



STOLEN AND MISSING PETS

A guide for owners



www.nawt.org.uk

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KEEPING YOUR PETS SAFE

We all have scenarios in life that we just don't want to think about. Things that make our blood run cold and our palms sweat at the mere mention of it. One such scenario is if one of our pets was lost or stolen, we couldn't bear not knowing where they were or what was happening to them.



PET THEFT AWARENESS WEEK

[www.petteft.org.uk] (held in March every year) highlights the issues and presents us with some startling statistics. The number of dogs stolen reaches a seven year high. 2,760 dogs stolen in 2021, which is a 13% rise on the previous year. That's around 8 dogs stolen everyday!*

It was reported in September 2021 that a new criminal offence of Pet Abduction was set to be introduced by the Government. This new offence will no longer treat a stolen pet as a 'loss of property' to the owner but recognise pets as sentient beings who can suffer considerable emotional distress at the hands of thieves.



Here at NAWT, we welcome this new legislation and the harsher sentences it will carry. As not only does this bring stress to the animals involved, but also to the families who are now missing their beloved pet.

Whilst the introduction of a new criminal offence of Pet Abduction will act as a stronger deterrent to thieves, it won't eradicate the problem entirely; particularly whilst certain breeds of dog are selling at such high price points. Therefore, it is imperative that pet owners remain vigilant to keep their beloved companions safe.

Although it is now compulsory to have dogs microchipped and records kept up to date, we still come across occasions when we scan an animal on arrival at our centres but are unable to make contact with the owners as the details are out of date.

Pet theft is something we hope you never experience, which is why we've produced this guide for pet owners to offer advice on keeping your pet safe and what to do if your pet goes missing or is stolen.

*Source: Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance

GIZMO & WIDGET'S STORY

Yorkshire terriers Gizmo and Widget were stolen from their owner Debbie Matthews' car while it was parked in a shopping centre car park in 2006.

Back then, pet theft was not recognised as anything more than the equivalent of getting your wallet or phone stolen. Therefore, Debbie was forced to take dramatic steps to help recover the dogs when police said there was little they could do to help.

Drawing on the support of her late father, Sir Bruce Forsyth, she was able to run a high profile media campaign to help recover the dogs and was offered lots of support from the charity, DogLost. Within a few weeks, both dogs had been returned but the experience left Debbie with a deep desire to change the way that cases of stolen dogs are handled. For example, Debbie discovered that vets are not legally obliged to routinely scan dogs for microchips when brought into a surgery for the first time. Gizmo and Widget were microchipped and their records were up-to-date, but had they been brought into a vet, there was little chance of Debbie recovering them. As a result Debbie set up Bruce Forsyth's Vets Get Scanning Petition to change the laws surrounding the microchip scanning of pets. Now a NAWT Trustee, Debbie is also co-founder of the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance and remains an ardent campaigner for pet theft law reform.



RUBY'S STORY

Rae Avatar Barnett and Neil Coleman's world turned upside down when they were out walking their dogs, Louis and Ruby, in fields near to their home. Ruby, a four-year-old whippet-cross, disappeared after she ran off to chase some rabbits. Ruby was used to being off-lead and until that day, she had always come back to her owners when called. After more than a year since Ruby's disappearance, the couple are still frantically searching for their beloved dog. They've spent nights camping out to investigate alleged sightings, and even hired sniffer dogs and helicopters to search further afield for the dog. So far they have had no luck. Ruby's owners have reported her as stolen and potentially sold on to another part of the country. Until they have proof that Ruby is no longer alive, they will never give up hope of finding her.

MILLIE'S STORY

Beth Parmar's Parson Russell Terrier escaped from her dog sitter's garden in 2017 sparking the start of a five-day emotional ordeal.

Thought to be hiding somewhere in the surrounding fields and woods, Beth and her family went looking for Millie day and night, while putting up posters and notices through DogLost as well as local noticeboards and Facebook groups.

Messages and calls soon started flooding in with possible sightings of Millie from around the area. Beth was overwhelmed by the outpourings of public support as people gave up their time to try and find her dog.

Eventually, after several sightings, Beth found Millie hiding close to the field where she had originally escaped. Whilst this ordeal was distressing for both Beth and her dog, she also learnt some useful tips along the way.

