

Lost and Found: Tips for Recovering a Lost Pet

If your pet disappears, stay calm, form a plan of action, and recruit as many people as you can to help with the search. Dogs will wander farther than cats, so if you're searching for a dog, immediately organize a team to comb the neighborhood and drive the surrounding area, posting signs and asking people along the way if they've seen a pooch on the run. Your recruits also should call all animal control agencies, shelters, and rescue groups within a 60-mile radius.

If you're looking for a cat, focus your initial search on a five- to seven-house radius, where indoor cats who bolt are likely to remain, says pet detective Kat Albrecht. Ask neighbors if you can check their yards, the spaces under their homes, and outbuildings. Inspect nooks and crannies where a disoriented cat could hole up, and bring a tasty treat as an enticement.

If your cat is too scared to come out, set baited humane traps with voice-activated baby monitors (to alert you when an animal is caught) in the areas you suspect she's hiding. In some cases, an amplified listening device or "plumber's camera" can help locate cats trapped or hiding under buildings. Remember that it can take a few days for cats to build up enough courage—or become hungry enough—to come out of hiding.

If you've followed these initial steps and are still coming up empty, it's time to take your search to the next level:

▶ **SPREAD THE WORD:** Make lost pet signs that are big, bright, and brief. On fluorescent poster board, write "Reward" in huge letters at the top and "Lost Dog" (or cat) at the bottom. In the middle, tape a flier with a photo of your pet between two or three words of description. Post the signs in highly trafficked areas, and take the flier to every animal shelter and veterinary clinic in the area.

Place ads in newspapers and announcements on radio stations. Check online at sites such as Fido Finder (fidofinder.com), Craig's List (craigslist.org), and Dog Detective (dogdetective.com). Consider using a lost pet alert service like findtoto.org to contact homes in your area.



▶ **HIRE SOME HELP:** If you can afford to hire a pet detective, start looking for one quickly, since scent trails weaken over time. When hiring a detective, ask for references and steer clear of anyone who guarantees success. Also beware of pet-recovery scam artists, such as someone who claims to have found your pet and asks for money before returning the animal.

▶ **BE PERSISTENT:** Visit animal shelters daily if possible; don't rely on staff to notify you if your pet is brought in. Keep in mind that many shelters have limited space and may adopt out or euthanize animals after a holding period—usually anywhere from three to seven days. Be sure to also ask shelter staff if your pet could have been placed in a foster home or transferred to a rescue group or if there are other shelters you should be checking.

Most of all, don't lose hope—many reunions occur after months of separation.

▶ **FOR MORE DETAILS** on pet recovery strategies, visit missingpetpartnership.org.