

What to do when your pet has gone missing?

By Beata Liebetruith

Even the most pampered, protected pet can become lost. A door accidentally left ajar can be all it takes to send you off on a desperate search. Looking for a lost pet is an emotional and frustrating event. However, following some simple steps might help bring your pet home before you can say "Fancy Feast."

One of the biggest mistakes people make when a pet goes missing is waiting a day or so to see if he'll wander back home. Most people will walk the streets around their home and call for their pet and this can work. However, don't be shy about knocking on neighbors' doors and asking if they have seen your pet. Also ask them to please check their garage, tool sheds, and crawl spaces. Cats often slip into small spaces unnoticed and can be trapped when doors are shut.

Before setting out to scour the neighborhood, place food, water, your cat's litter box, and an unwashed piece of your clothing outside the door. These items might help lure your pet home.

As you search the neighborhood, bring flyers or a pen and paper to write down your contact information for people, a favorite squeaky toy or treats, a flashlight to search trees and underneath cars, a leash and collar in case you find your pet. If your pet has a favorite companion, bring them along too.

Post and hand out flyers with your pet's picture and your phone number. Flyers are inexpensive to make and are a powerful tool when searching for a missing pet. Keep it simple. To get people emotionally involved, you may state on the flyer how much you miss your pet – "Child is heartbroken" or "My best friend is missing." I have seen total strangers take off work to help look for a pet because they were moved by a sign they saw. The website www.petbond.com offers a free and easy to use flyer-maker program.

Ask businesses to put up a copy of your flyer. This includes gas stations, fast food restaurants, convenience and grocery stores, veterinarians, groomers, trainers, and pet stores. Give copies of your flyer to people that walk their dogs in the area. Keep in mind that as many as one-third of pets are located more than 10 miles from their home. If, after a few weeks, your pet is still missing, create new flyers and write "Pet Still Missing" at the top.

Personally go to all the area animal shelters at least every other day. Calling the animal control department or shelter on the phone is not very effective. The way you describe your pet may not be the way a shelter describes your pet. You must visit the shelter, even if your pet was wearing tags when it was lost. 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 20 miles of where your pet was lost.

Put an ad in area newspapers. Some people will only look in the newspaper to locate an animal's owner.

Don't get discouraged! Most pets are amazing survivors and won't give up finding their way back to you, so please don't give up on them.

Prevention Tips

- Make sure your pet is wearing up-to-date tags on his collar at all times.
- Microchipping your pet can help ensure that you are reunited. Washoe County Animal Control Officers do their best to scan pets in the field for a microchip and get them back home to their people.
- Keep current photographs of your pet and document their details. One black Labrador may look like a thousand others, but does yours have a black spot on his tongue, a pink toe pad, missing or broken teeth, or a notch in his ear?

Websites where you can post lost/found pets:

www.petharbor.com - Washoe County Regional Animal Services posts all incoming strays hourly.

www.petfinder.com

www.pets911.com

www.lostpaws.com

www.h4ha.org/lost/found