Most lost dogs do not stray too far away from where they went missing, so if your dog does go missing, make sure to stay local to the area on searches and if you can, leave a scented item behind to try to attract them back to the same spot. Social media is a fantastic, free source for advertising the loss of a pet as are organisations like Doglost (see details on page 11).



MINKY'S STORY

Minky the cat went missing in 2011 when her owners moved from Wiltshire to Somerset. They kept their four cats in for some time after the move, but when the day came to let them out, only three came back. Hope began to fade after weeks of fruitless searching. Meanwhile, at the other end of the village, Minky had found an old lady to take care of her. When her new "owner" died and the cat was brought into NAWT, a routine scan to see if she had a microchip revealed her original family's' contact details. Luckily the mobile number was still correct, and there were cries of joy when staff told them the happy news. Minky was reunited with her family that same day. It is still under review that microchipping cats is to become mandatory, and here at NAWT we fully support this campaign as it is something we would always recommend. Any cat rehomed by NAWT is automatically microchipped.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PET IS LOST OR STOLEN

Be Prepared



Keep a set of up to date photos of your pet from lots of different angles so you can quickly post pictures on social media or posters.



Write a description of your pet including any distinguishing features, if they are microchipped, tattooed, neutered etc. so you are ready in an emergency.



Dogs must be microchipped by law and must wear a collar and tag bearing your name and address whilst out in public. You may also want your cat to wear a collar and tag.



All owners must have their cat microchipped by the 10th June 2024. Owners found to not have microchipped their cat will have 21 days to have one implanted, or may face a fine of up to £500.



Keep all your pet's documentation in one place to help prove ownership. This will include microchip numbers, vaccination certificates, registration documents, purchase receipts, rehoming contracts, vet bills. Also keep some photos of you with your pet over the years.



Make up some slips of paper with your name and phone number on, plus a brief description of your pet so you have them to hand out if you are searching for your pet.



Keep your details up to date on the microchip database and save their number in your phone.



Keep an updated list of contact details for your microchip database, all your local authority animal wardens, local vets, local rescues, national missing pet websites, local police and anyone else you may want to contact if your pet is lost or stolen.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PET IS LOST OR STOLEN

If your pet is lost or stolen



It is important to act quickly and try to make your pet 'too hot to handle'.



If your pet is microchipped, immediately inform your microchip database.



Ensure there is someone available to receive calls at the phone number that is on the tag.



If your dog is lost on a walk and you have had no luck calling him, go back to your car as dogs are often able to find their way back there. If your dog is sociable with people check any areas where people may gather like cafes or shops. Leave your contact details and a description of your dog just in case.



If your pet has escaped from your garden or is missing locally, search the area (remembering to look up as well for cats stuck in trees) and hand out your contact details to neighbours, postmen, local dog walkers and others who cover the local area. Also post your pet's details on any local Facebook community site.



Report the loss to your local authority animal warden. **Please note it is the responsibility of the dog warden to handle lost or stray dogs.**



If you believe your pet has been stolen, report the theft to the police and ask for a Crime Reference Number. Also check if there was any CCTV operating in the area that might provide clues.



Contact other local services to make them aware your pet is missing such as neighbouring local council animal wardens, local vets, local rescue centres.



Register your pet as missing on as many Missing Pet websites as possible. Useful contacts are on the last page of this booklet.



Use our templates to put up your own missing pet posters and place them everywhere you can in the area local to your home or where the pet went missing. Do remember to take them down when you are eventually reunited with your pet.








Make full use of social media using Facebook, Twitter and even YouTube. You can also contact the local radio and local papers.

HELP TO PREVENT YOUR DOG BEING STOLEN

Discovering your pet has been stolen and never knowing what happened to him has to be an owner's worst nightmare. It is every owner's responsibility to ensure their pets are kept as secure as possible.

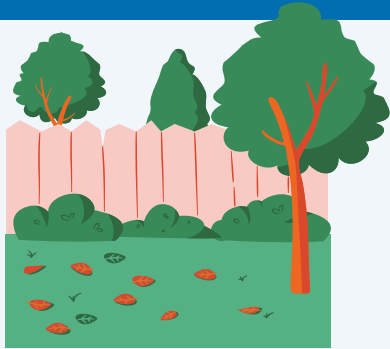
DOGS CAN BE STOLEN FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS:

-  Ransom – many owners will offer a reward with no questions asked.
-  To order – particularly pedigree dogs for breeding or for export.
-  Dog fighting – it is alleged that some dogs are taken as bait for dog fighting.
-  Selling on – the internet makes this an easy, anonymous task.
-  Breeding – either as puppy farm stock or just to make money selling puppies.

