



## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIND A LOST ANIMAL

If you've found a lost pet, check for an ID tag. If there is a tag and the owner's name is on it, call and arrange for a pickup, and know you have done your good deed for the day. If the tag gives the name of a veterinarian's clinic, call during business hours and get the name and phone number of the owner using the code number on the tag. Then follow up to return the dog or cat. If the animal has no tag, there may still be a way to identify the stray if he/she has been microchipped. Some animals even have tattoos inside of their ears!

If you have some hesitation about giving an animal you found back to an owner, keep in mind that just because that animal might have been injured, scared, or without identification does not mean that he has a "bad" home. Your stray might have lost his identification; he might have been lost for a long time; he may even be a rescued animal who was scared when he was adopted.

### ORPHANED KITTENS FOUND (OR MOM CAT FOUND WITHOUT KITTENS)

**The best place for kittens younger than eight weeks old is with their mother, whenever possible.**

If you see a litter of kittens that looks to be abandoned or orphaned, please refer to the following guide for what to do:

- If you find kittens that are alone, determine if the mother has abandoned them or if she is just off looking for food. The only way to find this out is to wait. Often times, she will return within a few hours. Observe from a distance or a hidden spot to be sure she is not returning before moving the kittens. Use common sense and be patient.
- If the mother cat doesn't come back after 8 hours, and you think she has abandoned the kittens or they are in danger, you can choose one of several options. Raise them yourself; find a foster family yourself or ask Animal Care for help finding a foster; or assist in trapping them so they can be vaccinated, spayed/neutered, and returned to their life outside. We can help you determine if the kittens require [neonatal kitten care](#) (one- to four-weeks-old), if the kittens are young enough to be socialized, fostered or adopted (six- to 16-weeks-old), or if they are at the age to be trapped, neutered, and returned (four months or older).
- If the mother cat does return for her kittens, you have multiple options to consider:
  - If the mother is feral and the kittens are too young to be separated from her, the best thing for the family is to leave them where they are for now as long as the location is safe. (Use your judgment and common sense—if you think the location is safe enough for the mother to survive, leave the kittens with her. Remember, the mother is best able to care for her kittens.) You can assist in providing food, water, and [shelter](#). Monitor the family daily and make the environment as safe for

them as you can. If you have decided you don't have the time or the resources to foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, then you can trap, neuter, and return the whole family when the kittens are 8-weeks-old or two pounds. If you can foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, the ideal window is when the kitten are between six weeks and 12 weeks old. The best thing for the mother cat is to be trapped, spayed, and returned to her outdoor home area.

- If the kittens are too young to be separated, and you believe it is safer for the whole family to come indoors—you can trap the mom, trap or scoop up the kittens depending on their age, and bring the whole family inside to a quiet, small room like a bathroom, where they can live until the kittens are weaned and it is safe to get them all neutered.  
IMPORTANT: It can be very traumatizing for a truly feral cat to be brought indoors with her kittens, not to mention potentially dangerous. [Learn how to tell the difference between socialized \(stray\) cats and feral cats.](#)
- If the mother is feral and the kittens are old enough to be separated from her, you have a decision to make: commit to foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, or trap, neuter, and return the kittens when they are 8 weeks or two pounds.
- If you trap a cat and discover at the clinic that she is a nursing mother, get her spayed immediately and return her to the area where you trapped her as soon as she is clear-eyed that evening, with approval from the veterinarian. Many times, you only learn this after she is at the clinic—make sure the clinic knows your plans for returning nursing mothers as soon as possible; they may have an anesthesia protocol that will enable her to wake up from surgery more quickly. It may seem counterintuitive to separate her from her kittens, but it's difficult to trap her again—this may be your only real chance to spay her and prevent further litters. Try to find the kittens (following the mother after you return her) so that you can trap and neuter them when they are old enough. *Note: Nursing mother cats continue to produce milk after being spayed, and can continue to nurse their kittens.*
- If you discover at the clinic that you have brought in a pregnant cat, have her spayed by an experienced veterinarian who has performed this surgery before. It may be necessary to allow an extra day for recovery and extended observation. For many people, this is a difficult aspect of trapping and returning, but as with nursing mothers or any cat in a trap, it may be difficult to trap her again—this is your opportunity to protect her from the health risks and ongoing stresses of mating and pregnancy.

## HANDLING HOMELESS ANIMALS

Please be sure to exercise caution with an unfamiliar animal. Even a tame cat or friendly dog can become aggressive and bite when they are frightened or injured. Since all homeless and feral animals have uncertain vaccination histories, it's especially important that you exercise caution in handling unknown animals.

**THINK  
BE  
CAREFUL**

To minimize the risk of being scratched or bitten, we recommend the use of humane box traps for feral cats. (Please see the section titled "Community Cats" for more info on potentially feral cats and resources.)

## LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

You should always report having found a lost animal so that the owner, if there is one, can find them. Doing this does not mean that you must relinquish all concern for the animal.

Even though you're not legally required to notify the shelter, you'll still want to let us know that you have a lost pet by filing a lost pet report. If the owners of the animal are looking for their pet, they will most likely start by calling the shelter, so it's very important that we know that you have found the pet.

If you still cannot find the owner and wish to give the pet a home, you are legally considered the owner of the pet after 10 days.



A typical ad describes the type of animal, the location where he/she was found, and the coloring and other distinct characteristics of the animal.

You want to leave out some crucial characteristic, though, so that when someone calls claiming to be the owner, you can verify that the animal really belongs to him/her. This helps guard against turning strays over to animal abusers. For example, you could leave out the gender of the animal, or the fact that she has white socks on her front feet or a really bushy tail. Don't forget to give your phone number and times you can be reached.

### **Be wary of dishonest callers.**

When someone answers your ad, make sure the person gives you a detailed description of the animal. To ensure that you have found the animal's real owner, here are a few additional tips:

- Ask the caller to bring a photo of the animal to the meeting place.
- Ask for their veterinarian's phone number, and make a follow-up call.
- Watch how the animal reacts to the caller in person. If you are not satisfied, ask for more proof of ownership.
- Remember to get the owner's phone number and address.
- Ask them to bring their photo ID.

### **FINDING A NEW HOME FOR YOUR NEW FRIEND**

If you do need to find a new home for a pet, you'll want to advertise as widely as you can, in as many places as possible. Creating a flyer is a great way to start.

When you've made copies of the flyer, post them throughout your community, wherever a good prospective adopter might see them. Ask to put them up at veterinarians' offices, pet supply stores, and the workplaces of your family and friends. Places like health food stores, supermarkets, libraries, churches, and health clubs often have community bulletin boards where anyone can post flyers.

**\*\*For additional resources on rehoming an animal, please see the section titled "Finding a New Home"**