

Tips From a Pet Detective on How Best to Find Your Lost Cat or Dog

In the blink of an eye, your pet can become lost. It's very distressing, but Kat Albrecht, a pet detective, says there is good reason to be hopeful if you follow her advice.



By Bonney Brown

Lost Cats

“The mystery to solve when an indoor-only cat escapes outdoors or is lost in unfamiliar territory is – Where is the cat hiding?” says Albrecht. “When an outdoor cat vanishes, the question is – What has happened to the cat?”

While posters and shelter searches are worth doing, they will not help if the cat is injured and hiding in silence, as cats tend to do. There is no substitute for what Albrecht calls an “aggressive, physical search of a cat's territory; looking under and in every conceivable hiding place in your yard and in your neighbors' yards. Simply asking a neighbor to look for the lost cat is not sufficient.” In many cases, the hiding cat can be found within a five-house radius.

A lost cat is usually so fearful that they will not come out even if they hear or see a beloved person. Instinct drives them to keep hidden and silent. For this reason, a humane trap is often the best way to recover the cat. Persistence is critical with lost cats.

Lost Dogs

Dogs can go missing for a variety of reasons, from an opportunistic journey when a gate is accidentally left open, to panic that can set in when a dog is frightened. A frightened dog will travel fast and likely be unresponsive even to someone they love and trust. Recovering a lost dog is all about launching a very visible marketing campaign.

Making an effective lost pet poster

Albrecht recommends a large florescent poster with brief wording that conveys a visual image of the lost pet. This is far more effective than the common letter-sized posters, because you only have a few seconds to get your message across to people driving by.

In your fliers or ads, withhold at least one identifying characteristic you can use to verify that a person has actually found your pet. Do not include your name, address, or a specific reward amount. When you go to claim your pet, take someone along and do not pay any reward until you have your pet back. Sad to say, scams have been perpetrated on people eager to be reunited with their pet.

Urgency and persistence pay off

The first few hours can be very fruitful both in terms of finding the pet and connecting with people who may have seen the pet, so don't take a wait-and-see approach.

You can look for lost pets online at www.petharbor.com. While not all shelters post found animals here, Washoe County Regional Animal Services does. Microchipping your pets can facilitate the reunion of dogs and cats who end up in shelters – I've seen pets reunited even years later by microchips.



In closing, consider Albrecht's words of encouragement; "Physically, your pet is out there somewhere and you stand a good chance of bringing your pet back home if you remain focused, positive and persistent in your efforts."

Bonney Brown is Co-Founder and President of Humane Network. She created and sustained a 94% communitywide save rate as Executive Director for Nevada Humane Society, which had more than 10,000 annual animal admissions. And she was National No More Homeless Pets Director, COO and Communications Director for Best Friends Animal Society.

