



# “Help Me... I Found a Stray!”

A practical guide to helping stray animals.



## “Help Me...I Found a Stray!”

Actually, the stray usually finds YOU! Why you? Because unlike those who can walk away from a suffering animal, you care. We wish there were more like you! Now that you've found your stray (or he's found you) we have one piece of advice: DON'T PANIC!

## How can I tell a lost pet from a homeless stray?

Take a good look at your foundling – is he in good physical condition? Does he appear well-fed? Have a clean coat? Is he easy to approach? Is he wearing a collar or identification tags (or is there a telltale ring of thin hair around his neck to show he's worn a collar)?

If your stray appears to be owned, you need to take quick action. Delay only increases the chances of injury or illness or of the cat or dog “turning wild” (adapting to the outside world and losing socialization to people).

## OK, it's a lost pet – how do I find the owner?

Tags make it easy. Check rabies vaccination or license tags with the issuing agency (you'll find the phone number on the tag). Identification tags may have the name and phone number of the owner, or be issued by a humane society. Either way, one phone call does the trick.

Check inside the animal's ears, on gums, and along the inner surface of hind legs for tattoos – especially on animals that appear to be purebred. Phone

the regional chapter of the American Kennel Club, International Kennel Club, American Cat Fanciers' Association, or the International Cat Association for assistance in tracing tattoos.

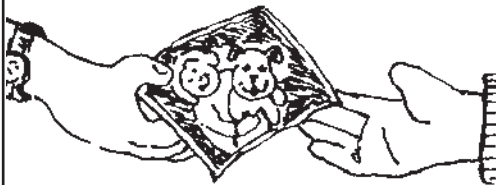
**Remember** – the odds are, the owner is looking for the dog or cat, so:

- Check “LOST” sections of local papers; place your own “FOUND” ad (many papers provide these at reduced rates or free).

- Register the animal with lost/found match-up programs at humane societies and animal shelters.

- Post “FOUND” notices in the area where the animal was picked up. Most effective are public bulletin boards in supermarkets; at veterinary hospitals, groomers and shopping areas; near playgrounds; and on lampposts. Your local humane society can often help you with this project. If possible, include a photograph of the animal on the notice.

- Neighborhood children are your most valuable resource! Kids make it their business to know all the pet animals on the block. Ask them if they recognize your stray or if they know of a family that recently lost a pet.



- If the animal looks like a purebred, contact the local breed club. “Fanciers” of a particular breed keep close tabs on each other or can quickly find a home for one of their favorites.

## I found the owner! Now what?

First, take a deep breath. Congratulations are *probably* in order, BUT...

Reselling animals for research, for baiting fighting or racing dogs, and as breeders for puppy and kitten mills is a thriving industry. An unscrupulous “buncher” (animal broker) may put on a well-polished act as a concerned pet-owner who's lost a beloved companion. Here's how not to be fooled:

- Ask for identification. When someone calls in response to an ad or posted notice, ask for the caller's name and telephone number and tell him/her you'll call back right away.

- Ask for a description of the animal. An owner should be able to give you details not mentioned in your ad or notice.

- Watch the reaction of the animal when the owner arrives. A reunion of human and animal companion has a distinctive “feel” to it!

- If you're not sure, ask for proof – veterinary records, photographs, a favorite toy, some unique behavior. Most state laws define the “owner” of the animal as the one who “keeps or harbors” or “has right of property in” it. Since you are harboring the stray, you may have right of ownership until someone else can prove they have “right of property.”

## How do I rescue a stray who won't come to me?

A stray that's "wild" (feral) or so badly abused, injured or frightened that it can't be approached will try to run away from everyone – even people trying to save its life. Don't underestimate the speed and strength of even a very weakened animal. And don't try to rescue it alone – *get help.*

Our experience suggests gradually luring cats into a front-opening carrier with food and coaxing – a method that requires patience, persistence, and several days or more. Smaller dogs may respond to the same technique, but larger dogs will require leashing. If you haven't done this kind of rescuing before, we strongly recommend getting assistance from an expert. Any animal can bite or scratch when cornered, scared, or hurt – you could be seriously injured and *still* not catch your stray.

