

Study Shows Microchips Help Find Lost Pets

A recent study highlights shelters' success in finding owners of microchipped cats and dogs.

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Pets who are microchipped have a better chance of being returned to their owner after entering an animal shelter than those who are not, according to a recent study by Linda Lord, D.V.M., Ph.D., assistant professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Ohio State and service head for Community Practice, Outreach and Shelter Medicine.

Specifically, the return-to-owner rate for cats was 20 times higher and for dogs 2.5 times higher for microchipped pets than were the rates of return for all stray cats and dogs that had entered the shelter.

"This is the first time there has been good data about the success of shelters finding the owners of pets with microchips," Lord said. "We found that shelters did much better than they thought they did at returning animals with microchips to their owners."

For the study, 53 shelters in 23 states agreed to maintain monthly records about microchipped animals taken to the facilities. Only shelters that automatically conduct scans for microchips on all animals were eligible to participate. Collectively, there were 7,704 microchipped animals that entered the shelters for the duration of the study: August 2007 to March 2008.

Strays made up slightly more than half of the animals tracked in the study, or 53 percent. About 42 percent of the animals had been surrendered by their owners and were not factored into the return-to-owner rate.

In all, owners were found for 72.7 percent of microchipped animals. Among those found, 73.9 percent of the owners wanted the animals back in their homes.

Although the study supports microchipping as a valuable permanent way to identify pets, issues related to registration may undermine its overall potential, according to Lord.

"In the study, the biggest reason owners couldn't be found was because of an incorrect or disconnected phone number in the registration database," she said. "The chip is only as good as my ability as a pet owner to keep my information up to date in the registry."

In the cases in which owners were not found, 35.4 percent was attributed to incorrect or disconnected phone numbers, 24.3 percent was owners' failure to return phone calls or respond to letters, 9.8 percent was attributed to unregistered microchips and 17.2 percent because microchips were registered in a database that differed from the manufacturer.

Most people who obtain a microchip for their pet register their contact information with the chip's manufacturer, Lord said. However, a pet owner can also register with another company. In addition, many animal shelters keep their own microchip registry databases.

Still, veterinarians can further help in the recovery process by telling clients about the importance of registration, according to Lord.

Lord also noted that no animal identification is more effective than a tag on a collar that includes the pet's name and the owner's phone number.

Lord conducted the study with co-authors Walter Ingwersen, D.V.M., DVSc, Dipl. ACVIM, of Boehringer Ingelheim Canada's Vetmedica Division; Janet Gray, D.V.M., a veterinarian in Redmond, Wash.; and David Wintz of the Larimer Humane Society in Fort Collins, Colo.

The study was published in the July 15 issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

