

Southern Connecticut Animal Trust, Inc.

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Dedicated to providing sanctuary and lifelong care to all homeless animals.

Lost Pet Behavior

How to Provide Recovery: Tips That Save Lives

By Kathy "Kat" Albrecht

Reprinted from *Paws to Think*, publication of *The Pet Savers Foundation*, Summer 2005 (Volume 4, Issue 3).

There is a *science* to finding lost people.

Professional trained searchers don't wander aimlessly in the woods when searching for a missing hiker. Instead, an organized search plan is implemented based on the knowledge of the behavioral patterns of lost people. For example, backpackers behave differently when lost and travel different distances than do hunters, berry pickers, and Alzheimer's patients. And because search-and-rescue managers are so familiar with these patterns of behavior, they can accurately predict where a lost person will be found. Backpackers are typically found on or near an established trail, hunters are typically found deep in the woods, and Alzheimer's patients are typically found within a 1/4 mile radius of where they became lost.

So what do we know about the behavioral patterns of *lost pets*? Thanks to Missing Pet Partnership, a grassroots nonprofit organization, we know that the three most common lost pet recovery tips that we give (place a classified ad in the paper, post flyers in your neighborhood, and visit the local animal shelter every day) are not always the best pieces of advice! That's because dogs are much different than cats. The methods that should be used to search for a lost dog, an outdoor-access cat that has vanished from its territory, and an indoor-only cat that has escaped outside are all

entirely different methods.

Dogs travel and are picked up by rescuers who determine their fate, the disappearance of an outdoor-access cat means that something has happened to interrupt that cat's behavior of coming home, and indoor-only cats that escape outdoors hide in silence near their escape point. And it is not only the behaviors of lost dogs and cats that have been overlooked – the behaviors of the people who lose their pets and the behaviors of the people who find those lost pets impact the chances that a lost pet will be returned home.

Understanding these human and animal behaviors will increase the likelihood that lost pets will be found. Here is what we know so far:

LOST CAT BEHAVIOR

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 returning home. The disappearance could mean that the cat is injured, trapped, or deceased within its territory. It could also mean that 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 opened parked van). It could also mean that the cat was displaced into unfamiliar territory—something as simple as being chased by a dog causing the cat to hide under a deck a block from home.

When this happens, the temperament of the cat will

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influence how it behaves. When displaced into unfamiliar territory, some cats will be so panicked and afraid they will remain in the same hiding place for weeks and they will never return home while others will break cover within hours and return home.

The investigative question to solve when an outdoor-access cat disappears is:

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CAT?

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 dependant upon their temperament. Using baited humane traps as a recovery tool is a highly effective method for recovering displaced, panicked cats that are hiding.

The investigative question to solve when an indoor-only cat escapes outdoors is:

WHERE IS THE CAT HIDING?

Temperaments that Influence Distances Traveled

Temperament influences actions. How a cat behaves when in its normal territory will influence how it behaves when it becomes “lost” or displaced into unfamiliar territory. Encourage cat owners to develop a search strategy based on the specific behavior of their cat. Here are guidelines to use:

Curious/Clown Cat

These are gregarious cats that get into trouble easily, run to the door to greet a stranger, and are not easily afraid of anything. When displaced, these cats might initially hide but then they will most likely TRAVEL. Strategy for recovery should be to place fluorescent posters within at least a five block radius. Also, interview neighbors in a door-to-door search, thoroughly searching possible hiding places in yards of houses and other areas within a close proximity to the escape

point. Do not assume that the cat will come when you call!

Care-less Cat

These aloof cats don’t seem to care much about people. When a stranger comes in, they stand back and watch. When displaced they will likely initially hide, but eventually they will break cover and come back to the door, meow, or possibly travel. Strategy should be to search hiding places nearby, interview neighbors door- to-door and search their yards. If these efforts do not produce results, consider setting a baited humane trap.

