



# LOST CAT ACTION STEPS



We are sorry to hear that your cat is missing. The first 24-48 hours are the most critical, and the effort you put in during this critical time will dramatically increase the likelihood that you will recover your pet safely. However, searches can sometimes go on much longer. Your ongoing, sustained and proactive involvement is critical to success.

**HARTT's team of lost pet consultants are all volunteers - we do our very best to contact owners of lost cats quickly, but due to the large volume of cases we receive, it may take a number of days for us to reach out to you. Please know that we understand how much you want your cat back, therefore, here are the most important steps you can take NOW, even before your first call with your HARTT consultant. DON'T WAIT! Start implementing these steps immediately, and you can share what you've already tried with your HARTT consultant once we reach out.**

Even if your pet was lost from an unfamiliar area, approximately 70% of the lost cats we help stay within a block or two of where they went missing (even if this location is an area they've never been to before). Using that probability, we will concentrate on this area first. The strategy also may be a bit different if your cat is young/healthy, or old/sick/medically compromised, and if your cat is confident/social or shy/skittish.

**Please read and check off each item once you've read and completed the task:**

\_\_\_\_\_ ONLY if you can do this safely and ONLY if there are no other pets, children or vulnerable adults to worry about, **prop open all yard gates, and even front doors**, so that the lost cat can choose to easily return to the yard and home if she so chooses.

\_\_\_\_\_ **STOP doing laundry and scooping your litterbox**; you will want to preserve all "scent material" which may become very important in the search. This includes preserving any soiled litter in zip-loc bags and not laundering your cat's bedding, other pets' bedding, or even some items of your family's laundry. Scent is the most powerful sense to an animal, and these scent items can be used strategically (more about this later).

\_\_\_\_\_ **Find a few good quality photos** of your cat right away, PREFERABLY one with your cat in a standing or walking position - this photo may be used for lost pet flyers.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Search your home and yard** - are you sure your pet isn't just hiding? Nervous pets - ESPECIALLY CATS - can hide in shockingly small areas. Check all these places:

## INDOORS

- \_\_\_\_\_ Under beds
- \_\_\_\_\_ Under and behind other furniture in the home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Behind large appliances
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inside mattress box springs and under couch cushions
- \_\_\_\_\_ In drawers and cabinets (that may have closed behind your cat)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inside boxes, hampers or storage tubs that may have been open and are now closed
- \_\_\_\_\_ On TOP of furniture - kitchen cabinets, bookshelves, etc.

## **OUTDOORS**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Under the home (if there is a crawl space, such as under manufactured homes)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Under storage sheds
- \_\_\_\_\_ Under parked vehicles – look up inside the bottom of the vehicles
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inside BBQ grills/cabinets
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inside play equipment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Under patio furniture and cushions
- \_\_\_\_\_ LOOK UP! Check all trees and branches CAREFULLY with a bright flashlight at night
- \_\_\_\_\_ Under and behind shrubs and plants

\_\_\_\_\_ **Set up food and water** (we call this a “feeding station”) in your yard, CLOSEST TO THE DOOR WHERE YOUR PET EXITED FROM. If your cat is hiding close by, this food and water can draw him back. Even if there are other animals in the neighborhood who might be attracted by the food and you may have to replenish, we want YOUR cat to easily find food and water whenever they return. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN DO! Refresh the food at least once a day, preferably twice. Choose DESIRABLE food – wet cat food, tuna, etc. During ant season, make sure all food is ant-proof by placing a heavier food bowl inside a shallow outer pan, and fill that outer pan with water to form an “ant moat.” Also place a feeding station at the scene of ANY sighting location you receive! If you are concerned about birds eating the food, wait until dusk to set up your feeding stations, when birds are asleep.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Do you have any type of WIFI security camera?** Ring, NestCam, Arlo, etc? OR, can your family members or friends loan you such a camera? If so, relocate your camera to close to ground level and point it at your feeding station to see if your cat is coming around after bedtime or at other times of the day. If you know any hunters, they may be able to also loan you a wireless “game camera” to capture photos of animals who come to your feeding station. You can also buy game/trail cameras on Amazon for under \$75.00.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Place scent items**, such as soiled litter from your litter box or items of clothing from a person with whom your cat is bonded, about 5 feet from the feeding station. Also place scent items at the location of ANY sighting location you receive!

\_\_\_\_\_ **Conduct a search** on foot or by car, ideally just before sunset or right at sunrise. Package up a treat jar to shake, and any favorite toys that make noise (balls with bells, crinkle toys). Begin walking or driving your neighborhood SLOWLY, looking closely in other yards. HARTT in general discourages rigorous ground searches with large teams because their presence may cause a frightened cat to flee the area. Get a high-powered flashlight and search bushes and shrubs from a bit of a distance after dark.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Look for neighbors with cameras.** Some will have doorbell cameras, others will have security cameras mounted outside their homes. Make a note of the addresses of each of these homes in the areas where your cat went missing. Then, armed with a flyer, visit EACH home and try to speak with a resident. Be heartfelt in your request – introduce yourself as one of their neighbors and explain where you live. Tell them you are very worried about your missing cat, and ask if they would kindly look back at the footage on their camera, from the date and time your cat went missing, to see if their cameras

happened to catch a glimpse of your cat and which way s/he was headed. Ask them to call you with their findings.

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**Go door to door:** IF your cat is frightened or injured, s/he may be hiding or may not be very mobile. Knock on the doors of EVERY neighbor to the left, right, back and front of your house, for at least 5 houses, in each direction. Hand them a flyer and tell them that your cat may be hiding or injured and will likely only respond to the sound of YOUR voice. Then, ask if you may please personally search their back yard. Be sure to look under and behind everything! If you only ask the neighbor to search for you, they will typically walk out their back door, call out “Here, kitty, kitty” and if they don’t see anything, they will report that your cat isn’t there. Nothing will replace you PERSONALLY searching adjacent yards for your cat.

