

Recovering Lost Pets Tara M. Sacramone, DVM

Do you have a plan to find your pet if s/he gets lost? You should. The Dunstable Animal Clinic gets calls and flyers from people who have lost pets every week. Recently, the Journal of Veterinary Medicine published a study on how lost pets were recovered and it reminded me of what an important subject it is, so I thought I would pass along some ideas to you.

Obviously, prevention is the best scenario here. Keep your dog on a leash or inside a secure fence. Many of our clients use Invisible Fence for their dogs. Generally, it works great. The one problem is that it doesn't keep other dogs or animals, such as porcupines, out of your yard. If you would like more information about Invisible Fence, check out their web page www.caninefence.com.

Cats are a different story. Indoor cats are safe, but only if they don't sneak out. Preventing outdoor cats from getting lost is much more difficult. If you do let your cat out, try to get them in every day, especially before dark. At the very least, try to have visual contact with your cat on a daily basis. Both cats and dogs also benefit from spaying and neutering. Many animals wander in order to find love.

If your pet does become lost there are several things you can do to get him/her back. The most important thing is having some sort of identification on, or inside, your pet. Rabies tags and dog licenses can help, but having an actual ID tag with your phone number can make the recovery time even quicker, especially if your pet gets lost on a Sunday or late at night when your vet clinic or town hall is closed. Some dogs and cats don't like tags. For these pets there are things like embroidered collars or flea collars with a phone number written with a magic marker. Another option is a microchip. This is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, which gets injected in between the shoulder blades. If your pet gets brought to an animal shelter or veterinary clinic, s/he can be scanned and the microchip will provide the information to ensure that you are reunited with your pet. We use the Home Again microchip at the Dunstable Animal Clinic. Their website can be found at www.homeagain.com. Can you tell I'm enjoying having access to the Internet available at the clinic? The real benefit to the microchip is that it CANNOT be lost and it does not bother your pet. This is especially beneficial since some dogs get loose by slipping their collars, and some cats won't even wear a collar.

Obviously, all forms of ID rely on your pet being found, but if you don't want to wait for the phone to ring there are several things you can do. Get on the phone yourself, call the local humane societies and shelters, call local veterinary clinics, or call your town's dog officer. You can also post signs, preferably with a current photo, in your neighborhood or the area where your pet was lost. Some people place an ad in the local newspaper.

Hopefully your pet will never be lost. However, this article may help you have a quick reunion if the worst happens.