HOW CAN YOU KEEP YOUR DOG SAFE?

- **Over 50% of dogs are stolen from gardens.** Make sure your garden is secure and no-one can enter without your knowledge. For added security ensure your fence is at least 6ft tall. Don't leave your dog unsupervised in the garden, keep an eye on them at all times – it only takes seconds to lift a dog over the fence.
- **19% of dogs are taken from breaking into homes.** If your dog is left at home, make sure your home security is good. Be aware if anyone has been watching your house and your movements.
- **16% of stolen dogs are taken from owners out walking their dogs.** Vary the times you walk and the routes you take and beware of strangers asking you questions about your dog or trying to play with him or her. Also, teach your dog to come back to you when called (recall training). Dogs running off can become vulnerable to thieves.
- **7% of dog thefts are dogs that have been tied up outside shops or other premises.** They are an easy target for any opportunist thief.
- **Dogs left in locked cars** are also an easy target even if you leave the car for just a few minutes and 5% of all stolen dogs are taken from vehicles.
- **Neutering your dog will reduce the risk of a dog being stolen for breeding purposes**
- **Ensure your dog wears a collar and tag at all times,** even in the house. This is a legal requirement in public places. Do not put your dog's name on the tag because a friendly dog could easily be enticed away if its name is called.
- **Choose a dog walker, dog sitter or boarding kennels carefully.** Ideally take recommendations from people you trust and do ask for and check any references.
- **50% of dogs stolen are puppies or young adults.** Be extra vigilant if you have a pregnant bitch or a litter of puppies. Be especially careful if you have advertised the puppies for sale, thieves will stop at nothing to steal a whole litter to sell.

HELP TO PREVENT DOG THEFT



GARDEN

Over 50% of dogs are stolen from gardens, make sure yours is secure and keep an eye on your dog at all times outside.

WALKING

Vary the times and routes you walk and be wary of anyone asking questions or playing with the dog.

Train the dog to come back when called.

Walk with other dog walkers.

Keep your dog in eyesight.



DON'T LEAVE IN CARS

Do not leave your dog in a locked car as this makes them an easy target. 5% of all dog thefts come from cars.



COLLAR

Your dog legally must wear a collar with an ID tag at all times without their name on, as some dogs would be enticed by name calling. Don't forget to make sure your microchip is up to date also.



DON'T TIE UP

Do not tie your dog up outside shops and public places, this is an opportunity for thieves to take your dog very easily.



HOME

Make sure your home is secure and be aware if anyone has been watching your home and movements.

Consider outside sensor lighting and CCTV.

Always check ID of any RSPCA or SPCA inspectors who contact you.

NEUTER AND SPAY

Neutering and spaying will reduce the likelihood of your dog being stolen for breeding.



Having neutral colours for harnesses and leads to not make gender obvious. Female dogs are at greater risk, since they can be used for breeding.

MICROCHIPPING

If your dog disappeared right now, would you know where to find the microchip registration?

Keep your dogs microchip number and the database contact number in your phone!

Make sure your dog's microchip is registered on a UK approved database with the correct contact information.

If you don't know your dog's microchip number, get the vets to check it for you for free.

ONLINE CAUTION

50% of dogs stolen are puppies or young adults. Be careful advertising young dogs for sale online as thieves will stop at nothing.



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG IS STOLEN OR DISAPPEARS

- Call Police on 999 if you've seen your dog being taken
- Call Police on 101 if you suspect your dog has been stolen or to reporting suspicious activity
- Call your dog's microchip database
- Call the local animal warden
- Register on DogLost.co.uk
- Call local veterinary clinics and rehoming organisations
- Get on social media
- Put posters up locally

IDENTIFYING A STRAY CAT

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A LOST CAT

If you find a cat and are worried about it, you should monitor its characteristics and behaviours to determine if you think it is a feral, stray or owned cat.

