



How to Find a Lost Pet

Lessons learned from the
successful return of Flo Jo!

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Introduction

This guide to finding your lost pet was made possible by a Border Collie named Flo Jo, who got a little spooked and took off on her big adventure. This is a "lesson's learned" guide that hopefully can help others quickly locate their lost pet and ensure they make it home safely.

A special thank you to Sandy, Ardis, Barbara, Jennifer, Heather, Heidi, Elaine, Larry & all the members & friends of the Y2K9's agility club for their wonderful insight on what worked best to help bring Flo Jo home. They truly took teamwork to another level and pulled together to help bring Flo Jo back to her mom, Rosie.

I would also like to thank Sharon, who shared her experiences with the safe return of her boy Jesse, who was made it back home after being away for 7 days!



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Before your Pet ever goes Missing

Make sure your pet is wearing a collar & is micro chipped!

- A collar is the first thing a person who finds a lost pet looks for to see who the pet belongs to. This is the quickest way to identify your pet and have him returned safely to you. This is why you should ALWAYS have a collar with identification on your pet, even if he/she is in the house or just playing outside in your fenced yard.

You never know if someone will leave the gate open or your dog gets a burst of energy while chasing a bunny and heads out over the fence on a new adventure!

Collars can fall off, so you need to have another form of identification for your pet. This is why getting your pet micro chipped is also extremely important!

- Flo Jo had a "Home Again" microchip. A microchip is a very small device, about the size of a grain of rice (12mm). You cannot see the microchip after it is implanted under the skin of your dog or cat. It is implanted under your pet's skin in a method similar to a vaccine injection.

The microchip has no internal battery or power source, so most of the time it's inactive. When the microchip scanner is passed over it, the microchip gets enough power from the scanner to transmit the pet's ID number. Since there's no battery and no moving parts, there's nothing to wear out or replace. The microchip will last your pet's lifetime.

The biggest benefit of getting your dog micro chipped is the activity that happens once you report your dog missing.

With HomeAgain, there "Rapid Lost Pet Alerts" are sent the minute you report your pet as lost. Your pet's "Lost Pet" info is sent out to the entire HomeAgain "Pet Recovery Network" within a 25 mile radius. The "Pet Recovery Network", is vets, shelters & other local pet owners, whose pet is also micro chipped and signed up for the alerts, to notify them of your lost pet.

Make sure you update your pets profile with a good photo of your pet, along with any info that would be useful in identifying your pet. Make sure to include your cell phone as a contact number! Chances are you will be out searching for your pet and not at home to receive any calls if your pet is spotted.

- The next time you are at the vet, have your vet scan your pet to ensure the chip show registered with your updated contact information.

Pet Microchip Companies

HomeAgain – (USA / 888-466-3242) -

<http://public.homeagain.com/index.html>

AKC/CAR – (USA / 800-252-7894)

<http://www.akccar.org/>

Microchip4Solutions (M4S ID) - Canada/North America -

<http://www.microchipsolutions.com>

AVID – (Global - 951-371-7505) - <http://www.avidplc.com/>

- Your pet only needs one microchip. This document is not an advertisement for HomeAgain, but they are by far the largest provider in the US. If your pet has a microchip by a provider other than HomeAgain, you can still register the number with HomeAgain to take advantage of their services.

One note of caution – The “basic” package does not come with the alerting services. There is of course an “upcharge” for these services. Make sure the package you have purchased provides these alert services!

All of the microchip companies offer various services to differentiate them from other companies. HomeAgain also offers medical insurance, as well as transport reimbursement of your dog was found 500 miles from home. Be sure to read the fine print on any service you purchase.

AVID chips are registered to your vet's office, where they have complete descriptions, emergency contact info for family members. They also have the ability to order prescription medication.

AVID might not do all the things that Home Again is now doing, but they also haven't changed the rules mid-stream or started charging annual fees.

Their id tags also carry three phone numbers – owner, family emergency contact, and vet.

Not all microchips are the same

- AVID® and Home Again® microchips read on a frequency of 125 khz and have been commonly used in veterinary hospitals and shelters across the United States. Each company has universal scanners that can identify chips from each other as well as other microchip companies that create chips that are also 125 khz.

Controversy involving microchips exists because one company (Banfield) introduced a chip that was 134.2 khz and incompatible with other readers.

Therefore, pets chipped with Banfield microchips could not be identified with the most common microchip scanners on the market in the U.S. Banfield has since stopped selling the undetectable microchips in their clinics.

The newer universal scanners can now read both types of chips. If you have an older microchip from Banfield (PetSmart Vet), it would not hurt to contact local shelters to make sure they have the universal scanners that can read your pet's chip.

