caused by the bacteria *Ehrlichia canis* which is present throughout ALL East Arnhem communities. It causes severe disease including fever, lethargy, inappetence, weight loss, blue eyes (corneal oedema) and bleeding disorders, with high mortality rate. Treatment is often unsuccessful therefore prevention is imperative. **The current recommendation is a tick collar (e.g. Seresto) in conjunction with either an oral or topical tick product (e.g. Bravecto, Nexgard or Simparica).** Please note that we do not have the Paralysis Tick found on the East Coast of Australia in our communities. If a tick is found on your dog, pull it off and squash it. Cats are not affected by *Ehrlichia canis* and rarely incur tick burdens.

Fleas

Fleas love warmth, humidity and sandy soil, and are usually in high prevalence in EARC communities. They are easily prevented with products such as Bravecto, Nexgard or Simparica. For cats, products including revolution or Bravecto work very well. If using a flea product for your cat, make sure it is specifically for cats. Some dog products can be toxic to cats.

Heartworm

Heartworm is a disease seen all over Australia, but is much more prevalent in the northern parts. Heartworm is spread from dog to dog (and also more rarely cat-cat) by a mosquito bite. The disease progresses to a life threatening condition. It is easily prevented by various



monthly or yearly products e.g. – Proheart Yearly injection (ask your private vet) or tablets including heartgard or Nexgard spectra.

Tapeworm

The tapeworm *Echinococcus spp.* can be a risk to dogs and cats that are free-roaming that may ingest rodents or offal (internal organs) from other animals including wallabies, or buffaloes. Do not feed offal to animals and prevent them from roaming and ingesting rodents. Faeces should be removed immediately to decrease environmental contamination as humans can contract 'hydatid disease' from eggs shed in dog faeces. Dogs should be treated with praziquantel every 5-6 weeks.

Dipylidium caninum, the dog flea tapeworm, can infect dogs if they ingest fleas (usually if they're biting at their skin when being bitten by fleas!) and it can cause mild abdominal discomfort in humans if they become infected. The best prevention is to keep your dog free of fleas, they can also be treated with praziquantel every three months.

Zipper worm is common in free-roaming cats that ingest frogs and other wildlife. It is best to keep your cat indoors both for their safety and the safety of our native wildlife. Treatment is a high dose of praziquantel every three months.

Tropical Hookworm

Tropical Hookworm is a particularly virulent intestinal worm whose larvae can penetrate the skin as well as be ingested by dogs and cats. These worms are a significant problem in Northern Australia. Prevention is by regular worming using known effective medications eg: Drontal and Milbemax. Drontal may need to be used more frequently in high risk areas.

Vaccinations

Prior to moving, it's recommended that your pet's vaccinations are up to date. Parvovirus and Kennel Cough are frequently seen in communities. The EARC veterinary team may be available to assist you whilst visiting in community, however as this is not a frequent service, if your animal is due for vaccination, we recommend contacting a private veterinarian in



Katherine or Darwin that is happy to send the vaccinations out to you remotely.

Skin and Ears

Skin & ear conditions are common due to the warmth and humidity. If your pet already experiences skin and ear conditions, make sure you are stocked up on appropriate products to manage this eg ear cleaners & medicated shampoo.

Heat

Given the severe heat and humidity, avoid exercising your pets during the middle of the day, and be aware of heat stress in dogs – particularly if they're overweight or long haired. Long haired dogs may need to be regularly clipped.

Nasties

Crocodiles, cane toads, snakes, stingers and sharks are all a threat to dogs in the top end. Dogs swimming in rivers or the ocean are potential croc & shark bait, so be conscious of this. If you're not swimming, neither should they. Despite their furry coat, dogs can also be stung by stingers. It's best to avoid this situation, but if it occurs, provide first aid as you would with a human.

Cane toads are very common in the wet season, and some dogs love to play with them. If a dog licks a cane toad, they are likely to be affected by the toxin which can cause drooling, seizures, coma and death. If you know that it's happened, rinse the mouth out with running water for about 10mins (avoid directing it down into the throat) and thoroughly clean the dogs mouth out. Seek veterinary advice/attention.

Given the remoteness of communities and the infrequency of vet visits, keeping a pet First Aid Kit is a very good idea. Talk to your vet prior to leaving about what they can provide you with. Dilute antiseptic, bandage materials, topical anti-inflammatory cream, ear drops, eye ointment are all a good idea.

Make the most of on-line pet & vet websites to gain more information or purchase



products:

<https://www.mypetwarehouse.com.au/>

<https://www.thevetshed.com.au/>

EARC animal management and veterinary team

The EARC animal management team is a small team providing a remote veterinary visit to all six EARC communities every 3-4 months. As the veterinary team is not a private veterinary service, we do not offer an emergency or after-hours veterinary services. If we are visiting your community we are able to provide basic vaccinations, check-ups and desexings, however we do not offer any further services e.g. pathology, x-rays. If you would like to book your animal in to see the veterinary team when they are next in community, please go into your community EARC office and write your name on the list. Please be patient with our team as other urgent cases in our communities may be prioritised over routine procedures. Fees will apply to veterinary services provided. For more information on EARC fees please see the 'fees and charges' section on our website.

If you are based in Nhulunbuy – there is currently a FIFO private veterinary service available called LL Vets Remote and their contact number is 0494679706. We highly recommend contacting a private veterinary clinic in Katherine or Darwin for further veterinary advice if urgently required. Alternatively, you could use an online veterinary service e.g. <https://www.vetchat.com.au/>.

Assess your pet's health condition before moving to community. If your pet requires ongoing medication, consider ahead of time how you will access this medication. Options include sent from your previous vet if they offer this service, or provided by an online veterinary pharmacy (keep in mind that a script from a veterinarian that has recently examined your pet may be required). Also consider the length of time it takes for medications to be posted, sometimes several weeks to remote communities. If your pet has an ongoing medical condition that requires regular veterinary interventions, reconsider bringing your pet to community.

When travelling with your pet please note that some commercial airlines require a 'Health Certificate' by a veterinarian stating that the animal is of good health. This examination is





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usually required to be conducted within 30 days of travel. Keep this in mind when scheduling flights with respect to timing of veterinary visits. Also consider other modes of transport that may be more suitable for your pet (charter flight, car travel etc).

For any EARC Animal inquiries please contact:

Our main Nhulunbuy Office on (08) 8986 8986 or email: info@eastarnhem.nt.gov.au and our EARC Animal Management Team will get back to you when available.

