



Lost Pet Guide and Resources

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Finding a Lost Pet - Where to Start?

Finding a lost pet often seems to depend on “luck”. We are here to help you find your lost pet without leaving it up to “chance” or “being lucky”. Your pet needs you to take action!

First confirm that your pet is not hiding somewhere in your home.

If your pet normally comes running when he/she hears the sound of a favorite treat being offered, shake the can or packaging to get their attention. Pets are known to be masters at Hide and Seek. Check crawl spaces, closets, and any other small areas within the house that your pet may be able to hide.

Once you are certain that your dog/cat is really missing, follow these simple steps to assist in finding your lost pet.

1. Check the immediate area surrounding your home and around your neighbor’s home.

Pets are known to climb to a safe spot or hunker down somewhere quiet if they are scared and not used to being outside. Grab a flashlight for checking in crawl spaces under your home and your neighbor’s home, tool sheds and garages. Sometimes cats won’t even respond to the voice of a loved one if they’re scared. Use the flashlight to help in your search.

2. Knock on doors and talk to people in the neighborhood.

Most people walk the streets around their home and call for their pet. People who knock on their neighbor’s doors to inquire about seeing their lost pet are more likely to find their lost pet versus those people who just simply call out their pets name.

3. Hand out fliers with your pet’s picture and your contact phone number.

Fliers need only to have a clear photo of the animal and a telephone number that someone will answer or that is linked to an answering machine. Start handing out fliers to neighbors in the immediate area. In general, target a 1-2 mile radius for dogs and a 5-10 house radius for cats, in all directions.

4. Post fliers in the area

While not as effective as going door to door and talking to people, Lost Pet signs do help prevent people assuming your pet was 'dumped' and is up for grabs. Start by posting a minimum of 10 signs in the immediate area where he/she was lost. It is best to use brightly colored paper or white paper. Use a recent clear photo of your pet and a contact number where the caller can reach you or an answering machine. Make sure to include the date the pet was lost so people realize the flyer is recent. Keep the flyer simple and concise with your pets name.

You should also post your Lost Pet signs at locations where people who spot your wandering pet might think to look to obtain your contact information, for example, veterinary offices, pet-supply stores, groomers, dog parks, supermarkets, post offices, and other local businesses.

Tell your mail person that your pet is missing as well as newspaper and delivery people like UPS/FedEx. Tell any person who drives through your neighborhoods on a regular basis.

5. Go to all local shelters and government agencies at least every other day.

Go to all local shelters and government agencies charged with picking up stray and lost animals and look for yourself to see if your lost pet has been picked up. Calling the animal control department or shelter on the phone is NOT very effective. Your pet may not be listed in the records yet at the front desk, and the way you describe your pet may not be the way a shelter describes your pet. Any animal may become dirty, matted and neglected looking very quickly, and you MUST visit the shelter, even if your pet was wearing tags when it was lost.

- Your pet's I.D. tag may have come off and microchips can fail to be detected by scanners.
- Ask to see the dogs/cats in the infirmary as well as in the general runs since your pet might have been injured.
- While you're at the shelters, ask to check the listings of animals who didn't make it, such as those hit by cars. Hard as it is to know a pet was killed, it's harder to never know what happened.
- Leave a copy of your Lost Pet sign with the shelter staff.
- You will need to go to the shelters at least every other day. Few shelters can keep animals for more than 72 hours. Sometimes it takes more than a few days for a pet to be picked up and brought to a shelter.
- It's important to visit all the shelters within 50 miles of where your pet was lost. In many areas stray animals are picked up by a government agency which holds them for a period and then turns them over to a shelter. If someone took your pet in for a few days hoping you would knock on their door and ask about it, they might later drop your pet off at the shelter that's most convenient for them, rather the one that's closest.

Knocking on doors and handing out copies of your flier to your neighbors and to the staff at all the local shelters is the most effective way of looking for your lost pet.

6. Check with the highway departments and shelters' dead lists.

Unfortunately, the next most successful way of finding a lost animal is through checking with the highway department and shelters' dead lists. Even if your pet is wearing tags and the highway maintenance department is supposed to send a list to animal control, you should check with them directly.

- There are usually several departments that cover roads in your area. You'll need to check city or town, county, and state roads departments, as well as the animal control agencies. Pictures or a copy of your flier should be left with each department. Again, calling is seldom successful, and actually visiting the department is the best way. You should check back once a week.

7. Get in Contact with a Veterinarian.

Send a picture to your pet's vet and they can send the picture to the CT Veterinarian Medical Association and get the info out to all of the CT vets.