If you are bitten or scratched, get treatment immediately. If you are bitten and the animal gets away, get the post-exposure rabies vaccinations (a series of three shots to the arm have replaced the old and painful method of 14 injections in the abdomen).

## Should I trap a stray?

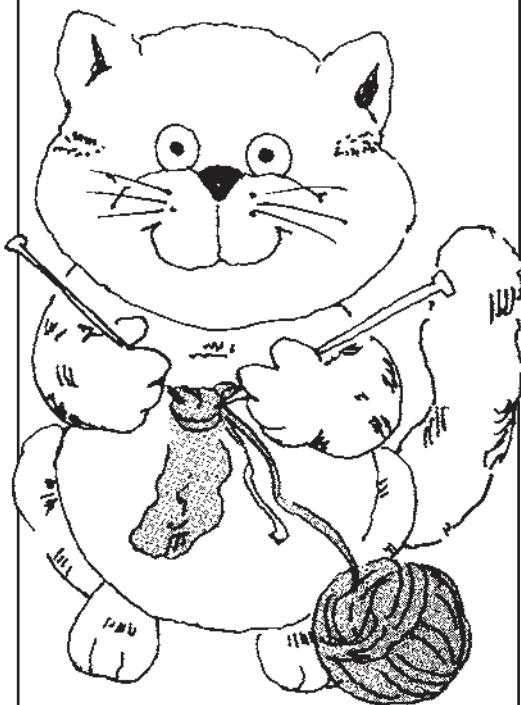
Feral, frightened, or elusive strays can be trapped with a specially built humane trap. **DO NOT** use home-made devices. Contact local humane organizations about borrowing or renting a live trap. Have them demonstrate it and show you how to use it correctly. Misusing a humane trap can injure or even kill a trapped animal. If you've been feeding the stray, stop for a day or two before setting the trap, since the food will be the bait. The trap must be kept under constant watch, but from a distance to allow the animal to go in. Be ready to deal with "accidental" trapping of other strays and local wildlife.

**Remember** – catching the animal is half the solution. What are you going to do NEXT?

## I've got my stray – NOW what?

If you have pets, don't expose your own animals to the stray until you know it's in good health. If the stray has been outside for awhile, he probably has fleas, ear mites, worms, or other parasites that can be passed to your pets. Have the foundling examined by a veterinarian.

Expect odd or protective behavior when a new animal arrives. It's usually better to keep the stray separated from the other animals – a bathroom, a spare bedroom, laundry room, or enclosed



heated porch or garage can make an excellent "guest house."

Feed your rescued stray a good brand-name pet food. We recommend "fixed formula" foods such as Iams® or Hill's Science Diet®. *Resist the temptation to overfeed* – you can't make up for missed meals in one feeding. Feed several small meals over the next few days and make sure your new arrival has plenty of fresh water. Give the dog or cat a comfortable place to sleep – and expect it to do a *lot* of sleeping.

Cats need a litter box available at all times, and dogs need to be walked on a regular schedule (at least three times each day, and about half hour after meal times). House breaking and litter box training may take some time with an animal that has been running loose, so keep your stray in an area with an easy-to-clean floor!

## What if the stray is sick or hurt?

Check with your local humane society. Many shelters give priority to injured or ill strays. Some euthanize animals needing a lot of medical care. If you bring the animal to a veterinarian on your own, you'll be expected to pay the bill just as if it were your own pet. Again, your local humane society can often help, especially if you are on a fixed income.

If you can't afford veterinary care, or if the animal's injuries or illness is too severe, consider euthanasia. It's better for the animal to die quickly at the hands of a caring veterinarian than to suffer a slow and painful death.

## My stray is pregnant – what should I do?

There are about eight puppies and kittens born for every available home. Even if you find homes for all of your stray's offspring, that simply means an equal number of puppies and kittens somewhere else won't get homes. Spaying and neutering are the only answers to the tragedy of pet overpopulation. Pregnant dogs and cats can be spay-aborted up to a very advanced stage. The risk of this operation is greater than an ordinary spay, but not as great as delivering a litter.

