

Guide to Finding a Pet Detective or Search Dog

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Lost Pet Research & Recovery
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About This Guide

Although this is called the *Guide to Finding a Pet Detective or Search Dog*, it is a little bit of a misnomer. This is really the Guide to Finding a Pet Detective, Search Dog, Lost Pet Tracking Dog, Lost Pet Tracker, Missing Animal Response Technician, Lost Pet Consultant, Lost Dog Trapper, etc. There are so many different types of people and groups that can offer on-site support in the search for a missing pet and they don't conveniently fall under one term. For convenience, I will often use the term "pet detective" even though most of these people are not licensed private investigators. I also use the term "search dog" to apply to tracking dogs, scent-specific trailing dogs, area detection dogs, and remains detection dogs.

The goals of this guide are to:

- Provide you with the necessary resources to find on-site assistance in the search for your missing pet. This includes access to the largest collection of pet detectives, search dogs, lost pet trackers, Missing Animal Response technicians, lost pet consultants, lost dog trappers and nonprofit/volunteer lost pet support groups.
- Help you determine what type of help you really need. A lot of people come into this thinking that they really need a search dog when they might benefit most from either hiring a pet detective or getting assistance from a local volunteer group.

Where to Find a Pet Detective or Search Dog

Prior to hiring a pet detective or search dog team, I strongly recommend reading the sections on "Understanding How Search Dogs Work and When You Should Use One" and "Before You Hire a Pet Detective or Search Dog Team."

Lost Pet Services Directory

This is a list of all the pet detectives, search dog teams, lost pet trackers, Missing Animal Response technicians, lost pet consultants and lost pet trappers that I have been able to find. It includes businesses as well as nonprofit groups and volunteer lost pet groups. I do not necessarily recommend the services of these businesses, groups or individuals. Be sure to read the section "Before You Hire a Pet Detective or Search Dog Team" before contacting anyone.

Lost Pet Services Listings Disclaimer: Lost Pet Research & Recovery (LPRR) makes no representations, warranties or guarantees as to, and assumes no responsibility for, the lost pet services provided by these individuals, businesses or groups, and LPRR expressly disclaims all liability for damages or loss of any kind arising out of the use or performance of services provided by these pet detectives, search dog teams or other lost pet consultants or volunteers. It should be understood that only a small percentage of lost pets are located during the search with a search dog, and in many cases, other search techniques may be more effective than using a search dog.

Lost Pet Services in the United States

Business or Group Name	State	Search Dog	Training	Reviews
Helping Escaped & Lost Pets	AK	No		Facebook
The Feline Finders	AR	Yes	MAR ^a	
HARTT, Inc.	AZ	No	MAR	Facebook
Missing Pet Detectives	AZ	Yes	MAR	
Dog Days Search & Rescue	CA	No		Facebook
Fetchem	CA	No	MAR	
Lost Pet Detection	CA	Yes	MAR	Yelp!
Pet Search and Rescue Investigations	CA	Yes	MAR	
Missing Mutt Detectives	CO	No		
Missing Pet Tracker	CO	Yes	MAR	Facebook
CT Dog Gone Recovery Volunteers	CT	No	MAR	Facebook
Farmington Valley Lost Pet Recovery	CT	No	MAR	
Summit Missing Animal Response Team	CT	Yes	MAR	Facebook
K9 Search & Rescue of Orange County	FL	Yes	MASDN ^b	Facebook
Pet P.I.	FL	No	MAR	Facebook
PI Jamie Katz	FL	Yes		BBB
Triple "T" Pet Finders of SW Florida	FL	No		Facebook
Carl Washington Pet Detective	GA	Yes		Yelp!
Lost Cat Finder	GA	No	MAR	Facebook
Lost Pet Tracker	ID	Yes	MAR	Facebook
New Leash on Life	KS	Yes	MAR	Facebook
Lost Pet Research and Recovery	MA	No	MAR	Facebook
Missing Dogs Massachusetts	MA	No		Google
New Bedford Pet Detective	MA	No		
Tracking 4 Paws	MA	Yes		Facebook
Wandering Paws K9	MA	Yes		
Wandering Tails Pet Recovery	MA	Yes	MAR	Facebook
Dogs Finding Dogs	MD	Yes	MASDN	Yelp!
Lost Animal Resource Group	MD	Yes	MAR	
Lost Pet Tracking Dogs	ME	Yes	MASDN	BBB
Maine Lost Dog Recovery	ME	No	MAR	Facebook
Lost Paws, LLC	MI	Yes	MAR	
The Retrievers	MN	No	MAR	Facebook
Epic Animal Recovery	NC	Yes		
Smokey Search Dog	NC	Yes		
Lost Pet Professionals	NE	Yes	MASDN	Angie's
Fast Track K9s	NH	Yes		Facebook
Granite State Dog Recovery	NH	No		Facebook
Buddha Dog Rescue	NJ	No		Facebook
Dog Haus Pet Sitting & Animal Control	NJ	No		Google