If they do not, contact Banfield and request they provide the scanner to the shelter.

- Conversely, if you are traveling outside the US with your pet, you should check with one of the other providers to see if your pet's number can be registered with that service. Make sure you provide a number where you can be reached within that country if your cell phone does not work globally.

This may not give you complete coverage if the local shelters/vets in the country you are visiting do not have the "Universal Scanner". Prior to the distribution of Universal scanners, scanners were specific to the microchip provider and could not read other providers microchips. This meant that even if your dog had a microchip, it would not be detected by the scanner.

Scanners are usually distributed to the local pet rescue community by the microchip vendor, so check with the local dominant company to see if they are distributing "universal scanners". If possible, contact a local vet in the area you are visiting to see who the dominant pet microchip provider is in that area.

Make a "Lost Pet" folder and keep a copy in your home and in your car –

- Make sure you have a good photo of your pet and create a "Lost Pet" poster on fluorescent paper, that you can start posting at a moments notice. By having multiple copies already printed in your home, car or RV, you are ready should your pet go missing from your home or while you are away in an unfamiliar area.
- If you have multiple pets, you should have a folder for each. The poster should have a good picture of your pet, along with a description, date missing, sex, height, approx. weight, coloring, notable injuries or scars and

any special needs like medications. Do not put your name or address for security reasons. Offer a reward, but don't put the amount.

- If you live in an area with multiple ethnic groups, you may want to create your fliers in Spanish or whatever the prevalent language is for your area.
- If possible, withhold at least one identifying characteristic. This will help identify any scammers that may try to call. Yes, it is a sad world where we have to worry about people taking advantage in our darkest hours.
- Again, be sure to put down your cell phone number, since chances are you will also be away from home searching for your pet. (See Appendix A for a Template)
- If you have a newer phone that allows you to store word or PDF docs, it would also be useful to keep a copy on your phone. This way you can email a copy to friends that are willing to come help, from your home computer or even while you are out searching.

You can also keep a copy on a memory stick, but I would not make this my only backup copy. While convenient, I have seen them fail in the past.

- You can also create a free email account with Yahoo/Google and create a draft email with these documents attached to the email. This way you can access them from any browser having Internet access.
- In addition to having the poster, you should also have a list of every 24hr vet, animal shelter, police station, rescue & newspaper within your local area. You can use Google Maps or Yahoo Local to track down this information. Just enter your zip code as your default location and do searches on vet, pet rescue, police, etc.....

If your pet is lost away from home, this technique is also extremely helpful for getting this info for the local area where your pet was last seen.

- Write down your pet's microchip number, as well as the service provider's number, so they can be alerted even if you are not at home. Also keep a copy or original of the dog's rabies certificate.
- Apparently there are some states that will seize the dog if you are stopped for some reason and don't have proof of vaccination. Also keep a copy or original envelope of county dog license

Read the fine print on the rabies cert, or on local licenses. Neither TAG is proof - you must have the paper certificate, or in the case of the Montgomery County (PA) dog license, the little envelope that the tag comes in.

Storage of documents

- For documents stored in your car, be sure to store them in a water proof ziplock bag/document case. You can find the document case at outdoor retailers, such as REI.
- Fold them with the print facing in, since the heat of the car can transfer the writing to the plastic case, making the document hard, if not impossible to read.
- Create multiple copies of the poster so you can start posting them immediately. Keep a heavy duty stapler w/staples and tape in your car/RV so you can begin posting fliers immediately.

Miscellaneous

- Keep a powerful flashlight in your car/RV. If your pet is sick or injured, he/she may hide in dark places and be unable to come out to you. A strong flashlight can help you see in dark spaces.

Use your flashlight for checking under houses and other dark spots. Also check storage sheds, garages, dumpsters, trash cans, and under cars.

- While cell phones are handy when searching with a group, walky-talkies can be more convenient. If you are searching in a local wooded area, walky talkies could be helpful.

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After your Pet goes Missing

(See appendix C for a condensed version “checklist”)

- a. **Time is of the essence** – Unfortunately, the longer your pet is missing, the less likely your chances of recovering your pet. Many of the tips are most useful if executed immediately after your pet has gone missing.

By taking a few moments now, to put together your own “Lost Pet” package for each of your pets, you will be ready to start getting the word out about your pet’s disappearance. Hand out the flier to everyone you see in the area your pet was last seen. You never know who may be able to help you, so talk to everyone!

- b. **Contact the microchip company** – Alert the microchip company immediately, so they can start alerting their network. If you have registered your pet’s number with more than one company, be sure to alert them all!
- c. **Enlist the help of friends & family** – There truly is strength in numbers! You can’t be everywhere, so getting help is so important!

