

# FINDING A LOST PET

**RIGHT NOW**...take 3 good quality COLOR photos of your pet. Full frontal, side and close up head shot. Keep them on your computer where you can make posters quickly if necessary. Update the photos frequently as your pet changes appearance (groomed, color changes, age, etc.).

Start first by searching your property and neighborhood. Take a strong flashlight to check under porches and possible hiding spaces (drains, vents, garage, sheds). Knock on neighbor's doors and ask if they have seen your pet. Let them know you are searching.

Beginning your search on your own property is especially true for cats. An indoor cat that accidentally gets loose outdoors is automatically considered to be in unfamiliar territory, which is frightening to even the boldest cat. Therefore, most indoor cats, whether self-confident or timid, will initially hide — and the hiding spot is generally close by (even under your own home) unless the cat has been chased further by a dog or another animal. Unless you SEE your cat escape outdoors, check EVERY single drawer, cupboard, closet shelf, packing/storage box, under/behind furniture, inside folding sofas, recliners, ice chests/coolers – anything that's remotely large enough to 'contain' a cat FIRST!

Call the police or sheriff and ask them to be on the alert. If you know your pet was stolen they MUST take a report; do not let them refuse to take a stolen pet report, \*but don't expect them to actually 'search'\*

Call your local shelters and animal control; also call shelters and pounds in adjoining counties. It is best to visit the shelters yourself, as many shelters are too busy to look for your pet and may miss him.

Advertise in every newspaper and penny saver type paper you can. Some papers will place free ads for lost pets.

Call breeders in your area and ask for their help--they can pass along the information to any local or state wide breed clubs. Send a flyer to them. If you can, find others on the web with your breed of dog, and ask a few to help spread the word.

Some breeds have a WEB-page for lost dogs of that particular breed. You can also send out lost/stolen dog notices to various breed email lists, and ask that it be forwarded. (Having your dog's picture uploaded on the web can help... build a page if you can, and make a printable flyer for your dog.)

Call radio stations and TV news stations and ask for fax number or email. Give a good description of your pet. Be aware that not everyone will know what breed your dog is if it is uncommon. You must be very clear in the description. Give its age, markings, height, weight, sex and whether the pet is spayed or neutered. Describe your pet's personality as well. Most stations won't do these, but 'local access' stations for cable TV may - some local 'talk radio' stations with limited range are your best bet.

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Contact road construction crews. Tell them that if they find your pet on the road, dead or injured, that you need to know about it. Not knowing is the worst part; even if your pet is dead it is better to know than to wonder for the rest of your life what may have happened. The Dept. of Transportation in some areas is responsible for removal/disposal of dead animals; make sure they have flyers – and the ‘reward’ holds for dead or alive.

Change your answering machine message to say: “I am sorry I am unable to take your call personally at this time. If this is a call about the lost pet, please leave the time of your call, location of the sighting, and your phone number. You may also try to reach me at 555-123-4567.”

Make large posters 14X21 by using two 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of paper (landscape), one on the top and one on the bottom with a picture of the pet in the middle. Cover the whole poster with clear "Contact" shelf paper. This makes the poster waterproof and it'll last for weeks. Use very bold print so it can be seen by a passing vehicle, with a telephone number of someone immediately available to check out a sighting. Make it brief, no long explanations on why the pet got loose, etc. You want someone driving by to be able to see the phone number easily, so that if they spot the pet they could call from a cell phone. Put "PLEASE DO NOT CHASE!" on the sign.

Make flyers, using good, clear photos. Note any distinguishing markings or behaviors. Offer a reward, if you can, but DO NOT post how much the reward is. Be sure to note on the flyer if your pet is on any medications or needs regular veterinary care.

Always put a phone number on the poster or flyer where someone is available all the time. When someone calls with a sighting, you must go NOW, not hours later...Pets do not meander around the same place usually, they seem to be "going" somewhere. Either back to their hideout or a new hideout.

Get at least 200 flyers to start with, and post them within a 1 mile radius wherever people will gather and have the chance to see them.

### Post flyers at:

Animal shelters	Grocery stores
Veterinary offices	Gas and service stations
Pet shops	Laundromats
Feed stores	Daycare centers
Sheriff and Police departments	Rest stops
Fire departments	Video stores
Grooming shops	Restaurants
Tack stores	Bars and taverns
Libraries	Ball fields

Keep a supply of flyers in your car, and give one to other pet lovers you happen to run across. Give them to anyone with a dog in their car, especially if that person has the same breed as yours. Animal lovers are happy to help keep an eye out for a lost or stolen pet.