## What if I find a mother and her litter?

The first rule is "Nature knows best." It's best not to handle the litter or "help" the mother care for them. Let mom do the work. Just give her a safe "nesting box" that's cozy, soft, warm, and big enough for her to lie down and nurse. Be sure to keep the temperature on the warm side (85 degrees for the first week or two, moderating *slowly* down to room temperature by the fourth or fifth week). Give the nursing mother all the quality pet food she cares to eat and plenty of fresh water. Weaning begins at about five to seven weeks of age. Start offering a mixture of meat baby foods and heavily diluted canned food to the puppies or kittens. Be sure to use the right canned food – dog food for dogs, cat food for cats. Nutritional needs for puppies and kittens are very different!



## I've found a litter without a mother – what should I do?

Hand-rearing an orphaned litter is time-consuming, frustrating, and often heart-breaking. The chances of survival drop dramatically without the mother. Proper nutrition, sanitation, temperature, and handling give you the best chance of success. Contact your veterinarian or local humane society for guidance. Enlist the help of friends, neighbors, and family members – you'll need it! If the litter is very young, feedings will be needed every few hours...*around the clock*.

■ **Nutrition** – The Borden Company makes milk substitutes for kittens (Kitten Milk Replacer, also called KMR®) and puppies (Esbilac®). If you can't locate these products, a home-made formula of 1 can evaporated milk, an equal part of boiled water, 1 egg yolk, 1 tablespoon Karo® syrup mixed well and brought to room temperature will do the trick. (You can make a larger quantity of this recipe and refrigerate it.)

Pet nurser kits are available at most pet-supply stores, or you can try a baby-doll bottle, premature infant nipple, or medicine dropper. You'll have to put a hole in the nipple of any bottle you use – a sterile hot needle works best. Newborns should be fed whenever they're hungry rather than on a schedule – a minimum of 4 to 6 times daily *around the clock*. Feed puppies and kittens lying on their stomachs and tug slightly on the bottle to encourage strong sucking. After a feeding, the stomach will have a round and rosy appearance. Hand-reared litters can be weaned a little earlier: introduce the semi-solid food described earlier at about 4 weeks of age.

■ **Environment** – The "nest" or "den" needs to be warm (see previous section for suggested temperatures), clean and quiet. *Orphan litters of puppies and kittens have the best chance of survival when the handling is kept to a minimum.* They may be cute and cuddly, but they're also at great risk for disease – in the early weeks of life, only touch them when necessary. The "incubator" box should have shredded newspaper bedding covered with a smooth blanket or towel pulled taut to prevent burrowing. (Burrowing newborn puppies or kittens can become overheated or suffocate.) Keep the box clean, changing the bedding regularly. Since there's no mother to clean the youngsters, use a warm damp washcloth to *gently* rub each animal. Rubbing the abdomen and anus is important to stimulate elimina-

tion. Introduce kittens to a shallow litter pan at about 1 month of age and begin housetraining puppies at about 6 weeks (but don't expect 100% consistent results in housebreaking until puppies are about 6 months old).

■ **Health management** – In the early weeks of life, puppies and kittens mostly eat and sleep. A puppy or kitten that is restless or cries constantly should be seen by a veterinarian. Stool is soft but formed and slightly yellow in color. Elimination should take place after every feeding. Remember – you must take the role of the mother in stimulating elimination, grooming, and socialization.

## How do I adopt a stray into my home?

Whether you keep your foundling or adopt him out, the new household should provide two important items beyond food, water, and veterinary care: time and space. Don't force a lot of attention on the newcomer. It's natural for your stray to be timid and hide. The last thing he wants is to be pursued. Since you don't know how the animal was treated before you found him (perhaps he was even abused), it will take time to gain his trust. It's best to keep a new-found stray in a separate room at first, so he has his own space. Be sure to make some sort of contact daily, even if it's only to look into a hiding place and talk softly. When he's ready, he'll come out. If there are other pets in the home, expect some debates. These almost always resolve themselves without serious harm, so watch carefully but stay in the background. And don't mistake fear for hostility. A stray animal must be quick, aggressive, and cunning to survive – but as the weeks or months pass, these old habits are replaced by the sociability of a housepet.

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## N O T E

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If severe aggression, timidity, or erratic behavior persists after several months, you may want to consult your veterinarian, local humane organization, or obedience trainer for the name of a reputable animal behaviorist to help you understand what your pet is trying to tell you.

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## How do I find a home for my rescued stray?