Team Frijoles Lost Pet Recovery	NM	No		Facebook
Long Island Lost Dog Search & Rescue	NY	Yes	MAR	Facebook
Missing Pet Pawlice LLC	NY	No	MAR	Facebook
Operation GYPSY, Inc.	NY	No		
Lost Dog Advocates	OH	Yes	MAR	
Lost Pet Recovery	OH	No		Facebook
Pet Search and Rescue Investigations	OH	Yes	MAR	Google
Bellabon's Pet Recovery Services	PA	No	MAR	
Find Toby (SMART 4 Paws)	PA	No	MAR	Facebook
Hound Hunters of NEPA	PA	No	MAR	Facebook
Luzerne County Pet Recovery Services	PA	No	MAR	
Team Ruby K911	PA	No	MAR	
Where's Fido?	PA	No	MAR	Facebook
Pack Leader Pet Trackers	RI	Yes		Google
Black River Search and Rescue Inc	SC	Yes		Facebook
Austin Lost & Found Pets	TX	No		
Dog Gone Detectives	TX	Yes	MAR	Angie's
Lone Star's K-9 Pet Trackers	TX	Yes		Facebook
Lost Pet Specialist	TX	Yes	MAR	Facebook
Pet Search and Rescue Investigations	TX	Yes	MAR	Facebook
Statewide Animal Control	TX	No		Facebook
Found Inc	VA	Yes	MAR	
Pure Gold Pet Trackers	VA	Yes	MAR	
Helping Lost Pets WA	WA	No	MAR	
International K9 Search and Rescue	WA	Yes		Yelp!
I Paw'd It Forward	WA	No		Facebook
Roaming Paws Lost Pet Services	WA	Yes	MAR	
Three Retrievers Lost Pet Rescue	WA	Yes	MAR	Google
Cold Nose Investigators	WY	Yes	MAR	
My Lost Pet 411	WY	No	MAR	Facebook

^aMAR is Missing Animal Response technician, which is a training formerly offered by [Missing Pet Partnership](#) and currently offered by the [Missing Animal Response Network](#). Whether or not someone is MAR trained is not always clear, so this is my best guess in some cases.

^bMASDN is the [Missing Animal Scent Dog Network](#), which is a certification offered by [Lost Pet Professionals](#) to K9 handlers affiliated with their business.

Note: If a website link does not work, please let me know. The website may just be temporarily down, and you should also do a quick search for the business/group on Facebook.

Lost Pet Services in Canada and the U.K.

Business or Group Name	Location	Search Dog	Training	Reviews
Dogs of Distinction Canine Training	BC	Yes	MAR	
Finding Lost & Escaped Dogs	BC	No		
Lost Pet Help	BC	No	MAR	Facebook
Pet Searchers	BC	Yes		Facebook
K9 Ground Search	ON	No		
Healing Hearts Lost Pet Search & Recovery	ON	No	MAR	
Lost Paws Inc	ON	No		Facebook
Trackers Edge	ON	Yes		Facebook
Happy Tails Detective	UK	Yes	MAR	Facebook
The Pet Detectives	UK	Yes		Google

Didn't Find Someone Listed? Don't Give Up! Keep Looking!!

The Lost Pet Services Directory is an ongoing project as I am always finding new resources. Check out this [Google Sheet](#) for an updated list of volunteer lost pet services groups. If it does not open immediately, click on "Open with Google Sheets." The list may also include any pet detectives or search dog teams that have not yet been added to this guide.

Check for Local Volunteers or Groups

The above listings only include nonprofit groups and volunteers with websites and/or Facebook pages. You may be able to find a local volunteer by checking the sites below. Most volunteers do not have search dogs but may help with searches, posters and/or trapping.

- [Missing Animal Response Network – Pet Detective Directory](#) – includes some of the pet detectives listed in this directory but also includes links to local volunteers. Everyone listed here has received Missing Animal Response (MAR) training.
- [Lost Dogs of America](#) – includes links to many state lost dog recovery pages/groups.
- [Lost Dog Trapping Facebook Group](#) – includes a map in their Files section showing locations and contact information of businesses, nonprofits and volunteers offering assistance trapping lost or stray dogs.