Cautious Cat

These cats are generally stable but they show occasional shyness. They like people but when a stranger comes to the door, they dart and hide. Some of these cats peek around the corner and eventually come out to investigate. When displaced, they will likely immediately hide in fear. If not pushed (scared off) from their hiding place, they will typically return to the point where they escaped from or they will meow when the owner comes to look for them. This behavior typically is observed either within the first two days (after the cat has built up confidence) or not until seven to ten days later when their hunger or thirst has reached a



point where they will respond. Strategy would be to conduct a tightly focused search in neighbors’ yards and to set baited humane traps.

Catatonic/Xenophobic Cat

Xenophobia means “fear or hatred of things strange or foreign.” Xenophobic cats are afraid of EVERYTHING that is new or unfamiliar. Their fearful behavior is hardwired into their character; it is caused by genetics and/or kittenhood experiences (nature or nurture). These cats will hide when a stranger comes into their home, and they typically will not come out until well after the company has left.

They do not do well with human contact (being held, petted, etc.) and they are easily disturbed by any change in their environment. When displaced, they bolt and then HIDE IN SILENCE. They tend to re-

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main in the same hiding place and become almost catatonic, immobilized with fear. If they are found by someone other than their owners, they are typically mistaken as being untamed or “feral.” The primary strategy to recover these cats would be to set baited humane traps. Xenophobic cats that become “lost” are routinely absorbed into the feral cat population.

LOST DOG BEHAVIOR

Dogs are much more difficult to recover than lost cats because they travel farther and they are picked up by rescuers who determine their fate. There are six major factors that influence the distances that lost dogs travel: Temperament, Circumstances, Weather, Terrain, Appearance, and Population Density.

Temperament of the Dog

How a dog behaves towards strangers influences how far it will travel (when lost) before someone intervenes and rescues it. There are three primary behavioral categories that lost dogs are classified into: Gregarious Dogs, Aloof Dogs, and Xenophobic Dogs.

Gregarious Dogs

Wiggly-butt, friendly dogs are more inclined to go directly up to the first person who calls them. Depending on the terrain and population density where the dog was lost, these dogs will generally be found fairly close to home or will be picked up by someone close to the escape point. Gregarious dogs are often “adopted” by individuals (not shelter or rescue workers) who find them.

Aloof Dogs

Dogs with aloof temperaments are wary of strangers and will initially avoid human contact. Eventually, they will be inclined to accept human contact once they have overcome fear issues and become hungry enough. While these dogs can travel a great distance, aloof dogs eventually can be enticed with food and patience, typically by experienced rescuers who know



how to approach and capture a wary dog. These dogs are often recovered by rescue group volunteers, and their wariness can be easily misinterpreted as “abused.” In addition, these dogs are often not recovered for weeks or months after their escape, giving them the physical appearance (thinness, injuries, stickers, ticks, etc.) that they are homeless, abused, and unloved.

Xenophobic (Fearful) Dogs

Xenophobia means “fear or hatred of things strange or foreign”. Dogs with xenophobic temperaments (due to genetics and/or puppyhood experiences) are more inclined to travel farther and are at a higher risk of being hit by cars. Due to their cowering, fearful behavior, people assume these dogs were “abused”, and even if the dog has ID tags, they will refuse to contact the previous owner. Some of these panic stricken dogs will even run from their owners! It may be necessary to use other dogs to get close enough to capture them or to use baited dog traps.

Circumstances Surrounding the Disappearance

A dog that digs out from a yard to explore a scent will tend to travel a short distance before it is found—meandering and doubling back as it explores a scent. On the other hand, a dog that bolts in panic due to fireworks or thunder will

take off at a blind run and can run for several miles.

Weather

A dog that escapes on a beautiful spring day may travel farther than one that escapes in a snow storm. Extreme weather conditions (snow, hail, rain, sweltering heat) will decrease the distances that lost dogs travel.

Terrain

A dog that escapes in a residential area will not travel as far as a dog that escapes in a mountainous area.

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Can you help?!

