



Lost and Found Pets



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Stray pets are often lost, or were abandoned by their owner. Pets never choose to be stray.

Dogs bond to people and view their family as their pack. They do not wander off, except if they think they are playing a friendly game of chase. A new dog, not yet bonded to its owner, might look for its last owner. A dog left alone in a yard might be bored and dig out of the yard to go and look for its owner.

Cats are territorial animals and bond to places. Cats very seldom understand the concept of a fence and assume they have free range, but they always desire to return to their home. Cats are easily lost or confused when their owners move house, or take them on holiday. Out of their home environment, a cat may panic and may not even respond to their owner.

Any pet, when not spayed or neutered, will be ruled by sexual desires. This will mean they wander more often, and over longer distances, but generally will desire to return home.

Lost or abandoned pets may become feral after living without an owner for sometime. Feral animals will revert to wild behaviours and can sometimes be dangerous. Feral dogs may form packs and become aggressive. Many of these animals have not been neutered and so they contribute to the growing problem of stray and feral animals.

Prevention

If you allow your pet to stray you may face a penalty and if your pet is found roaming it may either be captured or put down without your knowledge. If your pet causes any injury to humans it may also be put down and you may face criminal charges.

Remember that your pet may be a risk to others, or may cause or be involved in a road accident. If you live in a rural area, your pet may also be a risk to local livestock.

There are several ways to avoid losing your pet, as well as ways to make finding them easier.

- **Set a Containment Policy** - It is essential, particularly if you have a dog, that you have a secure method of keeping your pet on your property. Check your fence for holes or spots vulnerable to chewing or digging. If your property is not fenced in some way, please stress to family members that your dog must be on a lead at all times when taken outdoors, until you have made the necessary changes.
- **Neutering** - Un-neutered pets will often wander further, particularly when in season or if there is another animal in season in the area. Until you have had your pet neutered, you must ensure that it has no way to escape. Un-neutered pets may breed with other animals in the area which may contribute to the problem of stray animals.

- **Training** - Well-trained pets are less likely to run away from their owners. Dogs must be taught to come to the sound of their owner's voice or another command. Cats can be trained to come to a sound – for example the shaking of their biscuit box. Speak to your local animal shelter or research online for dog-training classes in your area, or speak to your vet about techniques for training your pet.

- **Exercise** - Bored or neglected pets are more likely to wander off. Keep your pet stimulated, well-fed and exercised.



- **Tags/Collars** - Have a tag made with your name, address and phone number that you can put onto your pet's collar. If your pet does run away, an up-to-date tag will increase the chances of your pet being returned to the new address.
- **Microchipping** - Microchips are methods of permanently identifying your pet and can be invaluable in recovering your dog / cat if they should become lost. If your pet already has a microchip, be sure to update your microchip provider if your contact details change.

Lost Pets

- **The First Stop** - The first stop when searching for your lost pet should be your home and garden. Your pet may be hiding or trapped somewhere on your property. Check cupboards, unused rooms, under the shed and so on- you'd be surprised by the places pets choose to squeeze into!



- **Neighbours** - If you believe your pet is missing, ask in your local area as a neighbour may have seen your pet or may be looking after it thinking it is a stray. Consider putting up posters with a picture of your pet and your contact details. If your pet could be considered dangerous to humans or other animals, it is important that you call your local warden or animal shelter immediately.
- **Wardens & Shelters** - If you believe your dog or cat is lost, contact your local warden and animal shelters with a detailed description of your pet. They may have already found them and will be able to help and advise you.

- **The Police** - Contact the police if you think your pet has been stolen. The police may pick up stray animals if they are found chasing or worrying local livestock, but otherwise stray animals are the responsibility of the local authority.
- **Veterinary Surgeries** - Phone all of the veterinary surgeries in your area. Sadly, your dog may have been involved in a fight or an accident. Leave your details with the vet and they will contact you if they find an animal that matches your description.
- **Pedigrees** - If your pet is a pedigree, try your local breeders or contact the Kennel Club on 0870 6066750 for details of your local breed rescue group.
- **Local Areas & Buildings** - Visit places where you usually walk your dog, or where you know your pet visits. If there are building sites or workmen in your area, ask around in case your pet has become trapped somewhere. If you have moved house recently, ask around in your last neighbourhood as your pet may have walked to your old address. Pets will often travel further than you may expect!
- **Notice boards** - Check notice boards in local supermarkets and veterinary surgeries as someone may have found your pet and posted a notice locally. There may also be notice boards online for your area.

Found Pets

- **Safety** - Lost or abandoned pets will often be stressed and anxious which may lead to aggression. Be wary of approaching strays unless you are certain that it is safe to do so. If you do come across a stray, it is best to call your local animal warden or shelter rather than trying to catch the animal yourself.
- **Identification** - Not all pets wear collars and sometimes they can fall off. Some pets have microchips, and even tattoos. If you see a pet without a collar, it may not be a stray. If you suspect an animal is lost, ask people in your local area as it may be a neighbour's pet that has come to explore your garden!



- **Food & Water** - The animal may not have access to food and water and stray pets can often starve if they can't find food themselves. Consider placing a dish of food and water in a safe place for the animal until you have spoken to a local warden or animal shelter.
- **Finding the Owner** - If you are looking after a stray call your local shelter or warden to see if anyone has reported a missing pet of that description. Put up a poster with a picture of the pet and your contact details around the area in the hope that you can reunite them with their owner.
- **Adoption** - If you would like to adopt the lost animal you must still inform the local warden. Local authorities must try to identify the animal and find its owners before the animal can be put up for adoption.
- **Injured Animals** - If you find a stray which has been injured be aware that this animal may behave aggressively and will require medical attention. Call your veterinary surgery and your local warden immediately.



If you have any questions about lost and found pets or a query about any aspect of this fact sheet, please email us at enquiries@iapwa.org and our Veterinary Panel will be happy to advise you.