

Whose Pet?

The fate of lost pets, especially dogs, is often in the hands of the people who find them. And sometimes it's the most good-hearted, well-meaning, pet-loving people who inadvertently prevent a lost dog or cat from getting home. This is because we make some false assumptions about the pets and their owners.

Many people assume that a dog wandering loose, without a collar, is a stray, and they'll either ignore him, keep him or call animal control. If a dog wearing a collar is dirty, injured, cowers in fear, or is scrawny, people assume he's been mistreated and may rescue him from his bad owner.

The truth is, dogs get separated from their owners for many reasons. Dogs can slip out of their collars. Dogs that are well loved may be anxious around strangers and cower in fear. A dog who has been lost for a long time may have become dirty, injured or scrawny during his misadventures away from home.

When people see a strange cat outside, people assume it's either a stray or someone's outdoor kitty. Cats are often ignored or taken in by the people who find them.

Pet detective Kat Albrecht, founder of Missing Pet Partnership has dealt with hundreds of missing pet cases. Her advice is, "When you find a dog or cat, assume that it is loved and wanted, and work toward reuniting that animal with its owner." Kat's motto is: "Think lost, not stray."

So, when you see a dog wandering loose, here are ways to reunite him with his owner:

- Check his tags. If he doesn't have an ID, his rabies tag could lead you to his owner.
- Walk him around the area where you found him. His owner may spot him.
- Take the dog to a veterinarian or local shelter to see if he has a microchip, which would identify the owner. If you are concerned about leaving the dog at a shelter, ask if you can foster him until the owner is found. By law, you have to turn in a found dog, so if the shelter won't allow you to foster him, come back in three days and adopt him yourself.
- Take a picture of the dog and make large FOUND DOG posters to place in the area where you found him.
- Place a FOUND DOG ad in the classifieds and on lost pet web sites.
- Read LOST DOG ads from area papers.

If you find a wandering cat, she could be feral or someone's outdoor cat. She could have been missing for so long, she became feral. If you see a cat hiding, she could be a neighbor's indoor cat that got out. Either way, consider the possibility that the cat belongs to someone, who may have been

searching for weeks or months and would love to have their kitty back.

So...

- Take a picture of the cat, if possible, and post a FOUND CAT poster in the neighborhood.
- Look in the paper and on web sites for lost cats.
- Contact local shelters and ask if anyone has reported the cat missing.
- Set a humane trap if the cat won't let you near her.
- Place a FOUND CAT ad in your local paper.

Take as much time and effort to find the pet's owner as you would want someone to spend finding you if your pet were lost. Pet people need to stick together!