

Lost and Found

According to the American Animal Hospital Association, roughly 30% of families have experienced the heart-break of losing their pet. Unfortunately, many of those families never see their furry friend again. This article is full of tips that will help the two of you reunite.

Time is of the essence when you are trying to relocate a missing pet. The longer your pet is isn't safe at home, the lower the odds that it will ever happen. So, what should you do if Fluffy is AWOL and what steps should you take if you're the one who finds someone's stray companion?

First, call all local papers and place a "lost" ad and make sure you read the "found" ads every day. Sometimes, the person who found the pet will place a "found" ad and assume the owner of the pet will check the paper. Likewise, the pet owner who placed the "lost" ad will assume the person who found the pet will check the paper. Many pets do not find their way home due to these assumptions. If you have found a stray pet, many newspapers will run a "found" ad free for a certain number of days. Call all ads that even remotely resemble your pet. Many people incorrectly guess breed or breed mix, weight, color and/or sex. Also, some people will place a collar on or take an existing collar off of a found pet.

The next step is to find two recent, clear, color photographs of your pet and make "lost" posters. If possible, one photo should be of your pet from the front, the other of your pet from the side. Add a close-up if available. List any and all unique or distinguishing marks your pet may have.

If you have found a pet, put as little detail on the "found" poster as possible. If someone calls you regarding the pet you have found, ask the person claiming to be the owner to describe the pet in detail before you give the pet up. Do not answer questions about the pet. There are unscrupulous individuals out there who will pretend to be the owner. These individuals ("Bunchers" or "Class B Dealers") then typically sell the animals to research laboratories or puppy mills. If you believe you've found your stray's owner, have the individual bring proof of ownership such as a picture.

Once you have made the posters, put them up all over the area in which you lost or found the pet. Pass them out to as many neighbors as possible. Enlist their help if they are willing. Also, place the posters at all local veterinarians, groomers, boarding facilities, humane shelters, and animal control facilities. If you do not have current pictures of your pet from the front and from the side, please consider taking some.

If your lost pet is spotted, it is important not to run after them. They may be scared. Sit down on the ground and call your pet. Use your pet's name. Have delicious treats with you. Use phrases your pet enjoys like: "Do you want a treat? Do you want to go for a walk/go for a ride?", etc.". Cats may need to be live-trapped.

Do not rely on individuals at humane shelters or animal control facilities to find your pet. While the people who work in these places strive to reunite as many pets with their owners as possible, these organizations handle thousands of animals each year and see literally hundreds of cats which may look exactly like your lost brown tabby cat or dogs that closely resemble your lost beagle mix. Call your local shelters (within at least a 30 mile radius) to find out where strays are housed and what the minimum holding period is. The minimum holding period is the length of time a shelter is required to hold a stray pet before euthanasia is performed. This varies from county to county and is often 2-4 days. Visit the shelter in person at least once during every minimum holding period. Make certain you are taken into all areas of the shelter, including "intake", "isolation" and "bite hold" sections to search for your pet.

Would you like to ensure that your pet finds her way home to you should she become lost? Identification tags and microchips are two simple ways to guarantee her safe return. Unidentified pets have less than a 10% chance of ever finding their way home. Even if your pet lives exclusively indoors, all it takes is one open door, one loose screen, an open

window or natural disaster and your pet is on the loose with absolutely no identification. The best tag is one with your home phone number and your pet's name on it. Additional tags such as rabies (as long as the clinic name and number are on it), and county license can be helpful if they are current. If the tags are not current, chances are we cannot trace them. If your pet has a habit of losing tags, write the pet's name and your phone number on his or her collar with permanent marker.

In addition to an I.D. tag, all pets should be microchipped. Microchips are a permanent form of identification placed under the skin in between the shoulder blades. If your pet were to lose his collar, he would still have a form of identification on him. Microchips are safe and inexpensive and your veterinarian can place one in seconds while your pet is awake. Make certain the person placing the microchip has had proper training. This procedure is best performed under veterinary supervision. Remember to update your registration information with the microchip company if you move or they will not be able to call you when your pet is located.

A note to folks with senior pets. Don't assume your older pet has passed away if he or she goes missing! Stray elderly pets are seen at the shelter every day. It is absolutely heart breaking to see a senior pet languishing in the shelter. When an older pet goes missing, they haven't purposefully "gone off to die", they have usually just gotten a little confused and wandered outside their home range. Please look for your older pet if he or she is lost. They deserve it!

Last but not least, don't give up! In some cases it can take a few months to find a missing pet. This typically occurs when the well-meaning individuals who originally found the pet, keep the pet for too long before attempting to find the owner or surrendering the pet to a shelter. So, keep at it and, remember, the more often people see your pet's information, the more likely they are to recognize your pet.