There are many Facebook groups and pages that post lost and found pets online. You may be able to find some on Facebook by searching for your state or region along with "lost" or "missing" dog, cat or pet. Some of these groups may have local volunteers that offer on-site assistance. It is not always clear from their Facebook page or website whether they offer on-site assistance, so you may need to reach out and ask. If they don't offer on-site assistance, they may be able to refer you to a local group or volunteer not yet included in this guide.

Pet Detectives Willing to Travel

If there's no one in your area, some pet detectives are willing to travel long distances. However, this can be very expensive! In most cases your money would be better spent finding someone local that can help you with effective advertising and possibly trapping.

- [Found Inc](#) – located in Virginia and willing to fly throughout US.
- [Lost Cat Finder](#) – located in Georgia, and willing to fly to many states.
- [Lost Pet Tracker](#) – offices in California and Idaho and willing to travel.
- [Lost Pet Tracking Dogs](#) – located in Maine and willing to travel.
- [Lost Pet Professionals](#) – national franchise with search dog teams in multiple states. Willing to travel long distances. Check [MASDN.org](#) for teams in your area.
- [Lost Pet Search and Rescue Investigations](#) – search dog teams located in multiple locations in US willing to travel.
- [Missing Pet Detectives](#) – located in Arizona and may be willing to drive throughout southeast US.
- [Pure Gold Pet Trackers](#) – located in Virginia and often travels throughout eastern US.
- [Smokey Search Dog](#) – located in North Carolina and may travel eastern half of the US.
- [The Feline Finders](#) – located in Arkansas and willing to fly throughout US.

Don't Forget to Check with Animal Control

If you are missing an animal, don't forget to contact your local Animal Control Officer (ACO). The job of the ACO is to enforce laws concerning care and treatment of animals. They may also respond to calls for stray or injured animals. Some work in shelters where they house stray animals and attempt to find their owners or rehome them. In some towns the ACO may primarily or even only handle dogs. In this case, find out if they can refer you to a local rescue or Trap-Neuter-Return group for lost cats.

You won't know what type of support your ACO can provide until you call them. At the very least, you want to submit a lost pet report and find out if anyone has called them about any stray or found animals. Some ACOs may even help with searching for or catching a lost pet. Others may be willing to loan you a humane trap, but not provide further assistance.

Other Places to Check

- Try an online search for "lost pet search dog," "lost pet tracking dog" or "pet detective" in your state, town or county.
- Ask local shelters, rescue groups or animal control if they know of anyone in your area. If you are looking for help trapping a lost cat, ask if there are any Trap-Neuter-Return volunteers in the area that might be able to help you.
- If there's another pet detective in your state or region, email them and ask if they know anyone closer to your location.

- You could try contacting your local Search and Rescue (SAR) group, but be aware that most SAR dogs are specifically trained to ignore animal scent, so they won't get distracted on human searches.

Before You Hire a Pet Detective or Search Dog Team ...

Please be aware that there is currently NO regulation or independent certification of search dogs for missing pets, and anyone can call their dog a search dog even with little or no training. Some people genuinely want to help and believe in their dog's tracking ability, but their dog may be inadequately trained. These dogs are more likely to lose the trail, follow the wrong trail or indicate that a pet is deceased when they are not. Even a poorly trained dog will have some successes. Other search dog handlers are unfortunately more interested in making money than in helping people find their pets. A bad track is not only a waste of money, it will have you wasting time and other resources focusing your search in the wrong areas.

A properly trained tracking dog generally requires 12-18 months of training before the dog can accurately run lost pet searches. This training might be accelerated if they focus on the dog's training full time as they do in the military and police. However, most pet detectives do not have the time or resources for this type of training. Be wary of anyone that is working a tracking dog after less than one year of training. Once a search dog is working lost pet cases, they should continue training on a regular basis to ensure reliability. Air scenting or area detection dogs may be adequately trained in as little as 3-4 months.

The training of the pet detective is also important since most lost pets are not found during the search and on-going support is often critical. Although often referred to as "pet detectives," few are actually licensed private investigators. Most provide education on lost pet behavior, physical searches similar to search and rescue operations, assistance with effective advertising, rental of equipment such as cameras and traps and/or help with catching loose pets. Others may refer to themselves as lost pet consultants or missing animal response technicians and may or may not offer on-site assistance. There are also many volunteer lost pet searchers and even some nonprofit groups.

Make sure that you are aware of the training and expertise of the person that you hire whether they are a paid professional or volunteer. There are a few groups that offer training and/or certification for missing pet work. The Missing Animal Response Network offers online trainings for pet detectives, shelter volunteers and search dog teams. Lost Pet Professionals provides their own training and certifications through the Missing Animal Investigators of America and the Missing Animal Scent Dog Network. I personally trained through the Missing Animal Response Network and (formerly) Missing Pet Partnership and can vouch for the quality of their online and in-person trainings.