Everyone knows cats don't like to beg for help... but times are tight at the shelter! Many Americans gave generously to animal and human disaster recovery organizations after last year's natural disasters, but this often meant reduced donations to local non-profits, including SCAT. The cats at the shelter are still counting on us for food and a home, so we are hoping that you can give generously to continue to support our important efforts.

SCAT is a 501c(3) non-profit organization, and all donations are fully tax-deductible. In addition, all donations are all gratefully acknowledged with a receipt for income tax purposes.

Funds will be used to continue our work helping homeless animals in southern Connecticut. This includes the cost of housing, medical care, food, etc at our Stamford shelter, as well as covering our Trap Neuter Release program to prevent the further proliferation of strays in our communities. Anything that you can contribute to help is greatly appreciated! And if you know of someone looking to add a cat or kitten to their family, please pass along our phone number—we always have many loving cats looking for a home.

Don't forget to ask if your employer has a matching funds program - it could double your donation!

In Memory of Franklin

Franklin came into my life through my good friend Vanessa. She lived in Portchester NY at the time, and he lived in her hallway. The people that had owned him gave him to me with all of his toys, and that's the day he became mine. We were together twelve years. At the time I took him home, I had another cat named Katie. Katie was about four years old, and Katie and Franklin got along beautifully. Katie loved him and would groom him all the time.

Some days when I would come home from work, I would find the refrigerator open. One day I saw Franklin standing on his hind paws, pulling the door open to look for food!



Franklin was always loving and so playful. He loved company, got along with everybody, and was always curious about everything. If you were fixing something, he wanted to see what you were doing. He always did what I asked, to sit, lie down to stop and to scratch only his scratching boxes. He was so smart, he knew what time to get me up every morning, he watched TV with me every night, and when I went to bed he would snuggle with me and lean against me or hold my hand or face with his paws.

Wherever I was in the house he was right behind me; I would fall over him every now and then, but I miss his face and loving ways. He was and still is my best friend. He will be forever in my heart.

With all my love, his mama *Susan Caterina*



Ways to Help Every Day



Tag Sale Donations

Tag sales are one of our biggest fundraisers. You can help by donating items such as housewares, appliances, toys, and sporting goods (no clothing or books, thanks). Please call 359-1439 if you have items to donate.

Thanks to everyone who has brought in empty ink jet and laser cartridges - keep them coming!
www.cashforcritters.com



SNET Community Connections

You can now help raise money for SCAT while you talk on the phone! With SNET Community Connections, you can designate SCAT to receive 5% of every dollar you spend on long distance calls. For more information or to sign up, call 1-800-635-SNET and reference SCAT ID #3016



igive.com

SCAT is registered with **igive.com**, a program that allows you to “donate” to SCAT... free! Simply shop online at any of over 350 of your favorite stores (e.g. 1-800-Flowers, Amazon, Best Buy, Drugstore.com, PETSMART, and many others). Reference SCAT and up to 27% of each purchase you make will be redirected to SCAT! Not only is this completely free to you, you can also get discounts for yourself with special igive.com partner offers. For an extra \$5 for SCAT, use the following URL: www.igive.com/html/refer.cfm?causeid=20478



Recycle Printer Cartridges

Don't throw out your empty ink jet and laser cartridges! Bring them in to help SCAT and the environment. We recycle empties for cash - see www.cashforcritters.com for more information and a list of eligible cartridges (e.g. Epson cartridges are not allowed, but most others are accepted). Bring them in to one of our events, or call for a drop-off location. If you are able to collect many from work, friends, and family, let us know and we can arrange pickup!



SCAT Web Site

Our www.adoptatcat.org site has more information about our group, volunteer opportunities, and adoption forms. Click on “Our Kittens” or “Our Cats” to see photos and descriptions of animals waiting to be adopted.



SCAT T-Shirts

For \$12 you can have your very own SCAT T-Shirt, with a color logo on the front and web address on the back. Call 359-1439 and specify S, M, or L. New: XL, XX, and XXX sizes available for \$15. Wear it and help spread the word about cat and kitten rescue in Southern Connecticut!



