

Pro Advice for Finding a Lost Cat (They May be Closer Than You Think)

Finding a lost cat might take some work, but it's not an impossible task. Start your search at home before you start making signs and knocking on neighbors' doors.

Chances are you've arrived at this article because you can't find your cat. First off: Don't panic. There's a good chance your cat is somewhere near your home and could reappear soon. It might just take some searching. Kat Albrecht, the founder of the Missing Animal Response Network (MARN), has some suggestions that can help.

Start at the House, Work Outward

OK, assuming you didn't see your cat jet out the door, Albrecht's first tip is to make absolutely sure your lost cat isn't still in the house. Once, a family contacted her, convinced a bobcat had killed their missing cat. After a few days, the family opted to adopt a new kitten. The homecoming of the mewling kitten triggered a noise from the house's chimney—where the first cat was stuck.

Once you've searched inside, start searching around the outside of your house, under decks and porches, and in other smaller places where a cat could hide. If you own an indoor cat, it's very likely they will be somewhere near your house, Albrecht says. If that search doesn't yield results, head over to your neighbors'. But, she says, don't just ask whether they've seen the cat, ask to search around their house like you did at your home. It might mean getting a bit dirty on your hands and knees, using flashlights to peer into dark places. It's up to you, not your neighbor.

"They're just not going to care that much to do that, so you need to do that," Albrecht says.

A 2017 study on missing cats measured how far away from home 477 cats were found. The median distance was about 50 meters from home. For indoor cats, the median distance was 39 meters—128 feet—away.

Cats with access to the outdoors—ones who might roam around the neighborhood freely—were often found farther away. Their median distance was measured at 300 meters, more than three football fields away, according to the study.

If you know your indoor-outdoor cat's territory, search that area before expanding farther out.

How to Find a Hiding Cat

Your cat's past behavior might give you an idea of what he's doing when he's lost, Albrecht says. If he likes to socialize when company visits your house, he may have simply wandered down to a

nearby house and found a way inside.

If your cat typically hides and doesn't come out until long after houseguests have departed, she might be hiding somewhere when you think she's "lost." She'll be panicked and afraid, so she'll stay silent, hopefully hiding away from any predators. That's why owners have to look hard.

"They will almost always be hiding," Albrecht says.

For instance, the Texas Pet Detectives Association found a missing cat who had hidden in a half-finished patio made of cinderblocks close to its home. The rescuers eventually had to remove some of the cinderblocks to retrieve the feline.

Some cats might eventually return to the house because they pass a "threshold" and need their human—likely for food or water—but that's not always the case, she says.

If the cat is hiding silently, it's best to search late at night when outdoor activity quiets down. Then you might have a better chance of hearing him.

Going out in the dead of night might not sound appealing, so another option is deploying wilderness cameras to track the cat in case he ventures out from its hiding space. Examining your or your neighbor's surveillance camera footage—doorbell cameras to the rescue!—could help, too.

Make Fliers, Social Media Posts

It's good to get the word out about your lost cat, but a post on Facebook or Instagram might not do much if you aren't connected to the people who live near you. Albrecht suggests posing on [Nextdoor](#), where your neighbors are more likely to see the information. You might also check to see if there's another social media-based lost pet organization in your area that can spread the word.

Craigslist is a good place to post, too, along with looking on the site for posts about found cats in your area.

Fliers are good, but you'll want to hand them directly to neighbors. Just stapling them to a telephone pole isn't as effective.

For signs, go big. Go neon. On her website, Albrecht tells pet owners to make signs giant and fluorescent, with a large photo of their cat or dog. Place the signs at major intersections near where the pet was lost so drivers don't miss it. Keep the message brief so drivers can read it as they move past. [MARN has a great sign-making guide](#) with advice for getting your poster noticed.

You should also make calls to area animal shelters to see if anyone has found your feline. If your cat was wearing a [collar and ID tags](#)—or even better yet, [microchipped](#)—and ends up being turned into a shelter, you have an excellent chance of being reunited. If your cat didn't have any

ID and wasn't chipped, calling shelters or even scouring them in person may increase your odds of success.

Luring Out a Lost Cat

Locating a missing cat is tough, but luring it back into the house might be another challenge. Your cat might want to stay in its hiding spot.

Albrecht says owners trying to lure out their cat should use food. You can even place food just inside the door and then close it once your cat heads back inside. You might also consider leaving food and water outside the home in case the cat comes back at night.

A humane trap might be needed when your cat is hiding somewhere more secluded. You can dribble food to the trap with a larger helping within the trap as the primary bait. Cover the trigger plate with a blanket or towel.

Lost Cat Myths

Albrecht says cat owners should avoid three misconceptions if their cat goes missing:

Putting a cat's litter box outside will coax it back home. The idea is the cat will smell it and come home. Not really, Albrecht says. The cat might come back if the litter box is out, but it's likely they came back because they need food or water. The litter box just happens to be there.

Cats will leave their homes when they're close to dying. That doesn't happen much either, she says. Unfortunately, sometimes cats will pass away hidden from plain sight, so you might have the unfortunate task of finding them hidden on your property, but that doesn't mean they hid to die alone.

Assuming that a coyote or other predator killed the cat. There are usually clues, like clumps of fur, when this happens. But some owners just assume that's what's happened when their cat goes missing. If owners assume their cats were killed and stop looking, the cats can eventually be taken into a shelter. There, if they don't have any identification, they could possibly be euthanized if no one adopts them, Albrecht says.

Whatever the reason she's disappeared may be, don't give up on your lost cat. Some cats can go missing for days—or even months—before finding their way back home. If you need expert help, you can always contact a pet detective to aid your search.

“It's human nature to want an answer,” Albrecht says. “We all want to solve the mystery.”

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