Before you hire anyone, make sure that they are a real business or nonprofit and have a good reputation. Most pet detectives do not solicit. Be wary of anyone that contacts YOU for paid

services. There are some scams out there that collect payment for lost pet services and never provide these services!

Check their website:

- Do they even have a website? If not, also check for a Facebook page.
- Do they have an About section that describes their experience and training?
- Do they clearly describe the training and abilities of their search dogs?
- Do they have any training or experience in dog or cat behavior such as a dog trainer, wildlife biologist, veterinary technician, pet sitter or shelter volunteer?
- Do they have training or certifications in search and rescue or missing pet work?
- Are they a licensed private investigator? This is important if you suspect your pet was stolen.
- Do they clearly describe the services that they offer?
- Do they clearly describe their fees? Be aware that some nonprofits charge for services.
- Do they include a Services Agreement or Terms and Conditions page on their website? These will often include cancellation and refund policies.

Ask them questions:

Unfortunately, many legitimate businesses and nonprofit groups may be missing a lot of this information. If it is unclear from their website, call or email them with questions about their services.

Some questions to consider asking:

- What type of search dogs do they have?
 - Are they scent-specific (i.e. only locate your missing pet) or general (e.g. find all cats)?
 - Can they detect animal remains or predator kill sites?
 - Are they able to check potential sightings? Most scent-specific dogs should do this, but some may not. If they don't, this may be an indication that their dog does not have a good negative indication. (The dog should indicate whether there is no scent at the location rather than go off searching for the scent.)
- What are their qualifications, experience or training?
- Do they provide support beyond the search such as consultations, posters, equipment rental or assistance with capture/trapping?
- Will they provide a GPS map of the search dog track? This is important especially if you cannot go on the search and/or if they don't provide other on-going support, so you can share the track with others.
- Can you or are you expected to accompany them on the search? A GPS map of the track is a must if you are unable to participate in the actual search.

- What is their “walk-up find” rate? This is where the search dog “walks up” and locates the missing pet during the search. Don’t be surprised if these are very low. Rates less than 10% are common. Be wary of anyone that boasts a high “walk up find” rate.
- What is their overall success rate? If they offer services/support beyond the search dog, they should be able to give you an estimate of the likelihood of finding your missing pet. Success rates of 60% to 80% are probably typical. Be wary of anyone that states a success rate over 90%.

[Search online for reviews and complaints:](#)

Check for online reviews such on Yelp!, Facebook or Google. I’ve added links to review pages on the lost pet services directory. When checking reviews, be aware that most tracking dog teams will have some complaints. This is often due to the high cost of services combined with the often-unrealistic expectations of many lost pet owners. However, be wary of anyone with lots of negative reviews and consider avoiding any with less than four stars. If someone has bad reviews, check to see if/how they respond. Avoid anyone that displays unprofessional behavior online.

Unfortunately, there are many businesses and nonprofits that have no reviews. There are many legitimate reasons why someone may not have any reviews. However, I would be wary of anyone that has been around for many years, has a professional looking website, uses a professional email (and not Gmail, Yahoo! or AOL) and has no reviews. This suggests someone that may be avoiding bad publicity.

Check the [Better Business Bureau](#) (BBB). If they don’t have a listing, it just means that they aren’t BBB accredited and/or no customers have left reviews. It doesn’t mean the business isn’t legitimate. However, if you find a listing with lots of unresolved complaints, this is a definite red flag.

Before purchasing any on-site services, make sure you are confident that you are dealing with a real business/person. Also check out their refund/cancellation policies. Some may provide partial refunds if you find your pet prior to the search, but others have a strict no refund policy.

[Understanding How Search Dogs Work and When You Should Use One](#)

So, you're thinking about hiring a search dog team to find your missing pet? Before you do, make sure that you understand how they work, their success rates, and whether one would be helpful in your situation. Unfortunately, many people hire search dog teams thinking that they are the most successful method to find and catch a missing pet. In some situations, search dogs are an invaluable tool, but in others, they may be a waste of money or even make finding your lost pet more difficult.

Different Types of Search Dogs

Most people are unaware that there are different types of lost pet search dogs. Different types are better for different situations. Make sure that you understand the capabilities of the search dog team that you hire. Some dogs may be trained in more than one of these disciplines.

Tracking or trailing dog

Technically there is a difference between a tracking dog and a trailing dog, but the terms are often used interchangeably. For simplicity, I will refer to them as tracking dogs from now on. Tracking dogs are scent-specific, which means that they require a scent-article (i.e. something that smells like your missing pet) and then they will follow scent trails left by your pet. Some tracking dogs can also be used to check potential sightings to help verify if they are your missing pet.