Matching Donation

Making a donation to SCAT? See if your employer has a matching donations program. If so, you can easily double your donation! SCAT is a 501c(3) non-profit organization.



Cat Food and Litter Donations

When you take care of nearly 80 cats a day, food and litter runs out quickly! To donate pet supplies, please call Lori at 973-1033. The cats will thank you!

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Fences that create barriers will influence a dog's travel since a dog will tend to take the "path of least resistance" when traveling. Cactus, heavy brush, and steep cliffs can be barriers that influence whether a dog continues on a path or changes directions.

Appearance of the Dog

What a dog looks like can influence how quickly it will be picked up by a rescuer. In general, most people are less inclined to pull over and attempt to grab a loose Pit Bull they perceive as being "aggressive" than they would a "friendly" wiggly Labrador Retriever. Also, size matters: people are more inclined to pick up small dogs - they look vulnerable and are easier to transport and house than large dogs. In addition, people are more likely to attempt to rescue a purebred dog that they perceive to have value than a mixed breed dog. When average motorists see a mixed breed dog trotting down the sidewalk, their impression is often that the dog belongs in the neighborhood or that it is a homeless stray. But when those same people see a Boston Terrier, they are inclined to believe that, because it is a "valuable purebred dog", it must be a lost pet.

Population Density

A dog that escapes in Manhattan will travel a shorter distance than will a dog that escapes in the Rocky Mountains or in rural farmland. When dogs escape into areas with a high number of people, their chances of being found close to the escape point are increased. But in areas with an extremely low number of people, they tend to travel further and their chances of being found close to the escape point are decreased. A dog that escapes in the middle of the night will travel farther before being seen than a dog that escapes during rush hour traffic.

HUMAN BEHAVIORS

Guardian Behaviors

Guardians often behave in ways that actually inhibit their chances of recovering their lost pets. Some de-



velop a "wait and see" approach (believing their pet will return home like Lassie) and by the time they start actively looking, the vital first few hours to locate their pet (or witnesses who saw the pet) are gone. Others develop "tunnel vision" and fail to find their dog or cat because they focus on wrong theories. They assume their dog was "stolen and sold to research" when in fact their dog might have been rescued and put up for adoption through a local adoption event. They experience "grief avoidance" and quickly give up their search effort because they really believe they will never see their cat again. They feel helpless and alone, often discouraged by others who rebuke them and tell them "it was just a dog" and "you'll never find your cat." In addition, the level of human animal bond (HAB) will influence the recovery efforts of a lost pet. People with a strong HAB will go to extremes to find their lost pet. They will accomplish the "impossible" task of visiting all shelters, posting flyers, and contact-

ing rescue groups while maintaining a full-time job and other family commitments. One of the primary reasons why so many lost cats are never found is that cat guardians focus their entire search efforts by posting lost cat flyers and by searching the cages at the local shelter. 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! It is up to the guardians to do this!

Rescuer Behaviors

The behaviors of people who find stray dogs differ from the behaviors of people who find lost cats. People who find stray dogs with skittish temperaments often misinterpret the dog's behavior. They assume that the cowering, fearful dog was "abused" when in

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fact the dog has a xenophobic temperament and has been shy and fearful since it was a puppy, due to genetics and puppyhood experiences. Dogs found in rural areas are often assumed to be “dumped” and homeless; many rescuers never think this could be a dog that was lost. Some people who find a stray dog that does not have a collar automatically assume it is “homeless” and therefore they immediately work to place the dog rather than attempt to find the dog’s owner. In addition, the first place where the owner of a lost dog will search for their dog – the local shelter – is typically the last place that someone who finds a loose dog will take it (due to the fear of euthanasia)! When people find stray cats, they also misinterpret behaviors. When rescuers observe a cat with a xenophobic temperament they assume, based on the cowering and skittish behavior, that the cat is an untamed “feral.” While it is true that feral, untamed cats that are unaccustomed to human contact will hiss, spit, twirl, lunge, and urinate when humanely trapped, this “wild animal” behavior is also common in cats who have xenophobic temperaments! We know this because we have talked to owners of lost xenophobic cats that had to be humanely trapped in order to be recovered; the owners verified that their cats exhibited wild behavior while in the humane trap. These behaviors are a reflection of a fearful TEMPERAMENT, not

