

Lost Cats Not Found as Often as Dogs

New study says that cat owners wait longer before searching for their pet.

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A lost cat isn't as likely to be reunited with its owner as a lost dog is, according to a new study detailed in the current issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

During the study, conducted in part by staff from Ohio State University, researchers found that in one city in southwestern Ohio, 71 percent of lost dogs were found, compared to 53 percent of lost cats.

Although Ohio law requires that dogs be licensed, 11 percent of the lost dogs had no license, tags microchips or other identifying documentation when they were lost.

Cat owners in that area aren't required to identify their pet; 19 percent of lost cats had a tag or microchip at the time they were lost.

More than half of the cats returned on their own, but less than one in 10 dogs did, according to the study, the results of which appear in the Jan. 15, 2007, issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

"Many people think that a missing cat just comes home on its own," said Linda Lord, the study's lead author and Ohio State assistant professor of veterinary preventative medicine. "Most of the lost cats that were recovered in our study did return home on their own, but nearly half of the cats reported missing were never found."

More than one out of three owners (35 percent) found their lost dogs at a shelter. Just 7 percent of cat owners who recovered their pet found it at a shelter.

"Cat owners tend to wait longer to call and visit a shelter," said Lord, who added that cat owners waited about three days before contacting a local animal shelter, while dog owners waited about a day to do so.

Lord and her colleagues restricted their four-month study to Dayton, Ohio, and the surrounding county.

Researchers interviewed owners of lost pets who agreed to participate in the study by phone. Collectively, these owners reported 138 lost cats and 187 lost dogs. Owners answered a series of questions related to the recovery of their pet, including what kind of methods they used to search for the missing animal.

The researchers also asked the owners if the animal was wearing an identification tag, a rabies tag, a license tag, or had a microchip at the time it disappeared. Each shelter scanned animals for microchips.