Tracking dogs are most useful when a pet is missing from an area where they do not normally travel such as an escaped indoor-only cat, any cat lost away from home, and dogs lost somewhere they do not normally walk. Some tracking dogs may be used for dogs and cats lost from their home, but these are much more difficult. Outdoor-access cats are among the most difficult to track. For more info, check out [this article](#).

Area detection or air scenting dog

Area detection or air scenting dogs do not follow scent trails on the ground. Instead they search an area for scent coming directly off of the missing animal. Some may also be trained to locate scent pools (i.e. concentrations of scent where the missing pet spent a lot of time) or objects that smell like the missing pet (e.g. collars, clothing, clumps of fur, etc.) Area detection dogs may be scent-specific (i.e. only locate your missing pet) or general (e.g. locate any cat in a given area). The latter are often referred to as "cat detection dogs." The search area is determined by the pet detective or search dog handler based on your pet's profile and location lost.

Area detection dogs are most useful for indoor-only cats, since these cats will often hide close to home. They are also useful for outdoor-access cats missing from their home. In this case, they search within the cat's typical home range (i.e. where they travel on a daily basis) for any trapped, injured/ill and hiding or deceased* cats. Area detection dogs are not generally used to search for lost dogs.

Remains detection dog

*Not all search dogs are trained to detect animal remains. Others may be able to locate full or partial remains, but not a predator kill site. Make sure that you understand the capabilities of the search dog that you hire. This is particularly important if you are concerned that your pet was killed by a predator.

Can a search dog still work? How long has your pet been missing?

If you are like most people, you probably did not know that using a lost pet search dog was an option until days or even weeks after your pet went missing. Whether a search dog can still assist you depends on the type of search dog used. Some people may try a bunch of other methods and only consider hiring a search dog after they have exhausted these methods. If you are considering hiring a search dog, you should look into this sooner rather than later since many search dog teams are very busy and may not be able to respond for several days or even a week.

When to use a tracking dog. How long does a scent-trail last?

The capabilities of the tracking dog depend on multiple factors including:

- the weather and terrain in which your pet is missing
- the type of pet missing
- the training and experience of the search dog
- the quality of your scent-article

Police dogs and human search and rescue dogs are often used within hours or a few days of the person going missing (or suspect running away). In contrast, lost pet tracking dogs are sometimes used days, weeks or even months after the pet went missing. There is considerable debate on how long scent trails last. Based on my experience, I would generally recommend only using a tracking dog within the first 1-2 weeks. A tracking dog might still be used after this time to check if your missing pet is still in the area and/or to check potential sightings. However, be wary of anyone that states that their tracking dog can follow a scent trail months after your pet went missing.

When to use an area detection dog

An area detection dog can be used at any time, but they are most successful when used within the first week that your cat goes missing. During this time an escaped indoor-only cat is most likely to be hiding nearby. With outdoor-access cats, timing is often more important to the safety/health of your missing cat. An outdoor-access cat may be trapped or sick/injured and hiding within their own territory. Please note that trapped cats have been known to survive days or even weeks, so a thorough physical search is still important (with or without a search dog) even if you didn't conduct one right away.

When to use a remains detection dog

Police and search and rescue dogs have been used to locate human remains weeks, months or even years after the person died. The ability to find remains over time really depends on the training of the search dog. Be sure to ask! The biggest problem is that in the case of a missing cat or small dog, there may be minimal remains to find, especially after a predator attack. I have sadly seen far too many instances where a search dog handler concludes that a lost pet has been killed by a predator based on minimal evidence, and in some cases the lost pet is later found alive or deceased elsewhere.

Do you have a good scent article?

This is only important if you are hiring a tracking dog or a scent-specific area detection dog. A scent article is something that smells like your missing pet such as clothing, a collar or brush with their fur. You can also collect scent from furniture or a cat tree by using a sterile gauze pad. To preserve the scent article, pick it up with gloves or a plastic bag and seal it inside an unscented plastic bag. Store in a cool dry place, but preferably don't freeze.

If you have multiple pets, it may be difficult to find a scent article that smells only like your missing pet. If you present the tracking dog with a scent article that has multiple scents, they may follow the wrong scent trail. This is less important if you are using a tracking dog and your other pets have never been outside in the search area (such as other indoor-only cats). If you are unable to obtain a good scent article, consider hiring a cat detection dog or a pet detective without a search dog.

What is the likelihood that a search dog will find your missing pet?

