

Athens-Clarke County Animal Control

What should I do if a pet gets lost?

We certainly hope your pet never gets lost. There are steps you can take beforehand as precautions, and afterward if it does happen, to maximize the chances of recovering a lost pet as quickly as possible. The most important advice we can give is **don't rely on only one method to identify your pet.** There are a lot of options, so why not get some peace of mind by taking advantage of all of them?

Prior to a pet getting lost:

1. Microchip your pet. These work everywhere, and most animal shelters, Animal Control agencies and veterinary offices have scanners that can read them. Most if not all can be looked up 24-hours a day. Make sure your contact information is up to date with the microchip company. Many shelters (including Athens-Clarke County Animal Control) microchip all adopted pets as part of the adoption fee. Most veterinary offices offer microchipping at a nominal cost. Microchips are often offered at low-cost vaccination clinics as well. For microchips to be useful, you usually have to register the chip by providing your contact information to the microchip company. There is usually a small fee for this, and it's important that you keep your information up to date in case you move or change telephone numbers. Microchips are designed to last for the life of your pet.
2. Get a custom, engraved identification tag. These usually list your name, telephone number and address. Sometimes they can include important information about your pet, such as medical needs. Make sure you get a new one if you move or change telephone numbers. These provide an immediate way for anyone finding your pet to get in touch with you. These can be obtained online or via mail-in forms available at shelters and veterinary offices. There may even be local businesses that can make these for you. Keep in mind tags can get pulled off in some circumstances, so it's important to have more than one form of identification for your pet.
3. Get a free tag from your local shelter. Some shelters (such as Athens-Clarke County Animal Control) offer free tags. Our tag has a four-digit number and our phone number. Owners provide contact information when they receive the tag. Anyone finding the pet can call us and we can look up the owner information quickly. The downside is that we are not always open, so sometimes this can delay getting your pet back to you. Keep in mind tags can get pulled off in some circumstances, so it's important to have more than one form of identification for your pet.

4. Make sure rabies tags are up to date. Rabies tags can work much like ID tags, but with several differences. First, some veterinary offices don't keep information on expired tags readily accessible. Veterinary offices are not always open. Not all rabies tag information is digitized or easy to look up. Tags can (rarely) get switched between different pets. Finally, low-cost rabies clinics may be staffed by different veterinary staff on different dates, so it might not be easy to track down who has the information. Keep in mind tags can get pulled off in some circumstances, so it's important to have more than one form of identification for your pet.
5. Make sure you have a recent photo of your pet. Having a good, recent photo to use with online postings and fliers can make a big difference. Breeds can easily be confused and simple descriptions may not make it easy to identify your pet to other citizens or to shelter staff. It's a good idea to have a recent photo of your pet's collar, too.

If a pet is lost:

1. Visit your local shelter(s) immediately. Go in person rather than rely on a description over the phone. Often you can leave a flier or give a lost report once you confirm the pet is not there. If you live in an area where there are multiple shelters nearby, go to each of them and file a report/post a flier. Having a recent photo can help shelter staff tremendously given the large numbers of animals that come through shelters.
2. Post fliers with a photo and contact information at local shelters, veterinary offices and anywhere else where people may see your pet (and that allows such fliers to be posted). Check your local ordinances for restrictions.
3. There are a number of online lost and found web sites for pets. Often a digital flier can be uploaded to several places. Social media sites are also a good place to reach lots of people.
4. Local newspapers and other publications may have resources available such as online and print classified ads.
5. Smart phone apps: Several new applications for smart phones now available allow you to take a photo of your pet and attach contact information. If your pet gets lost, this allows you to immediately post a digital flier. Some of these apps even provide maps showing the locations of lost pets and can be searched.

Finally, this is by no means a comprehensive list of everything you could do. Again, the most important point is to make sure there are multiple ways to identify your pet and get her or him home as soon as possible. Most of these cost little or no money and don't take much time.