



Locating a Lost Cat

Cat owners often behave in ways that actually inhibit their chances of finding their lost cat. They develop “tunnel vision” and fail to find their cat because they focus on wrong theories. They experience “grief avoidance” and quickly give up their search effort. They feel helpless and alone, often discouraged by others who rebuke them and tell them “it was just a cat” and “you’ll never find your cat.” But one of the biggest problems is that cat owners typically focus their search efforts by posting lost cat flyers, calling the local shelter, and placing a litterbox on their front porch assuming the cat will do all the work and come home.

Although these techniques are important and should not be overlooked, the primary technique to recover a missing cat should be to obtain permission from all neighbors to enter their yards and conduct an aggressive, physical search for the missing cat (and to set baited humane traps there when necessary). Simply asking a neighbor to “look” for the lost cat is not sufficient! Neighbors are not going to crawl around on their bellies under their decks or houses to search for someone else’s lost cat!

Your cat needs you

The important thing to remember is that your cat can’t tell you where he is—you are responsible for his safety and rescue. So please don’t give up after only a day or two. We recommend that you keep looking for as long as six months, if necessary. There are reports in the media of “miracle cats” who return after a year or more. Your cat could be a miracle cat.

Look closest to home

If you did not actually see your cat slip outside, be sure to thoroughly search your home. Cats have been known to hide in the most remote places, such as closets, empty boxes, and under furniture. If you live in an apartment, be sure to check the hallways, stairwells, basement, storage closets, laundry rooms, and any vacant apartments that may have had a door ajar. Also, check with neighbors as they may have either seen or taken in your cat. Most lost cats who have always lived indoors will not go far from home. Many are discovered hiding just a few doors away or even a few feet from the front door. Start by looking under nearby porches, in basements and garages, in bushes, and even under cars. Once outside, your cat will likely be wary or frightened of any human voice and may not recognize you or come immediately when you call. Don’t be discouraged if he doesn’t respond. Call to your cat as if you’ve just seen him, using an upbeat voice, the kind of voice that you normally use to greet him. Call your cat’s name often and listen for a reply.

*Information in this article has been provided by our friends at Missing Pet Partnership. For even more helpful tips please visit their home page at www.missingpetpartnership.org.



Be a detective

As you search for your cat, ask everyone you meet if they've seen him. Children are particularly good sources of information as they are usually outdoors more often than adults. Ask people walking dogs, the mail carrier, owners of nearby businesses, and people coming to and from work. The more people you include in your search, the more likely you are to find your cat.

Post signs

As soon as possible after losing a cat, post signs to alert the neighborhood and to social media. Put a good description and photo of your cat on your signs, and make sure to offer a reward. Color copies are generally preferable to properly distinguish your cat's features. Include where and when the cat was lost and a telephone number and email address where you can be reached. If your cat has been microchipped, include the microchip identification number (also, alert the microchip company that your cat is lost). To be effective, you must blanket your area with these lost signs, beginning within a one or two block radius and gradually expanding the area. Ask friends to help you slide signs under the doors of neighbors' houses and apartments, and to post them at local businesses and veterinary hospitals. Place the flyers in visible areas, even on the windshields of parked cars.

Set up a temporary outdoor feeding station

Leave fresh food and water outside on a porch or in a sheltered area close to your home. Set up a large, sturdy box lined with an old towel or other items that smell familiar to your cat. If your lost cat should return while you are asleep or away from home, food, and shelter may save his life.

When to look

The best time to look for a lost cat is when it's dark and streets are quiet as the cat may be too fearful to come out during the day when there is more activity from people and traffic. Take a flashlight with you and search under parked cars, in yards, under bushes, and in alleys. It's a good idea to take a friend along at night for safety and to bring some canned cat food or tuna or salmon to attract your cat.

Notify humane agencies

Call all the animal shelters and veterinary hospitals in your area, beginning with the municipal animal control agency. Be sure to provide a good description of the lost cat and ask them to post your sign or take down specific information on your cat, should he be brought there later. Consider delivering a photo of your cat or sending a picture via email—so many cats look alike, it's hard to provide a comprehensive description over the phone. Be sure to continually and frequently check with shelters as unclaimed animals often are at risk of being euthanized.

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Outdoor-Access Cats: Cats are territorial. When an outdoor-access cat suddenly vanishes, it means that SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED to that cat to interrupt its normal behavior of coming home. The disappearance could mean that the cat is injured, trapped, or deceased within its territory. Or perhaps the cat was transported out of the area-either intentionally (by an irate neighbor who trapped the cat) or unintentionally (by the cat climbing into an open vehicle). Possibly the cat was displaced into unfamiliar territory (something as simple as being chased by a dog several houses away) causing it to panic and hide in silence.

Indoor-Only Cats: The territory for an indoor-only cat is the inside of the home where it lives. When an indoor-only cat escapes outdoors, it is “displaced” into unfamiliar territory. Usually they will look for the first place that will offer concealment and protection. Their instinctive response is to HIDE IN SILENCE because that is their primary protection from predators. How long they remain in that hiding place and what they do from there is dependent upon their temperament.

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