Very few searches end with the search dog actually finding the lost pet (a.k.a. a "walk-up find"). For an escaped indoor-only cat, the probability of a walk-up find may be as high as 20% if the search is done within the first 24-72 hours when your cat is most likely hiding nearby. After that time, your cat may be traveling around (though often still close to home) and may avoid the search dog. Walk-up finds for lost dogs and outdoor-access cats are much lower, often less than 5%.

Reasons why the search dog may not find your missing pet:

- Someone picked up your pet (usually friendly dogs or curious, out-going cats).
- Your pet is frightened and is avoiding the search dog team (usually skittish dogs and most cats). In fact, a good search dog handler will often stop a search when their dog indicates a very strong scent. They want to avoid scaring your lost pet out of the area or into a potentially dangerous situation (such as into the street).
- The search dog never gets to the end of the trail. Very common for lost dogs that are capable of traveling many miles within a single day.
- The missing pet has scent trails all over the place and the search dog can't work through them all. This is common with an outdoor-access cat lost from home. It may also occur with a lost cat or dog that has spent a day or longer hanging out in the same area.

Why use a search dog if it's unlikely that they will find your missing pet?

Search dogs can provide useful information to help find your lost pet such as:

- They can help rule out that your missing pet is deceased, trapped or injured/ill and hiding in the immediate area.
- A tracking dog can provide a "direction of travel" (i.e. where your missing pet initially traveled) and/or where they have been spending most of their time (i.e. scent pools). This information can help you determine where to put up lost pet posters, hand out flyers, and possibly use a feeding station, surveillance camera, and/or humane trap.

- Some search dogs can help verify sightings by checking for your lost pet's scent in the area of a potential sighting.

Are you prepared to do the necessary search follow-up to find your missing pet?

A search dog can be a useful tool to help you find your lost pet. However, even with a search dog, it may take several weeks to several months to find your missing pet. I recommend a minimum search effort of six weeks. I have seen far too many people put all their hope in the search dog finding their pet and then they are emotionally unable or unwilling to continue the search after their pet is not found that day. Other people put all their resources into paying for the search dog and then don't have money for other important (and often more effective) search tools such as posters, cameras or traps.

Should you hire a pet detective or search dog team?

After reading this article, you may be asking yourself whether you should hire a search dog team. In some cases it may make more sense to hire a pet detective without a search dog, find a lost pet consultant or volunteer or hire a licensed private investigator. To help you with your decision, I have included situations below where it is most and least useful to use a search dog.

When to use a search dog for a lost dog:

- When time is of the essence such as a puppy, very old dog, sick or injured dog or a dog dragging a leash.
- You live in a rural area and there have been no sightings of your dog. Make sure to first put up EFFECTIVE lost dog posters over a large area to confirm that your dog has not been seen.
- You have multiple sightings miles apart and do not know which (if any) are your missing dog. A tracking dog may be able to help verify the sightings by checking for your dog's scent.
- You have a strong concern that your dog may have been taken by a predator.

When NOT to use a search dog for a lost dog:

- If you have multiple sightings of your dog in one area, you DO NOT need a search dog! You already know where your dog is located. Going into that area with a search dog is more likely to chase your dog out of the area than it is to locate them. In this case you should consult with a pet detective or get other assistance with capture and/or trapping from an experienced trapper.
- If you have sightings of your dog in locations miles apart. If you are confident that these are your dog, then a search dog is less likely to provide useful information. You need to focus on posters! Consider getting help from a pet detective or lost pet volunteer on how to make truly effective posters and then how to catch your dog once they are located.

- If your dog was likely stolen or picked up, then it's unlikely there is a scent-trail to follow. If you strongly suspect theft, you may be better off hiring a licensed private investigator in your state.
- If you can't easily afford to hire a search dog, save your money for more effective search methods! Most importantly, learn how to effectively advertise for your lost dog. If you can afford it, hire a pet detective, do a consultation or purchase an e-book on finding lost dogs.

When to use a search dog for a lost cat:

- When time is of the essence such as a kitten, very old cat, sick or injured cat or a cat dragging a leash.
- Your cat was lost from a location away from home.
- An escaped indoor-only cat. This is one of the easiest searches for a tracking dog and one of the most successful for an area search dog. However, this is also the type of search where you are most likely to be successful without a search dog as long as you learn how to effectively search. If you can easily afford it, consider hiring a search dog. If not, consider hiring a pet detective without a search dog, getting help from a lost pet consultant or purchasing an e-book on lost cat behavior.
- You suspect that your cat is trapped or hiding somewhere inside your home. In this case, make sure that the search dog is capable of this type of search, which has its own challenges. Ideally, they will also have other tools such as a thermal camera, amplified listening device and an endoscope (for seeing inside walls or small places). A pet detective without a search dog can also be effective in this type of search as long as they have the necessary tools.
- An outdoor-access cat lost from home. Few cats are found using a search dog, but it is very important to rule out that your missing cat is trapped, sick/injured and hiding or deceased within their territory. This type of search can also be done by a pet detective without a search dog or on your own (if you learn how to do it effectively).
- You have multiple sightings in different areas and do not know which (if any) are your missing cat. A tracking dog may be able to help verify the sightings by checking for your cat's scent.

