**What To Do When Your Pet Is Missing**

Despite all good intentions and measures taken, it happens. Your beloved pet slips past you, out the door and takes off. You tried to catch him, but he’s too fast. Of course, we always recommend microchipping and keeping identification tags on your pets, just for instances like this. There are other steps you can take to proactively get your pet home more quickly.

Once it is apparent your pet is not immediately coming back, you may find some of the following hints helpful:

* Call the Humane Society of Harrisburg Area (HSHA) or your local humane society or animal shelter as soon as possible after you pet has gone missing and file a lost report. Make sure you speak with someone – don’t simply leave a message. The person taking your lost report may ask for information you may not have thought important. You will be asked for a physical description of your pet, where you live/where the pet was when it went missing, the age of your pet and any distinguishing features. Included in the physical description, you will be asked for the breed of your pet and estimated weight. Try to be as accurate as possible. When animals come into a shelter weighing 20 pounds, but a lost report lists the dog as weighing 40 pounds, the match is not going to be immediately made.
* A picture is worth a thousand words – and this is true when looking for your lost pet. If possible, supply HSHA with a recent picture of your pet. This makes it much easier for staff to recognize/identify your pet. Your definition of brown may be another’s definition of red.
* If you adopted your pet from HSHA or another rescue organization and have stayed in touch with your pet’s favorite staff members or volunteers, inform them your pet is missing. Often, shelter workers and volunteers have a large network of animal rescue contacts. The wider net you cast, the better your chances of reuniting with your pet.
* In the same vein, make fliers with a recent picture to post advertising your pet is lost. The information you will want to include should be your pet’s name, age, distinguishing marks and any behavioral quirks it would be important for a finder to know. Keep a unique piece of information from the flier. This will enable you to verify a caller does indeed have your pet. You will also want to include contact information for you or someone else who can be contacted by a finder. Make sure this contact information is up-to-date and working. (Disconnected phone numbers will not help your pet get home faster.) Post these fliers in your neighborhood, the local minimart, the grocery store you go to, groomers, pet supply stores, the dog park, local veterinarian offices – anywhere pet people frequent.
* Contact your local police department. Many strays who arrive in shelters are brought by law enforcement officers. If you have made fliers, supply the department with several so they can be distributed among the staff of the different shifts. If you live close to another municipality, call them and supply them with the same information. It is not inconceivable that a pet can wander from one jurisdiction into another. The longer a pet is missing, the more likely this is possible.
* Let your mail carrier know your pet is missing and give him/her a picture. Your mail carrier is in your neighborhood 5-6 days a week. Especially notable if you are missing a dog – you can be sure your mail carrier knows who every dog in the neighborhood is and where it belongs. It is worth mentioning and supplying a picture or flier to anyone else who is regularly in your neighborhood such as construction workers, crossing guards, and other delivery service people.
* In this day and age, the internet can be a useful tool in finding a lost pet. Websites such as Craigslist often have postings for lost or found pets. Again, a picture will be especially helpful. Post a lost report on one of these websites, in the local newspapers, or any other media outlet that may be popular in your area.
* Be sure to check in regularly with the organizations where you filed lost reports to be sure no animals came in matching your pet’s description. Make sure they still have your report on file and they know your pet is still missing.
* Some people have used non-traditional services or methods to help locate a lost pet. Pet detectives, tracking dogs, and animal communicators are among these types of services. If you are interested in such a service, search the internet for availability in your area.

One thing to keep in mind, reuniting a pet with its family is easier when the pet wears identification. It doesn’t keep a pet from wandering off, but it makes a reunion happen more quickly. Collars and identification tags are important, put pets can slip collars and tags can fall off. Permanent identification such as microchips are a more reliable form of identification. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice and is inserted beneath the skin between a pet’s shoulder blades. If a pet is brought to an animal shelter, a veterinarian’s office, or some police stations, the pet can be scanned for a chip. If the pet is chipped, the owner’s information is accessible and they can be notified their pet has been found. If your pet is not currently microchipped and you would like him/her to be, your personal veterinarian can provide this service for you. HSHA can also microchip your pet at one of our vaccine/microchip clinics. The cost at an HSHA clinic for a microchip is $25. It only takes about 10 seconds to actually implant the chip in your pet. (Another benefit of a microchip for dog owners is that you can get a lifetime dog license for your dog which will eliminate the need to renew a license every year.)

The adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” speaks volumes to the importance of taking all precautions to prevent your pet from running away. However, despite all good intentions, things happen. If they do, hopefully the above information will help reunite you with your pet more quickly.



7790 Grayson Road

Harrisburg, PA 17111

717-564-3320

www.humanesocietyhbg.org