

Help! My cat's

Sadly, this is an all too frequent plea for assistance that we receive via our Helpline, social media sites and via our branches. Here is some advice about what to do.

Not all cats are house cats and it's no surprise if your feline friend comes and goes as it pleases. However, if your return home greets you with little more than an untouched food bowl, you might be feeling helpless about what to do next. Don't panic! Instead, read our guide on what to do if your cat goes missing.

All is not lost

Before you put a plan together, it is important you try not to worry. Even cats with a regular routine can disappear for days at a time and return later with no hassle. If you do find yourself in a situation where your cat is missing, it's time to make an action plan.

1 Search first

It might seem obvious but it is important that the first thing you do is check around your home and garden. There's every chance your cat might be hiding in the unlikeliest of places, from cosy cupboards to garden sheds. Shady places are favoured by felines when the weather gets warm, so check your garages and outbuildings if you have them.

2 Speak to your neighbours

The next step should be to ensure your neighbours are aware. Ask them to check their property, sheds and garages as well as keeping a look out. Talk to anyone who might have seen your cat recently; the postman, newspaper delivery people and your local vet are all worth speaking to.

3 Pick up the phone

Keeping a list of phone numbers pinned to a board or attached to your fridge in the event of your cat going missing is always a good idea. Keep the following details close at hand.

- Speak to your local Cats Protection branch. To search for your local branch, visit www.cats.org.uk/find-us and enter your postcode
- If your cat is microchipped, talk to Petlog on **0844 4633 999** so they can register your cat missing and also to check any 'found cat' reports in your area – lines are open 365 days a year 24/7
- Register the details of your cat at www.animalsearch.co.uk
- Get in touch with any other local animal rescue organisations in your area. Try www.catchat.org to find your local shelters
- Call all local vet practices in your area
- Speak to your local council's Environmental Health Department. They're likely to keep a record of cats found killed on the roads and although not an easy call to make, it is worth giving them a call to rule this out



gone missing!

4 Advertise

If you're able to, make some flyers up to place around your area. Make sure to include a good description of your cat, the gender, age, colour, colour of the cat's eyes, breed and any distinguishing features they may have. A photo is a big help. A contact telephone is necessary but for your safety, it's wise not to give your address. Take your flyers to local shops, vets and local notice boards.

5 Get online

Social media sites are packed with great resources to help track down your cat, as well as providing an opportunity to advertise your lost pet. Animal Search UK and CatAware have their own Facebook pages and with permission, you may also be able to post on the pages of local animal charities.

If you have your own Facebook and Twitter accounts, it is worth posting up a picture of your cat and asking your friends to share or retweet; you're likely to reach a larger number of people this way.

6 Tips and tricks

Hopefully by this time, your cat will have sauntered back in as if nothing has happened. If you're still without your pet, it's time to intensify your search with our handy tips and tricks.

- If your cat has a favourite toy, try leaving it in your garden
- Cats have a strong sense of smell so if there is a regular blanket or bedding that it usually sleeps on; leave it out in a dry spot to entice it out of hiding
- Cats are generally more active at night, especially during hotter weather. Go out with a friend or family member when it is dark and call for your cat by name

- Leave a bowl of water out and some food. Although you may find it attracts other animals, it is still well worth putting your cat's favourite dish out to entice it out of its hiding place, perhaps with a tasty treat such as tuna

7 Keep your cat safe

Hopefully your cat will soon be home and safe but you can help to ensure this doesn't happen again by following a few steps.

- Keep your cat in at night. Even if your cat is particularly restless before bedtime, a little bit of exercise through playing will soon help them settle in for the night
- Make sure your cat is microchipped and the information is kept up-to-date. Cats Protection believes all owned cats, even indoor ones, should be identified in order to trace their owner should they become lost or injured. The preferred method is to microchip as it is both permanent and safe
- If you choose to fit a collar with your contact details attached, Cats Protection advises the use of a quick-release or snap-opening collar in preference to an elasticated one. Always follow safety precautions when using cat collars; it must be fitted correctly and two fingers should fit snugly underneath it when your cat is wearing it to prevent injury

8 Don't give up

Above all, it is important not to give up hope. We hear many tales of cats being found and reunited with their owners, sometimes years after they have gone missing. If you need more advice, contact our Helpline on **03000 12 12 12** or email helpline@cats.org.uk ●