Cats do not have the same legal status as dogs do, meaning that they have very little protection in the eyes of the law. This means that local councils and authorities do not have a responsibility to deal with lost or stray cats.

Due to their roaming nature, it can be very difficult to determine if a cat is genuinely lost. You might think the cat that regularly appears in your garden looking hungry and lost is a stray only to discover its home is just a couple of streets away. Cats are regarded as the property of their owner in the eyes of the law and so removing a cat from their owner could be regarded as theft. Therefore you have to be very certain to establish the status of a cat before taking any steps.

STRAY CATS

A stray cat is a domestic cat that has become separated from its owner. Sometimes, it is because the owner has moved away. It may be friendly and approachable, but slightly skittish – it all depends on how long the cat has been stray for.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE FOUND A STRAY CAT

Ring your local rehoming or rescue centre such as NAWT for advice.

Create a paper collar to reach out to the potential owner, in case the cat does return home so you then know it is safe. Take a strip of paper, and add wording along the lines of 'IS THIS YOUR CAT? IF SO, CALL...' and attach to the cat, if and when safe to do so. If no one makes contact within a few weeks, then this is a sign the cat is not returning to a home.

Invest in or borrow a cat basket, trap the cat and take it to the vets or a rehoming centre where they can scan for a microchip. If a microchip is found, then attempts will be made to contact the owner of the cat to reunite them.

IMPORTANT! From the 10th June 2024, all owners must have their cat microchipped. Owners found to not have microchipped their cat will have 21 days to have one implanted, or may face a fine of up to £500.

MICROCHIP INFORMATION

WHAT'S A MICROCHIP?



It's a tiny device that is implanted under the skin of an animal, normally between the shoulder blades, and is the same size as a grain of rice. Each microchip carries a unique 15 digit number that can only be read by a special scanner. This number is linked to an entry on a database that stores the animal's information plus details of his or her keeper. If your pet is lost or stolen then this is one of the best ways of tracing him or her.

We advise people to have the animal checked all over when scanning for a microchip as it can easily get missed if only checking the usual place of the shoulders.



DO YOU KNOW WHICH MICROCHIP DATABASE YOUR PET IS REGISTERED WITH?

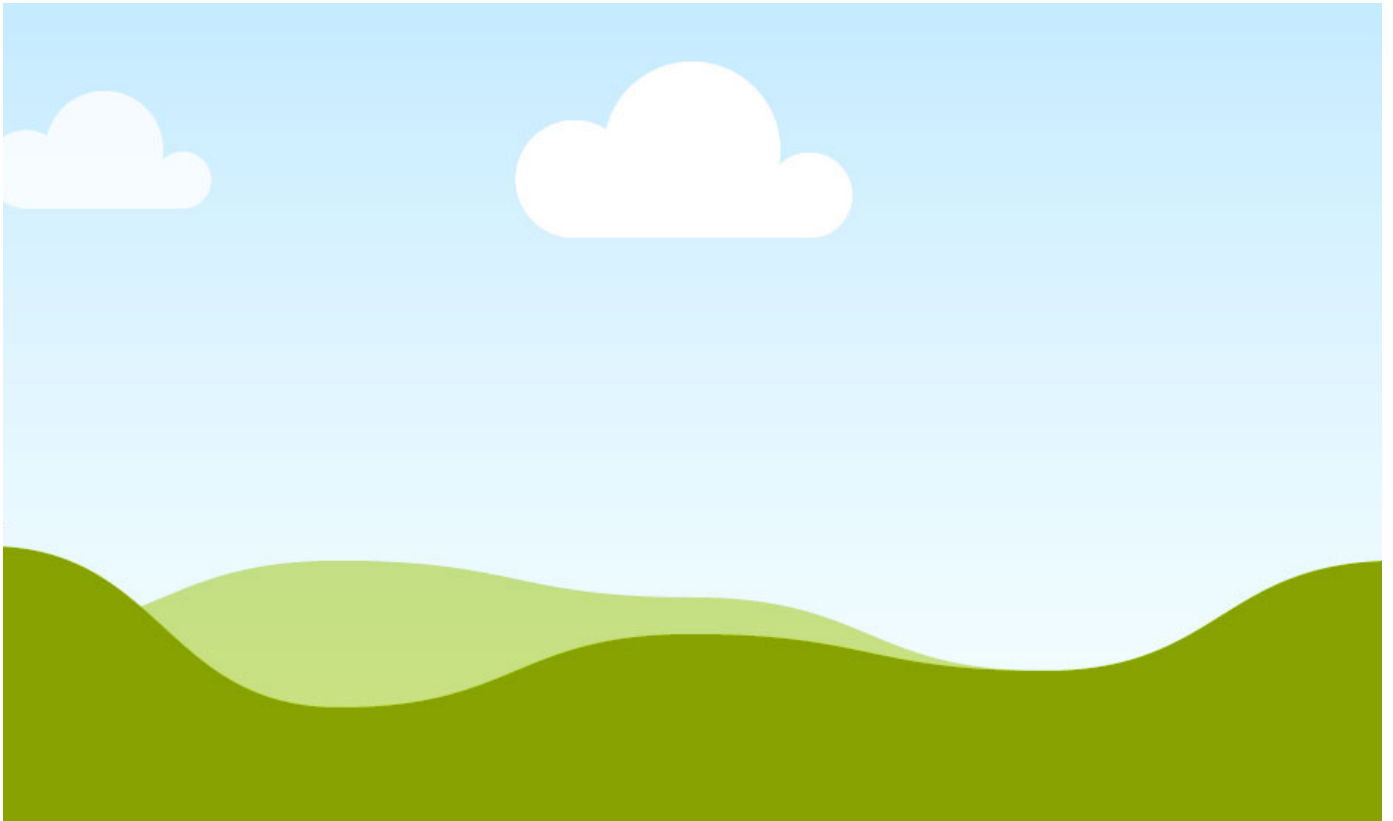
If you are unsure, then you can use www.checkachip.com to check this. You must ensure the microchip information is stored on a UK Government approved database, some examples include Pet Scanner, Animal Tracker, Pet Log and Smart Trace.