8. Put ads in Craigslist and the local paper.

Some people only look in the newspaper to locate the owner of a lost pet. Leave out a piece of information that only the true finder would know, such as the color of your cat's collar or a distinguishing mark. Sadly, there are scam artists who prey on people who have lost a pet, claiming to have the pet in order to collect a reward. Be sure to check the "Found Pets" section of the paper.

Advertising in the paper can also be important to establish you were actively looking for your pet in case someone were to claim it as their own.

Also put ads in the papers distributed to surrounding towns as he/or she might have traveled far away from your home.

9. Ask businesses in the area to put up a copy of your flier.

This includes gas stations, fast food restaurants, taverns, convenience and grocery stores. Ask if you can put a copy of your Lost Pet sign up in the **pet food aisle**. If someone picks up your animal and holds it for a few days hoping you will find them just as your pet did, they will need food.

10. Contact local rescue organizations and give them copies of your flier.

People who are afraid animals will be euthanized if they turn them over to the shelter might contact a rescue, and rescue people often go through local shelters looking for animals they can help place in new homes. Ask the shelters if they know of anyone doing rescue in the area, even if they don't work with them. For a listing of local rescues, go to www.google.com and enter the words "animal rescue" and the name of your city.

11. Give copies of your flier to people who walk their dogs in the area.

They're more likely to spot animals than most people. If you go to the parks early, you may find people who regularly walk their dogs together as an informal group. Dogs on leash notice and want to investigate all kinds of things, even strange birds, lizards and turtles.

Factors That Influence The Distance Your Lost Dog Will Travel

There are six major factors that influence the distances that lost dogs travel: temperament, circumstances, weather, terrain, appearance, and population density.

1. Temperament of the dog.

How a dog behaves toward strangers influences how far he will travel (when lost) before someone intervenes and rescues him. There are three primary behavioral categories into which lost dogs are classified:

Gregarious dogs: Wiggly-butt, friendly dogs are more inclined to go directly up to the first person who calls them. Depending on the terrain and the population density where the dog was lost, these dogs will generally be found fairly close to home or will be picked up by someone close to the escape point. Gregarious dogs are often “adopted” by individuals who find them.

Aloof dogs: Dogs with aloof temperaments are wary of strangers and will initially avoid human contact. However, they will be inclined to accept human contact once they have overcome fear issues and become hungry enough. While aloof dogs can travel a great distance, they eventually can be enticed with food and patience, typically by experienced rescuers who know how to approach and capture a wary dog. These dogs are often recovered by rescue group volunteers, and their wariness can be easily misinterpreted as the result of abuse. In addition, these dogs are often not recovered for weeks or months after their escape, giving them the physical appearance that they are homeless and unloved, and have been abused (thinness, injuries, stickers, ticks, etc.)

Xenophobic (fearful) dogs: Xenophobia means “fear or hatred of things strange or foreign.” Dogs with xenophobic temperaments (due to genetics and/or puppyhood experiences) are more inclined to travel farther and are at a higher risk of being hit by cars. Due to their cowering, fearful behavior, people assume these dogs were abused, and even if the dog has ID tags, they will refuse to contact the dog’s people. Some of these panic-stricken dogs will even run from their own people! It may be necessary to use other dogs to get close enough to capture them or to use baited dog traps.

2. Circumstances surrounding the disappearance.

A dog who digs out from a yard to explore a scent will tend to travel a short distance before he/she is found due to the dog meandering and doubling back as they explore the enticing scents.

On the other hand, a dog who bolts in panic because of fireworks or thunder will often take off at a blind run and can run for several miles.

3. Weather.

A dog who escapes on a beautiful spring day may travel farther than one who escapes in a snowstorm. Extreme weather conditions (snow, hail, rain, sweltering heat) will decrease the distances that lost dogs travel.

4. Terrain.

A dog who escapes in a residential area will not travel as far as a dog who escapes in a mountainous area. Fences create barriers and will influence a dog's travel, since a dog will tend to take the path of least resistance when traveling. Cactus, heavy brush, and steep cliffs can be barriers that influence whether a dog continues on a path or changes directions.

5. Appearance of the dog.

What a dog looks like can influence how quickly he/she will be picked up by a rescuer. In general, most people are less inclined to pull over and attempt to grab a loose pit bull (a breed they often perceive as being aggressive) than they would a Labrador retriever (a breed they perceive as being friendly).

Also, size matters: People are more inclined to pick up small dogs, since they look vulnerable and are easier to transport and house than large dogs.

In addition, people are more likely to attempt to rescue a purebred dog, whom they perceive to have value, rather than a mixed-breed dog. When average motorists see a mixed-breed dog trotting down the sidewalk, their impression is often that the dog belongs in the neighborhood or that she is a homeless stray. But when those same people see a Boston terrier, they are inclined to believe that he must be a lost pet because he is a purebred dog.