### Give flyers to:

- Trainers...both dog and horse trainers may be willing to help.
- Farriers...if your dog is out in the country with someone, farriers can help to keep open eyes on farms and ranches that may have dogs not visible from the road.
- Schools...ask the principal of any area schools if you can give a flyer to each teacher to show the class. Kids are great at spotting pets. [include school bus drivers]
- Delivery people and agencies
- Gas and Oil Delivery
- Postal employees (ask if you can post one in post office lobbies too; it may be considered "advertising" and not allowed)
- DON'T put flyers in mail boxes (it is illegal to use mail boxes for 'private' stuff, but you can hook them to the "flags" on the box)
- Florists, UPS/FedEx offices and fuel delivery employees, utility meter readers
- Road crews and construction workers
- Garbage collectors

You might want to get a notebook in which you can write down all the people, numbers, shelters, etc. that you have called and sent flyers to. Your vet may have the AMVA directory from last year, and if he or she will let you have the outdated directory, you may want to send flyers to as many vets in your area and state as you can. Check off the name of each vet as you address your envelopes. You might make a short cover letter to send along, and ask if they can share this flyer with others in their area. They may even be able to give them to their pharmaceutical delivery people to help distribute.

Keep a list of everyone who calls with a sighting and a phone number so that if you get to that place of the sighting and can't figure out what they said, you can call them back and maybe they can meet you there and tell you which way she was headed, etc. Get a map of the area (Mapquest) and mark the sightings on the map.

Call a search and rescue club in your area to help track your dog. They may be able to find your dog in minutes if they can use their dogs for tracking other dogs and not people. If they cannot help, ask for referrals.

If you hire a pet detective, make sure that the dog and handler are certified. Training a dog to search for missing pets takes just as much effort as training a dog to search for a missing person. Unfortunately, with any great idea there are going to be people who try to take advantage of the situation. There have been reports of individuals putting vests (signifying a search dog) on untrained dogs and charging significant sums of money to search for missing pets, warns Albrecht. Before hiring anyone to find your pet, make sure you check the individual's credentials and call his or her references.

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Be aware of scams!! DO NOT pay anyone for any reason your reward money until you have your pet in your hands!! Some scammers will call you and tell you they have your pet in some other state, and they will send you the pet after you send them some money. Do not fall for this. You will never see your pet or your money, if you do.

Type in "lost pets" in your browser screen, and you'll get a list of websites for services that help locate lost or stolen pets.

Make sure to look for him at his regular meal times. This seems to bring frightened/lost pets out of hiding, being the creatures of habit that they are. Check around restaurants, businesses that sell food; he may be trying to scavenge scraps

Check "FOUND" ads every day.

If the pet was timid to begin with...he will be hiding, terrified. When hunger finally overtakes fear, it will venture out of his hiding place. That is when the mass notification of the whole area will pay off. Hopefully, somebody will see him and call a phone number from a sign or one of those business cards. At that point somebody needs to GO, right then... because the pet is going have fear overtake hunger and go back to hiding somewhere.

Most times a humane trap is a very good idea. If you find the area it is in get a humane trap to that location. You will put food and its toys and something with your scent on it, inside the trap. Do NOT try to chase it and risk having the pet run. The passive way to recover is with the trap.

Animal Control they may loan a trap if you have a sighting. Check area rescue sources for traps to borrow. Place clothing, toys, and food in the trap and give it time. Check the trap frequently to release any captured critters that you didn't want to capture, like squirrels or raccoons, etc.

If you get sightings don't chase! You'll just chase it out of the area. Try to keep it comfortably in the area it is spotted in. Find a place to feed it, so that it feels it can come back to that spot for food...and then try to beg, borrow or steal a humane trap.

For every day that passes that you don't have any calls with sightings, put new signs out approximately 1 mile in each direction.

Create "drop zones" where you can leave food and an article of your clothing so your pet will stay with your scent.

KEEP GOING TO THE SHELTERS, every day if possible. They don't have time or staffing to check for you.

*Many thanks to all those who contributed suggestions for this article.*