MICROCHIPPING LAWS

- All dogs over the age of 8 weeks must be microchipped by law.
- It is the dog breeders responsibility to ensure all puppies are microchipped by the time they are 8 weeks old, and then to ensure the details are passed onto the new owner.
- You could face a fine up to £500 if your dog is scanned with no microchip by a dog warden. You will be given 21 days to get them microchipped before you are fined.
- All owners must have their cat microchipped by the 10th June 2024. Owners found to not have microchipped their cat will have 21 days to have one implanted, or may face a fine of up to £500.
- It is also possible to microchip small animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs, which may be advisable if your pet is prone to escaping.
- It states under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) that some reptiles are required to be microchipped, so be sure to check this if owning an animal of this species.

LOST DOG

Have you seen _____?



Description of dog and details on what wearing when last seen* :

Lost in _____ on ____/____/____

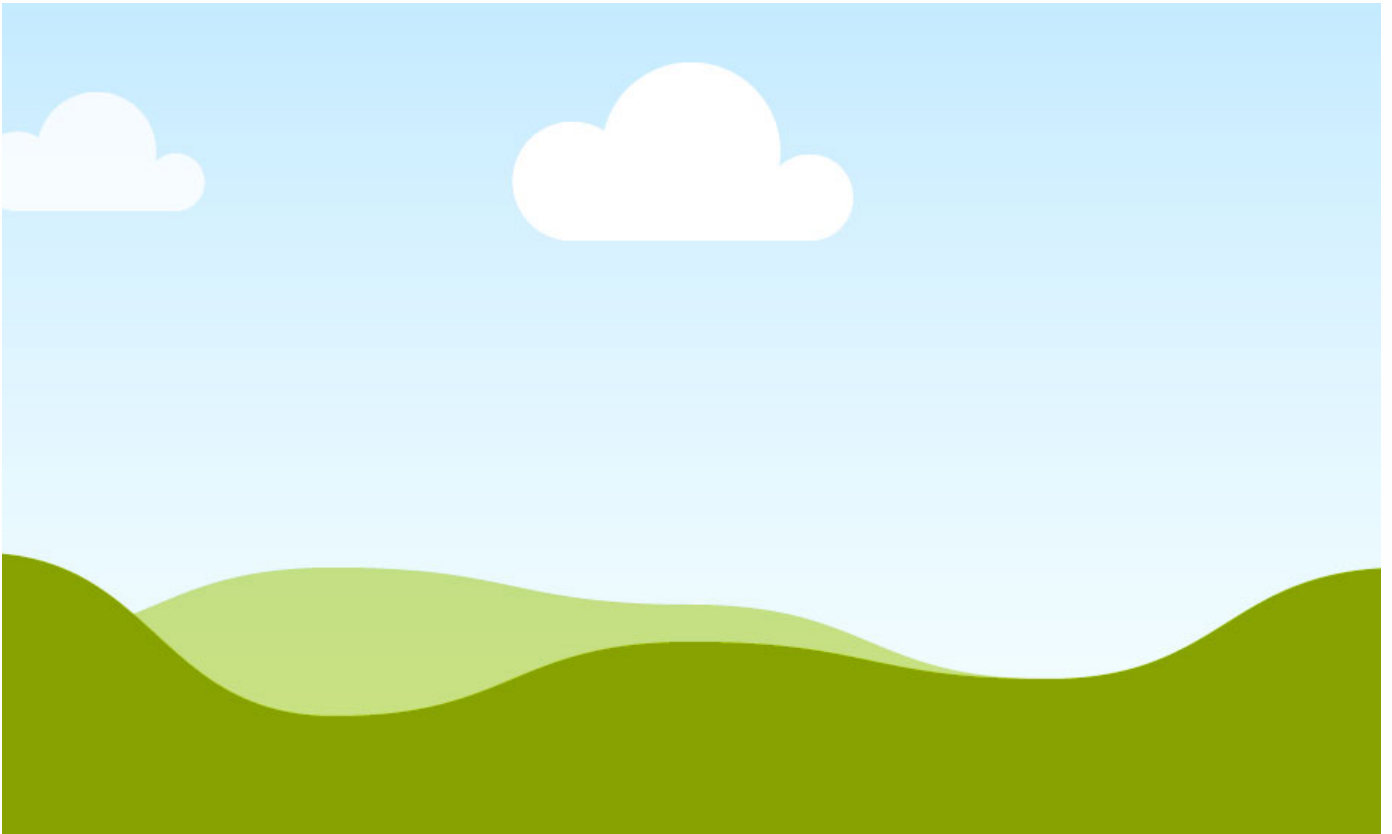
Please contact _____ on _____

Thank you

*Example: has black spot on right ear and wearing a red harness

LOST CAT

Have you seen _____?



Description of cat and details on what wearing when last seen*:

Lost in _____ on ____/____/____

Please contact _____ on _____

Thank you

*Example: has black spot on right ear and wearing a red collar