When NOT to use a search dog to find a lost cat:

- If you have multiple sightings of your cat in the same area, you DO NOT need a search dog! You already know where your cat is located and the last thing you want to do is risk chasing them out of the area. Even if you know where your cat is located, catching them can still be challenging. Consider getting on-site assistance from a pet detective without a search dog, doing a consultation or purchasing an e-book on lost cat behavior.
- If your cat was likely stolen or picked up, then it's unlikely there is a scent-trail to follow. If you strongly suspect theft, you may be better off hiring a licensed private investigator in your state.

- You are missing an indoor-only cat and don't have a lot of money. Don't waste your money on a search dog! Save your money to purchase humane traps, surveillance cameras and posters/flyers. You have a very good chance of finding your missing cat if you just learn how to search effectively. Depending on what you can afford, hire a pet detective, get a consultation or purchase an e-book on finding lost cats.
- You are missing an outdoor-access cat and don't have a lot of money. Save your money for effective advertising! A thorough physical search within your cat's home range is still very important! Consider hiring a pet detective without a search dog to assist you in your search or learn how to conduct an effective search yourself.

Can you afford a search dog and other important considerations?

Can you afford a search dog and still have money left over for posters, cameras and traps? There are very few volunteer search dog teams. Most cost anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars. If you need to pay for travel, this can make them much more expensive. If paying for a search dog will be a struggle, then you are better off spending your money on a consultation or on-site assistance from a pet detective that will provide other more effective services.

Given the low success rate of just using a search dog, follow-up support and services are very important. Do they offer services and support beyond search dog services? If not, can you afford to also hire a pet detective or lost pet consultant to assist you on the remainder of your search? Again, this support is often critical.

If you are still unsure whether you should hire a pet detective or search dog team, don't wait to get started on your search! Getting started quickly with the right techniques can make the difference between finding your lost pet quickly and taking weeks (or longer) to locate them. Check out my [FREE Lost Pet Search Checklists](#) to get you started.

Tips on Getting Help Faster

If you have decided to hire a pet detective or otherwise reach out for assistance for help finding your lost pet, you may need to be persistent to get a response. Many people that do this work full time are extremely busy and in high demand (at least at certain times of the year). They may be on the road a lot and receive many inquiries for help. Many volunteers are also busy because they probably have a full-time job on top of their volunteering duties.

Use these tips to get help faster:

- Check their website or Facebook page first for information on services or their service area. If you contact them with questions that can easily be found online, they may not prioritize responding to you.
- Try multiple methods of contact. Some people are better at responding via email or text while others prefer phone calls. Check for an online lost pet form, send an email, send a

Facebook message, text or leave a voicemail. Don't do them all at once, but maybe start with two and then try another method if you don't get a response within 12-24 hours.

- Be persistent but not annoying. Don't just try one contact method once and then give up. At least follow-up once and try a second method of contact.
- If you are sure you want to hire them, consider purchasing a phone consultation if they offer one.
- Try to be civil when you contact them. Losing a pet is a very traumatic and stressful experience and it is completely normal to be really upset. However, if the pet detective doesn't immediately get back to you or can't offer you assistance right away, try not to get angry with them. If they see you as a hostile or unreasonable person, they may well choose not to take you on as a client even when they have time available.

Preparing for the Search Dog Team's Arrival

If the search dog team is unable to come on-site immediately, take advantage of the time that you have to prepare for their arrival. There are several things you can do to maximize the effectiveness of your search.

Posters, posters, posters

I can't stress the importance of posters enough! Create and post some well-designed, large and bright lost pet posters. In the majority of cases where I have done searches, I'm lucky if I see 1 or 2 posters on the drive in, and in most cases they are small and hard to read. This step is most important if you have a lost dog missing more than 24 hours or a lost cat missing more than one week. In these cases, it is extremely helpful if you can get some potential sightings to check with the search dog rather than just starting with the location where they were last seen.

