

## What to do when you find a stray

If you find a stray dog or cat, keep in mind that the animal may be a lost pet, and someone could be frantically searching for him/her. Cats and dogs get loose for one reason or another and may become lost. If a lost pet has been on the run for weeks or months, he or she is going to be dirty and skinny and have fleas, even if he/she escaped from a wonderful home. [Missing Pet Partnership](#) developed its “Think Lost, Not Stray” campaign to dispel the assumption that every roaming animal is unwanted.

### Here are some tips to help you reunite the animal with his or her person:

- If the animal has no ID tag, put a temporary one on him/her. Include your name and phone number so that if the pet gets lost a second time, he or she will be returned to you.
- Check with the animal regulation department in your city or county to find out your legal responsibility regarding the found animal. Some municipalities require you to turn the pet over to them, while others will allow you to keep the pet while you attempt to find the owner. If you must take the animal to the shelter or pound, be sure to claim “first and last rights.” Claiming first rights gives you an adoption privilege if the animal is not claimed by the owner. Claiming last rights gives you an adoption privilege if the animal is not claimed within a given time period and is due to be euthanized. It is a good idea to call the animal control facility daily to let them know that you are interested in the animal's welfare.
- Take the animal to be scanned for a microchip. Your vet or local shelter likely has a scanner to check for the chip. Also, check the animal's ears for a tattoo, as this is sometimes used as a form of pet identification.
- Check the lost and found section in local newspapers and in the newspapers of nearby towns. Lost pets can travel some distance (either on their own, by hitchhiking on a vehicle, or by being rescued and then lost again in a new location) and may be farther away from home than you think.
- Place “pet found” ads in the local newspapers. A typical ad describes the type of animal, where he/she was found, coloring and other distinct characteristics. You want to leave out some characteristics about the animal, so that when a person calls claiming to be the owner, you can verify that the animal really belongs to him/her. For example, you could leave out information about the gender of the animal, or that he/she has white feet, or a really short or bushy tail. Don't forget to put your phone number and times you can be reached in the ad or flyer.
- Create flyers. Take a good photo of the pet, write a basic description and then access the free, easy-to-use flyer maker program at [www.petbond.com](http://www.petbond.com) to create your flyers. As with newspaper ads, leave out some information so you can ask specific questions of possible owners to help verify that the pet is really theirs. Print out the flyers, attach them to brightly colored poster board, and write “FOUND CAT” (or dog) in large black letters across the top, to ensure that the flyers are noticed. Missing Pet Partnership also has some great [tips](#) for [creating highly visible](#)

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[flyers](#).

- Post the flyers in the vicinity where the animal was found, at local businesses and in other places in your community.
- Email the flyers to your friends, family members and other contacts in the surrounding area, and ask them to alert others. Post the flyer on social networking websites, such as Facebook. Search Facebook to see if there is a group in your area that posts information about lost and found pets. Other sites where you can post messages include the classifieds section of [Petfinder.com](#) and [Pets Missing in Action](#)
- There are people who monitor lost and found pet ads in an attempt to scam unsuspecting animal lovers by claiming animals and then selling them for lab research. So, use caution and ask questions before you give the animal to someone claiming to be the owner. To ensure that you have found the real owner, here are a few tips:
  - Ask the caller to bring a photo of the animal to the meeting place.
  - Ask for the phone number of the caller's veterinarian, and make a follow-up call to verify the information.
  - See how the animal reacts to the caller in person. If you are not satisfied, ask for more proof of ownership.
  - Remember to get the owner's full name, phone number and address.

For more tips, take a look at the article [Avoiding Pet Scams](#)

If you've done all of the above and a lengthy period of time elapses with no owner coming forward, it's time to think about the pet's future. If you decide to keep the animal, make sure to have him or her checked by a vet and spayed/neutered. If you can't keep the animal, read Best Friends' guide [How to find homes for homeless pets](#).

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