6. Population density.

A dog who escapes in Manhattan will travel a shorter distance than a dog who escapes in the Rocky Mountains or in rural farmland. When dogs escape into areas with a high number of people, their chances of being found close to the escape point are increased. But in areas with an extremely low number of people, they tend to travel further and their chances of being found close to the escape point are decreased. A dog who escapes in the middle of the night will travel farther before being seen than a dog who escapes during rush-hour traffic.

Recovering Your Lost Or Escaped Indoor-Only Cat

If your indoor-only cat has escaped outside there is good news, your cat is probably closer than you know.

It is likely that your indoor cat is scared and hiding and, depending upon the terrain, may be closer than you think! When an indoor-only cat escapes outside, it becomes a case of where the cat is likely hiding in fear (which is usually near the escape point).

Cats are territorial and your cat's territory was inside of your home. Once your cat has been transplanted into an unfamiliar territory, it seeks shelter because it is afraid. A cat that is afraid or injured will seek areas of concealment such as, under a deck, under a house, under a porch, or in heavy brush, AND THEY WILL NOT MEOW! Meowing would give up their location to a predator. It has nothing to do with whether the cat loves you, whether it recognizes your voice, or whether they can smell you--it has everything to do with the fact that a frightened cat will hide and try to survive by avoiding all possible threats.

If you actually see your indoor-only cat escape, do not make any quick moves. If the door or window your cat escaped from is closed, slowly and quietly open the door or window and back away, letting your cat return on its own. You need to clear a path for the frightened cat to return into the home. If your cat remains frozen outside, slowly and carefully approach from a position or angle so that if your cat decides to run, it will run towards the house and hopefully through the open door back into the house. Resist the temptation to chase your cat, as you may make them run further away.

If this attempt fails and your cat runs away or your cat has escaped to an unknown area outdoors, prepare to set up a humane cat trap.

- * Remember the best bet you have for recovering your lost or escaped indoor cat is to set up a humane cat trap immediately and in close proximity to the point of escape!!
- * Contact a local animal rescue organization to loan you a trap and help you with the correct use of the cat trap. The last thing you want to do is injure your cat or another cat by using the trap incorrectly!
- * Traps should never be left unattended.
- * Use the cat trap in conjunction with the above outlined steps (on pages 1-3) to increase the odds of successful recovery of your lost cat.

What Not To Do!

Owner Behaviors That Create Problems

People often behave in ways that actually inhibit their chances of recovering their lost cat or dog. Some develop a “wait and see” approach (believing their animal will return home, like in the movie Lassie or Homeward Bound). By the time they start actively looking, those vital first few hours, during which they might have located their dog or cat (or witnesses who saw their animal), are gone.

Others develop “tunnel vision” and fail to find their cat or dog because they focus on the wrong theories. They might assume, for instance, that their dog was stolen and sold for research when, in fact, their dog may have been rescued and put up for adoption through a local adoption event. They experience “grief avoidance” and quickly give up the search because they really believe they will never see their cat or dog again. They feel helpless and alone, often discouraged by others who rebuke them and tell them “It was just a pet” and “You’ll never find them again.”

In addition, the level of human-animal bond (HAB) will influence the recovery efforts of the lost pet. People with a strong HAB will go to extremes to find their lost pet. They will tirelessly visit all the local shelters, post flyers, and contact rescue groups while maintaining a full-time job and other family commitments. On the other hand, people with a weak HAB will quickly become discouraged, assume they will never see their animal again, and will stop searching.

Rescuer Behaviors That Create Problems

People who find stray dogs often misinterpret the dog’s behavior. They assume that the cowering, fearful dog was abused when, in fact, the dog has a xenophobic temperament and has been shy and fearful since she was a puppy, due to genetics and puppyhood experiences. Dogs found in rural areas are often assumed to be “dumped” and homeless; many rescuers never think that this could be a dog who was lost. Some people who find a stray dog without a collar automatically assume that the dog is homeless. They immediately work to place the dog rather than attempt to find the dog’s people. In addition, the first place where people search for their lost dog – the local shelter – is typically the last place where someone who finds a loose dog will take him (due to the fear of euthanasia)!

Helpful Links

Paw Nation's 20 Tips to Find a Lost Pet:

<http://www.pawnation.com/2013/02/24/20-tips-to-find-a-lost-pet/?ncid=webmail45>

www.granitestatedogrecovery.com

ct.foundandlostpets.com

<http://www.missingpet.net/>

www.lostapet.org

www.pethunters.com

CT Lost & Found Animal Page (Facebook)-

This is a community of people who are pet lovers that keep an eye out for missing pets that are posted on Craigslist or in Newspapers. Please feel free to join this page and post a picture of your lost animal with contact information and pertinent details (microchipped, tags, name, etc).