If you are missing your cat, make sure you check in every nook & cranny in your home! Cat’s have been known to get themselves wedged in the smallest of spaces or locked in closets and basements. Expand your search to under porches, neighbor’s sheds, garages, etc.....

While you are out in the area where your pet was last seen, you can have friends/family handing out fliers to people in the local area, visiting police stations, shelters and vets.

- d. **Post fliers everywhere – the bigger/brighter the better! - I cannot stress this enough!** Telephone Poles, supermarkets, post offices, banks, pet stores, groomers, gas stations, restaurants, etc....any store window you can find! Be sure to check back often to see if the poster is missing or damaged.

Sharon had contacted the local police department when Jesse went missing, but when the people who found Jesse called; the police dispatcher did not find the missing pet info right away. The officers who responded remembered seeing all the lost dog posters and figured this was the dog and contacted Sharon.

Make sure you leave enough posters so all carriers & patrolmen can get a copy. It does not hurt to follow up with calls after shift changes to make sure the new dispatcher is aware of your missing pet.

Stop patrolmen, delivery people, postal workers, landscapers, public works people on the street and make sure they have a copy of your flier!

Go door to door and talk to people. Many people have pets and understand what you are going through. You will find many to be sympathetic and want to help.

The biggest thing is to ***be in the area all the time*** giving out posters and searching. If the community sees you care, then they will care too. Talk to people and ask questions. Tell people, report it to as many relevant organizations as possible and constantly call them to check updates. Get it in the paper, put flyers EVERYWHERE. The more people who know who your dog is and what he looks like, the more chances you will have of someone spotting him and calling you or picking him up.

You will be amazed at how much support you will get from the community. People will come out of the woodwork to help you and to look for the dog on their own, whether you are aware of it or not.

There will be times when you feel like you are getting somewhere...and there will be times when you'll feel like you are looking for a needle in a haystack. Anything you do is a step in the right direction. Your dog is a family member. **Don't give up.**

e. **Enlist the help of a 4 legged buddy** –

While a dog may be too scared to come out around strange people, they maybe more inclined to come out around a familiar dog pal. Bringing a 4 legged buddy can be very helpful! If you don't have a 4 legged buddy, bringing your pets favorite squeaky toy so he/she can hear a familiar "happy" sound, can help bring him/her out if hiding in the bushes.

Jesse curled up in a wooded yard behind a fence where 2 Jack Russell's lived. They had been barking at the fence for 4 days, before their owner went over to his neighbor to see what the dogs could be barking at. That is where they found Jesse.

f. **Spread the word online** – If you belong to any local newsgroups, post a message that you're pet is lost. Chances are that others on the local list will forward your message and help spread the word about your pet.

Send an email to all your friends and ask them to forward it on to anyone in the area. You can place a free classified on www.PetFinder.com.

g. **Online lost/found** – There are websites like www.findtoto.com or www.SherlockBones.com , which are pay services for automated calls to

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neighbors in the area where your pet was last scene. They make automated calls, giving your lost dog or lost cat message describing your pet in detail, including your contact number, and our website address where the recipient can go to view your lost pet's picture and information. If you have a cat, you can try www.TabbyTracker.com.

There is another site called www.fidofinder.com. I have not used this site, but have listed it in case it could be helpful.

www.missingpetpartnership.org - Missing Pet Partnership is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to reuniting lost companion animals with their owners/guardians. Their website offers behavior-based lost pet recovery tips and referrals to lost pet services.

You can also post on Petfinder.com, Craigslist, yahoo groups like "K9AmberAlert".

h. Personally visit local shelters, DAILY if possible –

Calling shelters is not always enough. Many times, shelter worker may not know the difference between breeds/colors.

Find out the holding period of each animal control and humane shelter. Be aware of how much time you have to claim your pet before it is euthanized! There have been many stories of a pet being euthanized or adopted out, even though the pet owner had called the shelter about the missing pet.

Make sure you leave a copy of your pet's lost poster. Make friends with the shelter folks so they all know you are looking for your pet.

i. Ask Animal Control, humane societies, and shelters about pet rescue organizations in your area.

Usually there are smaller pet rescue groups that work with the local humane shelter. They often take pets from the shelter to save them from euthanasia and adopt them out to new homes.

Call the rescue groups regularly to see if they have your pet.

j. Contact Breed Specific Rescues –

These rescues may not be local, but pull dogs from shelters if they find out about them. So if you are missing your Great Dane, be sure to contact all the Great Dane or Large Breed Rescues in your state.

k. **Check out all the local papers for Found Pets and place a Lost Pet classified**

Believe it or not, not everyone uses the Internet on a regular basis. With consolidation in the newspaper industry, sometimes one paper owns many of the smaller papers and shares a single call center for classifieds.

