

How To: Recover Your Lost Pet

The Humane Society of the United States grants permission to individuals and organizations working to end cruelty to animals to reprint and distribute "How To Recover Your Lost Pet."

This year more than eight million stray dogs and cats will be brought into animal shelters in this country. These, plus the unknown number of strays that die from disease or injury or starvation while loose, make up a staggering number of pets that are lost or abandoned and never found. Sad as this is, the real impact comes when it is your pet, your very own Rowf or Meowser that is among the missing.

Losing a family pet can be a heartbreaking experience. This is truly a case where "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Don't give your pets the opportunity to get lost.

Keep your dog under restraint and under the personal supervision of a responsible family member whenever it is outdoors. Neutered dogs and cats are less apt to feel the urge to roam, or wander off following the scent of an attractive member of the opposite sex.

Cats can be quite content to stay inside all the time, but if you allow your cat to go out in your yard, it's a good idea to establish a regular mealtime for the cat so it will learn to return to the house at that time. If it doesn't show up, you'll know something is wrong. This is an advantage, because the sooner you start looking for a lost pet, the better your chances are of finding it.

No matter what precautions you take, one day when your head is turned, or the door is left ajar, or someone opens the gate, your pet may be gone. That's why the most important thing you can do for your pet is to put an identification tag on his collar. This is so important, it's worth saying again: Put an

identification tag with your current address and phone number on your pet's collar.

Strangers will be more likely to aid a pet with an I.D. tag. The vast majority of the dogs and cats that end up at animal shelters could be promptly returned to their owners if only they had I.D. tags. Instead, they must often be euthanized after a short holding period, because the owner doesn't know where to look for his pet, and the shelter workers don't know where to look for the owner. I.D. tags are cheap, you can get them at any pet store, and they are the best insurance against this tragedy happening to you and your pet.



As soon as you realize your pet is missing, start looking for it. Don't put it off, thinking Fido will find his own way home after a while. He might, but if he doesn't you will have given him extra time to wander further and further from home.

If it's your dog that is lost, first check the places in your neighborhood where it usually goes: parks, school yards, wooded areas, or the homes of neighbor's pets. Look carefully, call its name, and

check every location twice.

If it's your cat that's missing, be sure to look up and under. Look up into trees or anything else your cat may have climbed. Look under cars, into alleys, behind garbage cans, and into any small place where a frightened or injured cat might crawl seeking seclusion and safety. In cold weather, check under and around automobiles. Cats are attracted to the leftover warmth of car engines. Call the cat by name, then listen carefully for answering meows.

Ask neighbors if they've seen your pet. If they haven't, ask them to keep an eye out for it. Describe the pet and tell them where you can be reached if they should find it. Ask postmen, patrolmen, meter readers, and anyone else who regularly walks the neighborhood to watch for your pet.

If your pet does have an I.D. tag on its collar, it's a good idea to leave someone at your house to answer the phone or doorbell in case a good Samaritan finds your pet and brings it home.

If you've had no luck after two or three hours of searching the neighborhood, it's time for more strenuous measures. The following suggestions may bring you success:

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Make signs. Use posterboard and an ink that won't run if it rains. Write "LOST", then describe the dog or cat, giving color, size, breed, sex, and any other identifying features it has. If you have a good photograph of your pet, you might try making copies of it on a photocopy machine and pasting a

copy on each sign. If you are offering a reward, put that on the sign, too. Sometimes a reward can motivate people to return your pet who would not otherwise bother.

Put your name and phone number on the sign. If you work, you should also write your office number or the number of a friend who is usually home when you're not.

If you can, get flyers with the same information mimeographed or photocopied. These can be handed out to paperboys, postmen, and others who regularly walk through the neighborhood.

Post the cardboard signs where they are most likely to be seen by the greatest number of people. Some good places are bus stops, busy intersections, parks, and playgrounds. You can also ask permission to post signs in neighborhood stores, post offices, police stations, or veterinary clinics. In any case, it's a good idea to notify nearby veterinarians that you've lost a pet, in case it gets injured and a passerby brings it in for emergency treatment.



Notify the animal shelters and city pound that you've lost a pet. Don't call just the shelter nearest you—call all shelters in your city. A dog can easily travel twenty miles a day, and the person who finds it may take it to the shelter nearest him, not nearest you.

If you don't know where the shelters in your city are, check the yellow pages under "Animal

Welfare Agencies" and the local government listings in the white pages for the city animal control facility. If you can't find listings in the phone book, your veterinarian may be able to tell you how to reach the shelter or pound.

Visit each shelter in person every two or three days to be sure of finding your pet if it is there. Even though your dog is unique and special to you, a shelter that handles 10,000 or more animals a year may not recognize it from your description. This is even more true for cats, where often the only distinguishing feature is color. At any time, there may be a half a dozen cats at the shelter the same color as yours. So it's important to visit the shelters in person, and make return visits every few days. If you have flyers describing your pet, leave a copy with shelter personnel. Don't give up hope too soon. There are many cases of pets and owners being reunited after a month or more of searching.

Put an ad in the newspaper. Most papers have a "Lost and Found" section in the classifieds where you can place a free or inexpensive ad. Describe your pet, tell when and where it was last seen, and where you can be reached. If your local paper has a small circulation, you may be able to afford to print a photo of your pet with the ad. Advertise the reward if you are offering one. Be sure to check the "Found" ads daily in case your pet is listed. Keep your ad running as long as you can. To save money, you can run the ad every other day, or only on weekends.

Some radio stations offer the free service of broadcasting descriptions of missing pets. Check the stations in your area to see if any of them are willing to do this for you.

Finally, you may want to check

with the police department or dog warden about dead animals picked up off the streets and highways of your town. It's very difficult to face the possibility that your pet may have been killed. But if the worst has happened, wouldn't you rather know the truth than wonder for months and years what happened to your pet?



If you are diligent in your search, you may finally see that one-of-a-kind face behind the wire gate of a shelter cage, or get the long awaited phone call that leads you to your pet. Have a joyous reunion, but don't forget there are a few things left to do. Take down the signs you've posted, and inform neighbors who've helped you in your search that your pet is home. Be sure to let the animal shelters know, too, so they can take your animal off the "lost" list. If you feel that a shelter has been especially helpful in your search, consider making a donation to help the shelter help other animals and owners.

If your pet has been "on the streets" for a week or more, it would be a good idea to take it to your veterinarian to check for parasites or diseases it may have picked up in its wanderings.

Last, but hardly least, promise yourself and your pet this will never happen again.