Go door-to-door in your neighborhood

Distribute flyers in your neighborhood. This is most important with lost cats, especially indoor-only cats. Ideally, go door-to-door and speak with all your neighbors within a 3-5 house radius or 500 ft (suburban) to 1/4 mile (rural areas). Better yet, get permission to enter your neighbor's property and do a thorough search yourself prior to the search dog teams arrival. You may even find your cat! If you are missing an outdoor-access cat, you should also ask your neighbors if they have ever seen your cat in their yard. This can help you get a better idea of where your cat normally travels and where to focus your search, especially if using an area detection dog.

If you are using a cat detection dog, it can also be extremely helpful if you visit your neighbors prior to the search and get permission to search their yards when the search dog team arrives. This way you won't be excluded from checking certain yards if the people are not home at the time of the search.

Use an Amber Alert service

If there isn't time for doing posters or distributing flyers, consider using a phone call alert service. See [Amber Alerts](#) for links and more information. These services are most useful for lost dogs and for cats that have a distinctive appearance and/or are most likely to be seen by people (e.g. very friendly or confident cats). This method is least effective for skittish indoor-only cats that are likely hiding in fear or only coming out at night.

Being Prepared on the Search

You will most likely accompany the pet detective/search dog team during the search. Be prepared! The search could last several hours and cover a lot of ground. Think about the terrain in your area and dress accordingly. Wear comfortable shoes and consider insect repellent or sunscreen. Some search dogs move very quickly while others are more slow and methodical. Make sure you have the search dog team's phone number in case you get separated.

What to bring on the search:

- Water (for you).
- Flyers or business cards. Give these to anyone that you talk to during the search.
- If possible, bring at least one poster to hold up and show to passing cars during your search. You can also carry this when approaching homeowners to get permission to search their property.
- A flashlight for searching under sheds, decks, cars, etc. Even a well-trained search dog is not infallible. Stay behind the search dog team, and if there's time check any good hiding spots during the search.
- Be sure to take notes on your search. The search dog handler may indicate locations of strong scent where you may want to follow-up with a surveillance camera and/or humane traps. Also record streets where you walk and make sure that you have posters up along your pet's travel routes. This is most important for lost dogs.
- Ask if they will provide you with a GPS map of the track. If not, consider recording your own track. If you don't have a GPS tracking device, some smart phones have this capability using an app such as ViewRanger.
- A camera or your phone to take pictures of any notable findings.
- Binoculars can be useful for scanning ahead of the search dog in open areas, and for checking out any distant animals that might be your lost pet.
- A can of cat food or dog treats in case you see your pet and need to lure them closer.
- Something to hold or restrain your pet should you find them during the search.
- Even a friendly cat may panic when picked up. Bring a cat carrier, duffel bag, towel or pillowcase to hold your cat.
- Bring a slip lead to capture a loose dog.

- An open mind. Many people that hire a tracking dog team already have an idea about what might have happened to their lost pet and where they might have gone. While you may be right, it is very important to keep an open mind and not develop tunnel vision. In my experience, it sometimes seems like people will hire a search dog just to verify what they believe happened, and if the search dog goes somewhere unexpected, they come to disbelieve the accuracy of the track. If you go through the energy and expense of hiring a search dog team, you should spend a minimum of one week focusing your search in the area that the search dog indicated.

If you have a bad experience with a pet detective or search dog team

If you contact or hire someone listed in this guide and have a bad experience, first contact the person directly to see if they are willing or able to resolve your issue. If they don't respond or work to resolve your issue, consider writing a negative review on Facebook, Yelp!, Google or the [Better Business Bureau](#) (BBB). You should be able to [file a complaint with the BBB](#) even if the business is not currently listed. For more serious issues, you should consider speaking with legal counsel.

If you can't find a search dog or pet detective using this guide

If you are unable to find someone to assist you in your search for your missing pet, you may request a full refund. However, before you do, consider using one of the coupons below instead.

Coupons for Lost Pet Research Products and Services

Whether or not you use a search dog, you may be interested in using these coupons for additional assistance.

- Use code SDSAVE\$10 for \$10 off the Lost Pet Recovery Online Instructions. Coupon is good for one month after the purchase of this guide.
- Use code SDSAVE\$20 for \$20 off an Email or Phone Consultation. Coupon is good for two weeks after the purchase of this guide.

Request a Refund

This guide comes with a 30-Day Money Back Guarantee. To request a refund, forward your purchase receipt to info@lostpetresearch.com or use the [Refund Request Form](#). Please include a reason why you are requesting a refund.

Help Improve this Guide

This guide is a continual work in progress, and I welcome feedback that will help improve the guide. Please let me know if you encounter any of the following:

- If a website link is broken or the website no longer exists.

- If you find someone new not listed in this directory. In this case, I'd also be happy to provide a refund if you would like one.

Thank you,

Danielle Robertson

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