

What to do if you find a 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.

Determining the type of cat

Owned cats

Owned cats can often be mistaken for stray cats due to their roaming nature. While most will find their way home, sometimes domestic cats can end up getting lost when they either roam too far, become injured or get stuck in an outbuilding or difficult place.

If you think you have found an owned cat that may be lost

- Ask around your neighbours and local Facebook community groups if anyone knows who the cat belongs to.
- If you can get close enough to the cat, you can check to see if they have a collar with a phone number or owner details attached.
- Create 'Found Cat' posters and place them around the local area.
- Download our paper collar here (**please add link**) to alert any potential owners that you are worried about the cat - these are printable collars that you can write your name and number on and place around the cats neck.

If you cannot find an owner, then you might try to establish if the cat is a stray.

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.

- 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.

If no microchip owner is found, or you cannot get in touch with the owner after several weeks, you have the choice to keep the cat as a pet if you wish or hand them over to a rehoming centre ready to be rehomed. As stray cats have usually been pets in the past, they can be socialised and domesticated again – unlike a feral.

Feral cats

A feral cat will be unfriendly, scared and may hiss if you approach. Feral cats often live in colonies (with other feral cats, or kittens). Feral cats are born in the wild and therefore will have no collar as they have had no human contact.

What to do if you have found a feral cat

The process of capturing a feral cat is very like a stray - but much harder. Feral cats will happily eat food you have put down, but you are less likely to see them as they are more likely to come out at night when there are less people around.

- Speak to a cat charity for help or advice. They can often provide you with a trap, or come to trap the cat for you.
- Once a feral cat has been successfully trapped, you can take them to a vet to be neutered. Most feral cats are then released back to their environment to live life wild.
- Some feral cat colonies are also relocated to live on farm land and act as pest control.

NAWT have done research into feral cats in the UK - you can read our findings here. ([link to feral cat research blog](#))

What to do if you find an injured cat

If you find an injured cat, take it to your nearest vet for emergency care. You can use a blanket to pick it up, or ask around cat owning friends to borrow a carrier. The vet will also be able to scan for a microchip, and if one can be found, be able to contact the owner.

What to do if you find a deceased cat

Sadly, if you come across a dead cat, there is likely to be a concerned owner trying to find their pet. It is important to take the cat to your nearest vet, who will be able to scan it for a microchip. If you are unable to do so, ask around friends and family who can help.

The vet will be able to contact the owners to let them know what has happened to their pet if it is microchipped.

If there is no microchip, the vet may be able to store the cat for a while, in case the owner starts calling veterinary practices to ask if a cat has been recently brought in.

Keep an eye on local Facebook pages for any reports of a lost cat, if you see a lost poster of a cat similar to the one you found, direct the owner to contact the vets.

The loss of a cat can be distressing, even if it is not yours. We have trained staff at our centres if you would like to talk about pet loss. Find out more [here](#).

If you're a cat owner looking to make sure your cat doesn't go missing, here's some advice:

Ensure your pet is microchipped, and contact details are correct, including your mobile number. This will greatly improve the chances of your pet coming home to you if it wanders too far.

If your cat is on a special diet, it will be worth noting on the collar. If your cat does go visiting local neighbours for fuss and attention, they will see your cat is on a special diet, and hopefully won't give them additional food throughout the day.

If your cat does go missing, report it to your microchip database, so a note can be added to your file. Call local veterinary practices and rescue centres in case your cat has been brought in as a stray.

Ensure you have clear photographs of your cat, so you can use them in the unfortunate circumstance of needed to put "lost" photos around the local area.

If you're a cat owner looking for advice on what to do if your pet ever becomes lost or stolen, please read our advice guide [here](#).

[Contact your local NAWT centres for advice](#)

HULA, Bedfordshire

Glebe Farm, Salford Road,
Aspley Guise
Milton Keynes
Bedfordshire
MK17 8HZ
Phone: 01908 584000

NAWT, Berkshire

Trindledown Farm
Wantage Road
Great Shefford
Berkshire
RG17 7DQ
Phone: 01488 638584

NAWT, Cornwall

Wheal Alfred Kennels
Wheal Alfred Road
Hayle
Cornwall
TR27 5JT
Phone: 01736 756005

NAWT, Clacton

The Street
Little Clacton
Clacton-on-Sea
Essex
CO16 9LG
Phone: 01255 860062

NAWT, Hertfordshire

Tylers Way
Watford-By-Pass
Watford
Hertfordshire
WD25 8WT
Phone: 0208 950 0177 (Option 2)

NAWT, Somerset

Heavens Gate Farm
West Henley
Langport
Somerset
TA10 9BE
Phone: 01458 252656