



## How to find a lost cat

### *the Story of Digger*

In March of 2004, on one of the most bitterly cold nights I can remember, Digger was found living behind a diner, surviving on what he could forage from a dumpster. He had an open wound on his chest and was terrified of humans. Determined to rescue him, a friend and I set a have-a-heart trap with a dish of tuna to tempt him and covered the trap with a heavy blanket. After several hours, he gave in to the smell of the food (and the frigid temps) and walked into the trap.

We treated him at Cats Exclusively which required soaking the badly infected chest wound in a warm solution of betadine several times a day. Despite how terrified he was of people, he fell asleep in my hands as he soaked in the warmth of the water. Naturally, I fell for this brave, vulnerable kitty and he joined my feline family. Digger was relaxed and happy with my other rescued kitties. He made himself comfortable in my home although he would run when I tried to pick him up.

One mid-September night I left the slider to the balcony open so the cats could enjoy the warm breeze through the screen door. I woke the next day and Digger was gone. He had found a tiny tear in the screen and worked at it till he tore a hole just large enough to squeeze through. He had jumped from the second story balcony and was gone. Thus began two and a half months of sleeplessness (no sleep when you're out looking for your cat every night) and constant worry. Happily, I did get Digger back! To this day I cannot pick him up but the moment I lay down to sleep, he is at my side with his head on my shoulder and there he stays throughout the night.

Following is a list of tried and true steps for finding your cat. ***Most importantly, start looking the moment you realize your cat is missing. Do not assume kitty will come home on its own.*** Cats will usually resort to hiding once lost and often won't even respond to their owner's calls. Focus your efforts on a thorough search of all hiding places near your home, spreading the word to as many people as you can.

## Search Effectively

- 🐾 **Start searching immediately.** If you conduct an extensive search immediately, there's a good chance you'll find the cat close to the location where it was lost. The more time that passes increases the opportunity for the cat to roam further from home.
- 🐾 **Stay calm.** It is natural to feel upset, but getting into a panic won't help you or your cat. Taking action immediately can mitigate anxiety.
- 🐾 **Carry a flashlight.** Even in daylight, bring a flashlight so you can look in dark places and catch the reflection of your cat's eyes. When a cat becomes lost and scared, it will often run to the first hiding place it sees. Search in dense foliage, under porches, in crawlspaces, and in garages or sheds. Be sure to look over and around items in storage as a cat can hide in very tight spaces. Start near the place the cat was lost and search outward. Knock on the doors of all homes and businesses within a few doors of the location where your cat was last seen. Ask permission to search sheds and garages.
- 🐾 **Search the area in a five house radius over and over again.** Many cats will hide and stay silent for a few days before they respond to your calls. Go back over the same ground repeatedly.
- 🐾 **Call quietly for the cat.** Don't assume your cat will respond to your voice as it normally does. A lost cat is usually a terrified cat and may not want to leave its hiding spot even for you. Call for it in a soft, quiet voice to avoid scaring the cat further.
- 🐾 **Stop and listen regularly.** A cat that is trapped, hurt or hungry will likely meow. Whether you're searching by yourself or with a group, take a few minutes in every area you search to listen quietly and attentively for the cat's meow.
- 🐾 **Look in high places.** Even a declawed cat can still climb, especially when scared. Look up trees, on rooftops and high corners.
- 🐾 **Search again after nightfall.** If you were searching during the day, return and repeat the steps above after it grows dark when it is the most quiet (3 a.m.) Bring a flashlight and call softly to your cat. Lost cats are sometimes more willing to leave their hiding places at night, when they can rely on the darkness for safety.
- 🐾 **Tempt your cat out of hiding by calling and shaking a box of dry food or treats.** The sound of a can opening may get a response as well. Lost cats are often too wary to approach sounds, even familiar ones, but this may work in the middle of the night, when it is dark and no one is around.
- 🐾 **Leave familiar scents outside your door.** Your cat's litter box, a familiar toy or blanket can help the cat pick up on the scent and hang around longer if it visits in the night. Also leave an unwashed shirt you have recently worn, outside the door.

- 🐾 **Set up motion sensor digital cameras around your home.** You may be able to catch a picture of the cat on camera so that you know they are nearby and focus your search.
- 🐾 **Leave a baby monitor outside the house.** Keep the receiver by your bed, loud enough to awaken you if the cat shows up and meows. You can also reverse the unit so that your cat can hear your voices during the day.
- 🐾 **Set a humane trap.** Many animal rescue groups will rent or lend traps that are easy to use. Place food with a strong odor, such as tuna, inside and put a waterproof cover over it. Check the trap frequently.
- 🐾 **Keep searching.** Most cats will hide instead of run when they are lost or in a scary situation. Because of this, some cats may spend several weeks in the area, moving from hiding place to hiding place by night. It is not unheard-of for a lost cat to be found after a couple of months.
- 🐾 **Recruit help from friends and neighbors.** Trade cell phone numbers with everyone involved in the search, and make sure each person has a flashlight, even in daylight. Warn anyone searching that if they do spot the cat, they should remain quiet and avoid sudden movements lest they spook the cat away again.
- 🐾 **It is best for the owner to approach the cat, especially since the cat is likely to be very frightened.**
- 🐾 **Keep other animals away.** Another cat in the area could have chased your cat away, especially if that cat or you have recently moved there. Ask other pet owners to keep their pets indoors while you look for yours, and be prepared to increase the scope of your search as you cover the ground closest to home.

### Spread the Word

- 🐾 **Distribute fliers in your neighborhood.** If your cat is missing for more than a few hours, talk to your neighbors and make fliers to put in their paper boxes or under door handles. Include your name, phone number, a photo and the date kitty went missing..
- 🐾 **Ask for information and help from passers-by.** Give them a flyer and ask if they have seen your cat. Postal workers, children, and others who spend a lot of time outside can be useful resources and scouts.
- 🐾 **Let Facebook be your friend.** Post a photo of kitty, note the date, your contact information, and the area where your cat went missing. (See below for other on-line help in finding your cat)
- 🐾 **If you receive a report of a cat sighting that doesn't quite match your cat's description, visit the location anyways.** Descriptions from strangers often do not match the description you gave the cat.

**Additional Social Media Options on Facebook:** Found Stray Cats Rochester, Lollypop Spotters, Missing Cats Rochester, Pets 911, Tabby Tracker, Craig's List