Rather than picking up every paper, a single call to the call center can check a number of publications classifieds in a single call.

l. **Dogs tend to move in the early mornings** (5am-7am) or at dusk. Be sure you are out looking during those time frames. Check out Appendix B for a better understanding of your dogs behavior, based on his/her personality.

m. **If in an unfamiliar area, get a few local maps-** This is helpful to get familiar with the layout, as well as giving you the ability to divide the search area up into sections between all your helpers.

What to do once you have a sighting

- a. **Get the Pet Owner to that spot** - Once you have a spotting, let the owner go to that spot, all others create a wide circle around that area but let the owner quietly call. Bring a familiar 4 legged friend if possible.
- b. **Gather up the clothes in your hamper** – At dusk, leave a crate with some of your dirty clothes and some food/water. Leave more clothes around creating a scent trail back to the crate.
- c. **Get permission when entering private property** - Once the dog is sighted, if it happens on private property be SURE to ask permission of the owner to go onto the property and let him/her know with how many people will be involved. Be sure to be polite and respectful.

A Few Words of Caution

Unfortunately, there are dangerous people in our society who prey upon victims by using "found" pets as a ploy.

- **NEVER** respond to a "found" pet contact alone. Take a friend or two along with you.

- Arrange to meet in a public place.
- **NEVER** invite the person to your home unless you happen to know them well.

Beware of money scams. A common one is a person calls you claiming to be a long-haul trucker. He says he picked up your pet and is out of state now. He heard about your ad, flyer, etc. and says he will return your pet if you will pay to ship it home. This person does not have your pet; he is only trying to take your money.

Don't wander around looking for your pet alone, either during the day or at night. Always bring a friend or relative. This is especially important in unfamiliar neighborhoods.

Use the identifying information you have withheld about your pet. Please remember that you should never give out **all** of the identifying features of your lost pet. If the person who claims to have found your pet cannot describe these features to you, they do not have your pet!

When You Find Your Pet

Go around and collect up all of your old flyers.

If you placed your dogs missing information online, makes sure you go back and mark them as "safe".

Thank everybody who has helped you.

Give your pet a big hug and let him/her know how happy you are to have them home again!

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Appendix A –

(Delete Appendix A and this line, format spacing as needed. Ideally use a very large sign for posters & use this size for handouts)

LOST DOG

REWARD

Missing since: _____

Description example: Whippet (like a small greyhound) White with patches of brown/black 47 pounds - male

Name: Jetzon - very friendly

Please contact owner:

“123-123-1234” Cell

Insert your dogs photo here

123-123-1234

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Appendix B: Factors That Influence Distances Traveled

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There are six major factors that influence the distances that a lost dog will travel: Temperament, Circumstances, Weather, Terrain, Appearance, and Population Density.



Temperament of the Dog

How a dog behaves towards strangers influences how far it will travel (when lost) before someone intervenes and rescues it. There are three primary behavioral categories of lost dogs: Gregarious Dogs, Aloof Dogs, and Xenophobic Dogs.

Gregarious Dogs: Wiggly-butt, friendly dogs are more inclined to go directly up to the first person who calls them. Depending on the terrain and population density where the dog was lost, these dogs will generally be found fairly close to home or will be picked up by someone close to the escape point. Gregarious dogs are often "adopted" by individuals (not shelter or rescue workers) who find them.

Aloof Dogs: Dogs with aloof temperaments are wary of strangers and will initially avoid human contact. They will be inclined to accept human contact only after they have overcome fear issues and become hungry enough. While these dogs can travel a great distance, aloof dogs eventually can be enticed with food and patience, typically by experienced rescuers who know how to approach and capture a wary dog. These dogs are often recovered by rescue group volunteers, and their wariness can be easily misinterpreted as "abused." In addition, these dogs are often not recovered for weeks or months after their escape, giving them the physical appearance (thinness, injuries, stickers, ticks, etc.) that they are homeless, abused, and unloved.

Xenophobic (Fearful) Dogs: Xenophobia means "fear or hatred of things strange or foreign." Dogs with xenophobic temperaments (due to genetics and/or

puppyhood experiences) are more inclined to travel farther and are at a higher risk of being hit by cars. Due to their cowering, fearful behavior, people assume these dogs were "abused," and even if the dog has ID tags, they will refuse to contact the previous owner. Some of these panic-stricken dogs will even run from their owners! It may be necessary to use other dogs to get close enough to capture them or to use baited dog traps.

