

Search Checklist for Cats Lost Away From Home

Cats may become lost away from home for several reasons: 1) they escape from a distant location such as the vet or while visiting someone, 2) they recently moved to a new home and are still unfamiliar with the area, or 3) they are either accidentally or intentionally transported in a car and escape when the car stops. Whether indoor-only or outdoor-access, a lost cat is likely to be scared, and their natural instinct is to hide and remain silent. Even if you have an inseparable bond with your cat, do not expect him to come out or meow when you search and call his name. Some cats will, but far more cats are too frightened to do so. Even if you cannot find your cat with repeated searches, it is very likely that he is still out there somewhere. Do not give up hope!

1. Physical Search

A. Search Indoors

If no one saw your cat escape, search indoors thoroughly. This applies to cats lost in new homes, other people's homes or other locations, such as the vet's office. Do not expect your cat to respond to your voice.

- Search within the first 1-2 days or as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- If there is any chance your cat is trapped or hiding in fear, repeat the search at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond after being hidden or trapped for this long.

B. Search the Surrounding Area

Search all potential hiding spots on property 3-5 houses (or 500 ft – ¼ mile) in all directions. Make sure to get the property owners' permission before doing this.

- This is most effective if done within the first 1-2 days, but some skittish cats will remain hidden longer.
- Get permission to search in any structure that has been opened since your cat escaped, such as sheds, garages or basements. Search under porches, sheds and decks with a flashlight.
- If there was any location you could not thoroughly search, such as a full shed, repeat your search at these locations at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond after being hidden for this long.
- When it is quietest, try walking around the area with a flashlight and look for the eye-shine of any cats.

C. Search Dog

- If you are potentially interested in hiring a search dog team, then read this article so you know what to expect: lostpetresearch.com/resources/search-dogs/. Less than 20% of lost pets are found using a search dog.

2. Advertising

A. Posters

Creating and posting effective lost pet posters is one of the most important things you can do! (Pet detectives report a success of anywhere from 40-90% with well made posters)

- Check for any town bylaws stating where and how signs may be legally posted.
- Start with posters in the immediate area and up to 1 mile.
- Expand posters 2-3 miles if there are no sightings.
- Some outdoor-access cats will attempt to return home on their own.
If your cat was lost within 10 miles of home (or a previous home), then place posters at major intersections between home and the location your cat was lost.
- Posters are easiest to read if placed where cars must slow down or stop.
- Your phone number and cat's picture must be large enough that they can be easily seen and read by someone sitting in a car or driving. Include a brief description of your cat and the date he was last seen.



B. Shelters and Rescue Groups

Locate all local shelters and rescue groups (try www.petfinder.com/animal-shelters-and-rescues/search/).

- Visit and provide a copy of your flyer. If you cannot visit, at least submit a lost pet report.
- Ask to see all cats, including those not on the adoption floor.
- Find out how long they hold new cats before putting them up for adoption, and visit at least this often.

C. Animal Control, Vets and Department of Public Works

- Contact your local Animal Control Officer and find out if they pick up stray cats.
- Cars rather than predators are often the greatest danger to lost cats. Find out who in your town picks up deceased animals and if they check cats for microchips/ID tags. This may be the Department of Public Works.
- Contact all local vets and your closest emergency vet and give them a copy of your flyer.

D. Flyers

Flyers should be hand-delivered or placed in locations where people walk. Explain that your cat may be hiding in fear, and ask people to check their property for any sign of your lost cat. **Flyers should not be used in place of posters where people are driving. This is the most frequent mistake that people make!**

- Start by distributing flyers in the immediate area that your cat escaped or went missing.
- Flyers may also be distributed in areas of potential sightings.
- Post flyers at any local businesses, parks, pet supply stores, gas stations, and the library and post office.
- Give flyers to anyone who regularly works in the area, such as the mailman.

E. Microchip

- If your cat is microchipped, contact the company and inform them that your cat is missing. Also make sure that your phone number and address on file are up-to-date.

F. Post Lost Pet Ads

- Post online classifieds with local newspapers.
- Post online ads on craigslist in *Pets* and *Lost & Found*, and repost weekly.
- Post your cat on www.lostmykitty.com, www.helpinglostpets.com, and www.tabbytracker.com
- Many local papers will post a small lost pet ad for free. However, a larger ad with photo is more effective.
- Post on social networking sites, such as Facebook. Also check for any "Community" pages for lost pets.
- Check online and in newspapers for any "found" or "for sale" ads that could be your cat.

3. Trapping & Surveillance

A. Humane Traps

- Borrow or purchase a humane trap or two. **This is often the best way to catch a frightened lost cat.** Place one trap outside near the point where your cat escaped. Some cats will return to these locations (even if it's the vet's office). Traps can also be used in the area of a verified sighting or if you see your cat and cannot catch him.

B. Surveillance

- Trapping or feeding stations (i.e. food placed out for your lost cat) are more effective if used with some form of surveillance. A trail camera is the best way to confirm who is eating the food you are leaving out. These can also be used to verify potential sightings.

C. Leave a Way for your Cat to Come Home

- Some outdoor-access cats will attempt to return to a previous home if you recently moved. If possible, leave a way for your cat to return home, such as an open porch, garage or window. If someone else lives in your former home, let them know that your cat is missing.
- Place out some items from home that smell like your lost cat (e.g. a blanket he slept on).

Release of Liability: Lost Pet Research & Recovery accepts no liability for the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of information provided in this checklist. By reading and using this checklist, you are releasing Lost Pet Research & Recovery and the distributors of this plan from all liability and accepting full responsibility for the search for your lost cat.

This is only a very brief list of search actions. There is much more that you could be doing to find your lost cat! For professional help, contact Lost Pet Research & Recovery at (413) 539-3530 or LostPetResearch.com. Additional information on lost cat behavior is available on this website and from www.MissingPetPartnership.org.