a lack of TAMENESS. Shelter and TNR workers should scan all “feral” cats for microchips and conduct research (check Classifieds, lost cat reports, etc.) to determine if the new “feral” is actually someone’s xenophobic pet cat that escaped outdoors, perhaps several weeks or months before it was found.

A FINAL WORD

Missing Pet Partnership’s web site (www.lostapet.org) lists lost pet recovery tips based on the analysis of lost pet behavior. With the knowledge of these human and animal behaviors and new suggested methods on how to recover a lost pet, we can better guide guardians and increase the probability that they will bring the lost animal that they love back home.

Kathy “Kat” Albrecht is a former police detective-turned-pet detective and author of “THE LOST PET CHRONICLES: ADVENTURES OF A K-9 COP TURNED PET DETECTIVE.” Kat is the founder of Missing Pet Partnership (www.lostapet.org) a national nonprofit organization working to conduct research into the behavioral patterns of lost pets while providing training and educational materials for shelter workers and volunteers. Kat is also the CEO of Pet Hunters International (www.pethunters.com) the first-ever pet detective academy that trains and certifies technicians and search dogs to track lost pets. Kat will present at the 2005 CHAMP Conference on “How to Mitigate Feral Cat Populations Through TAR (trap-and-reunite) Services.”

British Cat Saves Lamb from Drowning

Sherry Morse, © 2003 Animal News Center, Inc.

A lamb who escaped recently from his pasture in England was saved from drowning in a swimming pool by an alert cat.

Puss Puss, a black and white cat, discovered the lamb’s predicament and frantically meowed, running back and forth between the pool and the garden where her owners were working, to alert them to his plight.

Puss Puss’s owners, gardeners Adrian Bunton and Karen Lewis, had taken her along with them to work at the garden of Cotswold District Council chairman Tim Royle in Icomb, Cheltenham.

Jill Royle said, “She was in a very, very agitated state, meowing and calling and crying and being an utter pest and dashing back and forward between them and the pool.”

“They found the lamb in the swimming pool,” Royle said. “They got it out and it was OK.”

When Bunton and Lewis found the lamb he was under the pool cover and his head was entangled in the pool cover straps, which actually were keeping him from drowning. Bunton jumped into the pool to rescue the lamb while Lewis went to get help.

Puss Puss is “a real little superstar,” said Lewis. The actions of the quick-thinking feline are all the more remarkable because she is disabled.

“As a kitten she had an accident and had to have her tail amputated,” Lewis explained. “She hasn’t grown properly, has arthritis and can’t curl up, jump or climb like other normal cats.”

Mrs. Royle wrote about the incident in the village newsletter and told readers, “If you see a little black cat with no tail walking in Icomb, it will be gallant Puss Puss, who deserves a medal.”

Neither Royle nor Puss Puss’s owners knew how the Jacob lamb had escaped from the field next to the house.

Yes! I would like to help.

Name _____

Phone _____ email _____

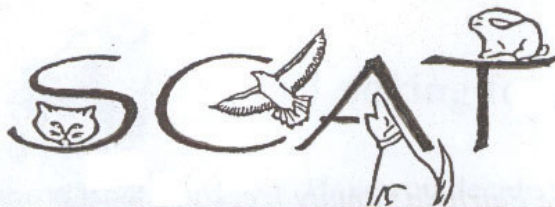
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- I am enclosing \$_____ in support of animal care.
- I would like to make my donation in honor / in memory of (please circle one) _____
- I am interested in volunteering.
- I have items I would like to donate.
- My gift will be matched by my company _____ (company form enclosed)

Please ask your employer if they have a matching gift program. It could double your donation!
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