Circumstances Surrounding the Disappearance

A dog that digs out from a yard to explore a scent will tend to travel a short distance before it is found meandering and doubling back as it explores a scent. On the other hand, a dog that bolts in panic due to fireworks or thunder will take off at a blind run and can run for several miles.

Weather: A dog that escapes on a beautiful spring day may travel farther than one that escapes in a snowstorm. Extreme weather conditions (snow, hail, rain, and sweltering heat) will decrease the distances that lost dogs travel.

Terrain: A dog that escapes in a residential area will not travel as far as a dog that escapes in a mountainous area. Fences that create barriers will influence a dog's travel since a dog will tend to take the "path of least resistance" when traveling. Cactus, heavy brush, and steep cliffs can be barriers that influence whether a dog continues on a path or changes directions.

Appearance of the Dog: What a dog looks like can influence how quickly it will be picked up by a rescuer. In general, most people are less inclined to pull over and attempt to grab a loose Pit Bull they perceive as being "aggressive" than they would a "friendly" Labrador Retriever. Also, size matters as people are more inclined to pick up small dogs because they look vulnerable and are easier to transport and house than large dogs. In addition, people are more likely to attempt to rescue a purebred dog that they perceive to have value than a mixed breed dog. When average motorists see a mixed breed dog trotting down the sidewalk, their impression is often that the dog belongs in the neighborhood or that it is a homeless stray. But when those same people see a Boston Terrier, they are inclined to believe that, because it is a "valuable purebred dog," it must be a lost pet.

Population Density: A dog that escapes in Manhattan will travel a shorter distance than will a dog that escapes in the Rockies or in rural farmland. When dogs escape into areas with a high number of people, their chances of being found close to the escape point are increased. But in areas with an extremely low number of people, dogs tend to travel farther and their chances of being found close to the escape point are decreased. A dog that escapes in the middle of the night will travel farther before being seen than a dog that escapes during rush hour traffic.

Owner Behaviors That Create Problems



Dog owners often behave in ways that actually inhibit their chances of recovering their lost dogs. Some develop a "wait and see" approach (believing their dog will return home like Lassie) and by the time they start actively looking, the vital first few hours to locate the dog (or witnesses who saw the dog) are gone.

Others develop "tunnel vision" and fail to find their dog because they focus on wrong theories. They assume their dog was "stolen and sold to research" when in fact their dog might have been rescued and put up for adoption through a local adoption event. They experience "grief avoidance" and quickly give up their search effort because they really believe they will never see their dog again. They feel helpless and alone, often discouraged by others who rebuke them and tell them "it was just a dog" and "you'll never find your dog."

In addition, the level of human animal bond (HAB) will influence the recovery efforts. People with a strong HAB will go to extremes to find their lost dog. They will accomplish the "impossible" task of visiting all shelters, posting flyers, and contacting rescue groups while maintaining a full-time job and other family commitments. On the other hand, people with a weak HAB will quickly become discouraged, assume they will never see their dog again, and will stop searching.

Rescuer Behaviors That Create Problems

People who find stray dogs often misinterpret the dog's behavior; they assume that the cowering, fearful dog was "abused" when in fact the dog has a xenophobic temperament and has been shy and fearful since it was a puppy, due to genetics and puppyhood experiences.

Dogs found in rural areas are often assumed to be "dumped" and homeless; many rescuers never think this could be a dog that was lost. Some people who find a stray dog that does not have a collar automatically assume it is "homeless" and therefore they immediately work to place the dog rather than attempt to find the dog's owner.

In addition, the first place the owner of a lost dog will search for his or her dog - the local shelter - is typically the last place that someone who finds a loose dog will take it (due to the fear of euthanasia)!

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Appendix C – Finding your Pet - Checklist

- ____ . Search all areas of your home/yard
- ____ . Contact the microchip company
- ____ . Enlist the help of friends & family
- ____ . Post fliers everywhere – the bigger/brighter the better!
- ____ . Enlist the help of a 4 legged buddy
- ____ . Spread the word online
- ____ . Online lost/found
- ____ . Personally visit local shelters, DAILY if possible
- ____ . Ask Animal Control, humane societies, and shelters about pet rescue organizations in your area.
- ____ . Contact Breed Specific Rescues
- ____ . Check out all the local papers for Found Pets and place a Lost Pet classified
- ____ . Dogs tend to move in the early mornings/dusk, make sure you are out there
- ____ . If in an unfamiliar area, get a few local maps

What to do once you have a sighting

- ____ . Get the Pet Owner to that spot
- ____ . Gather up the clothes in your hamper
- ____ . Get permission when entering private property

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