Classified advertising, handbills, posting notices at local veterinary hospitals and food stores, and referrals through local humane organizations are the most popular techniques for placing a stray in a good home. But don't overlook word-of-mouth – quite often "friends of friends" know someone looking for a pet. Not only will your orphan find a home quickly, you'll have a better chance of following up.

And do follow up! Screen a potential adopter carefully – you want your stray to have a permanent and loving home. A qualified adopter should appreciate it if you're thorough. Ask questions, including: Have you had pets in the past? If so, where are they now? What will you feed your pet and how often? Who is/will be your veterinarian? How much time will be spent with your new pet? Is the cost of continuing and possible emergency veterinary care within your budget?

Get a home address and telephone number, references, identification, and a "good faith" fee of no less than \$25.00. If a potential adopter balks at this amount, he or she may also hesitate at the cost of proper care – look for a different home! Get promises that the animal will be kept properly indoors and will not be used as a guard dog or "mouser." Finally, there should be an agreement that you can come and visit the animal three or four weeks after placement. If you feel able, you can also tell the adopter he or she may return the pet to you – rather than euthanize it or surrender it to an animal shelter – if things don't work out.



## I want to bring my stray to an animal shelter – how do I find the right one?

There are more dogs and cats than available homes. That means animal shelters are flooded with unwanted pets. Few can accept every animal referred to them. Because of pet overpopulation, “no-kill” shelters are frequently full or only accept the most dire emergencies and other shelters must euthanize after a week or two to make room for new arrivals. Space and funds limit the number of animals taken in by shelters.

Here are some considerations in choosing a shelter: size of cages or runs;

feeding/nutritional policy; adoption screening and follow-up; the animal’s realistic chance of adoption; whether unadopted or “unadoptable” animals are euthanized (killed) or conditions under which animals will be euthanized; method of euthanasia (injection of an overdose of an anesthetic into a vein is considered the most humane method). If the shelter is “no-kill,” what happens to unadopted animals? Being caged for life probably isn’t what you had in mind when you rescued your stray!

## What should I do if I find injured or abandoned wildlife?

First, be sure the animal really needs your help. Too often, humane “help” for wildlife actually makes the problem worse. For example, a good-hearted person discovers a nest of baby rabbits. Guessing that the mother has abandoned them, the person “rescues” the babies. Usually, mama is less than 50 yards away, looking for food. She will abandon a nest that has been disturbed or has the scent of another species of animal around it – and hand-rearing wildlife is a very difficult and dangerous task. It’s also unfair to the animals – reintroducing hand-reared animals into the wild (if they survive that long) has a disturbingly low success rate.

Catching an “injured” wild animal may also be worse than the injury. Minor wounds usually heal faster when left to Nature, and the trauma of trapping, anesthetizing, treating, and re-releasing makes the risks of human involvement much greater. As a rule of thumb, a wild animal hurt badly enough that you can approach it is one in need of assistance – but DON’T DO IT ALONE.

In fact, if you don’t have the skill and experience of a professional, don’t do it at all – contact a local wildlife refuge or rehabilitator. Raccoons, otters, squirrels and chipmunks may look cute, but their claws and teeth can do severe damage – and an injured animal moves more quickly than you think. Contact your local zoo, state Department of Conservation (or Natural Resources), Audubon Society, Greenpeace office, or other animal advocacy group to locate the closest preserve or rehabilitator.



## There Are Millions of Reasons Why You Found a Stray...

That’s how many dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens are homeless in the United States. Since most strays are not neutered or spayed, there are more strays being born every hour. Millions of strays are picked up by humane societies and animal shelters each year at a cost of over *half a billion dollars!* And in spite of all those efforts, the stray population continues to grow.

But not all strays were born homeless – millions of “throw-away” pets are left behind, tossed into forest preserves, and set loose on open land. Others are free-roaming pets who were injured, frightened or chased beyond their ability to return home.

Responsible stewardship of companion animals – including leashing, ID tags, and especially neutering and spaying – is the only long-range answer. By reaching out to a needy stray, you’re carrying on that legacy of compassion. You have our congratulations, our respect...and our thanks.



**Tree House  
Animal Foundation**  
1212 West Carmen Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60640-2999

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