USEFUL CONTACTS

DogLost

www.doglost.co.uk

Telephone: 01633 673859

Email: admin@doglost.co.uk

Twitter: [@doglostuk](https://twitter.com/doglostuk)

Facebook: [doglost.co.uk](https://www.facebook.com/doglost.co.uk)

National Pet Register UK

www.nationalpetregister.org

Email: admin@nationalpetregister.org

Facebook: Pet Register

Twitter: [@petregister](https://twitter.com/petregister)

Animal Search UK

www.animalsearchuk.co.uk/search

Telephone: 01244 355 247

Email: info@animalsearchuk.co.uk

Facebook: Animal Search UK

Twitter: [@animalsearchuk](https://twitter.com/animalsearchuk)

Association of Dogs and Cats homes (ADCH)

Find your local rescue centre -

www.adch.org.uk/find-a-rescue/

Check-a-Chip

www.check-a-chip.co.uk

On the above website you input your pet's microchip number and find out which database it is registered with and the phone number for that database.

Pet Theft Awareness

www.pettheft.org.uk

Email: contact@pettheft.org.uk

Facebook: Pet Theft Awareness

Twitter: [@pettheftaware](https://twitter.com/pettheftaware)

Vets Get Scanning

www.VetsGetScanning.co.uk

Facebook: Bruce Forsyth's Vets Get Scanning Petition

Drone SAR For Lost Dogs UK

Facebook: Drone SAR For Lost Dogs UK

Instagram: [dronesarforlostdogsuk](https://www.instagram.com/dronesarforlostdogsuk)

Twitter: [@Drone_SAR_For_Lost_Dogs_UK](https://twitter.com/Drone_SAR_For_Lost_Dogs_UK)





For further information visit
www.nawt.org.uk