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**Are there cat feeders in your area?** Many neighborhoods that have a population of stray or feral cats have a “caregiver” somewhere in the neighborhood who feeds and looks after the cats. Look for homes with bowls of cat food and water outside – chances are, they are a cat feeder. Be sure to visit these people, as your cat may have also found this free food source and be frequenting their property! Ask them to keep a watch out for your cat.

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**Special needs circumstances:** If there is reason to believe your cat may be sick or injured (ie, cat is geriatric, disabled, was seen hit by a car or was in an auto accident), then a careful, quiet grid search is highly advised in case your cat is not able to move.

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**Do NOT have a multitude of people calling out the cat’s name** – if 5 different people are calling “Fluffy!” in 5 different areas or on 5 different streets, the cat will have no idea which direction they are supposed to go. Also, calling a cat’s name, clapping or whistling can also trigger a panicked “*Oh no – they’re looking for me!*” flight response in a cat and can be counterproductive. HARTT recommends that ONLY an owner with whom the cat is bonded should call the pet’s name. Even then, with shy cats, calling the cat’s name can work against you. Please ask your HARTT consultant about “shy pet protocol” and how to attract a nervous pet to you. Others in the search party should merely search and, when the animal is spotted, notify the owner of the exact location.

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If your cat is microchipped, **call your microchip company** and report him missing! Your veterinarian or the shelter or rescue group from whom you adopted your pet should be able to tell you the name of the microchip company they use, their phone number, and, your pet’s microchip number if you can’t find it. Make sure your contact information is current, in case your cat is found and scanned for a chip.

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**If your cat is located**, the first priority is to keep the cat calm and do nothing that could drive him into a roadway or other dangerous area. The owner should proceed quickly to the scene with a favorite toy, treats, and a carrier (or even a large pillowcase if no carrier is available).

**Once on scene, we recommend that the owner sit down, slightly angled away from the cat.** The owner should begin talking softly just so the cat can hear their voice and identify them as familiar. Whenever possible, allow the cat to approach the owner. Try not to make any rapid movement or gestures. We call this behavior “shy pet protocol”. It’s always best if your pet approaches YOU first. If you try to pursue your pet, they could rapidly run from the area (and you can’t outrun them anyway!).

**We recommend calling your HARTT consultant ASAP once you have eyes on your cat.** If she won’t come to you, we can coach you on what to do next, or expedite getting a humane trap to the scene (more about this below).

## Online and Social Media Sites

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Not a big computer user? Not on social media? That’s ok – recruit a family member, child, grandchild, friend or neighbor to handle this part of the work. Don’t skip it! Many people communicate about lost and found pets on these sites; don’t miss this opportunity to communicate about or search for your lost pet!

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**Nextdoor** – This smart phone app is the MOST IMPORTANT social media site to use for lost cats. It’s free to use and was created as a way for neighbors in specific areas to communicate with one another. Posts on NextDoor (ND) range from crime reports, to mechanic shop recommendations, to nearby school bake sales, to lost and found pets. In general, only a resident can post or view ND for their specific “neighborhood” and a small range of nearby neighborhoods. If you aren’t already a member of NextDoor, it can take up to a week to be “approved”. Ask your neighbors if any of them are members of the site, and they can post for you.

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**Neighbors by Ring app** – You don’t need to own a Ring device to download this app, which also focuses on the area nearest your home. Put a virtual flyer on this app to spread the word that your pet is missing.

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### **Maricopa County Lost and Found Pet**

**Map** (<https://gis.maricopa.gov/ACC/Stray/index.html>) this site will show the location of lost and found pets within the past few days (older found pets will not be visible on the site). All strays who come into MCACC are posted on this site, using the location where they were found. NOTE – this location could be MILES from where your pet went missing so search all listings in a wide area as well.

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**Craigslist (“CL”)** (<https://phoenix.craigslist.org/>) – This online ad page is free to use. Check in both the “LOST AND FOUND” and in the “PETS” section. Search for your pet AND post your pet. Beware of color – you may consider your cat to be “orange”, but someone who may have already found your cat may have listed her as “tan”, “yellow” or “gold”. Posts quickly roll to the bottom, so we recommend refreshing your post at least every 2 days.

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**Facebook (“FB”)** – many different lost pet sites can be found on FB – here are a few for the Maricopa County, Arizona area:


- Straydar <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Straydar/>
- StraydarAZ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/798423246969450/>
- Straydar Scottsdale/PV/Arcadia <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1280153812030349/>
- Lost Cats of Arizona <https://www.facebook.com/lostcatsaz/>
- Lost and Found Pets of Peoria, Glendale, El Mirage, Sun City & Youngtown <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1810302072550418/>


**Paper Flyers - NOTHING takes the place of basic paper flyers, posted all over your neighborhood!** Even if you have posted online and searched all of those posts, you are typically only reaching “pet people” who are active in the animal community. This means that all others who do not have pets and do not follow pet issues will never know you are searching for a pet! Paper flyers will reach parents out for a stroll with babies or toddlers; fitness walkers; people passing casually through a neighborhood; seniors; and kids playing in the neighborhood.

For CAT owners, **we recommend hanging at least 30 flyers in a 2-block radius RIGHT AWAY** – you should be able to do this in less than 90 minutes. Use 3M clear packing tape (NOT duct tape, NOT blue or green painter’s tape and not regular scotch tape) to adhere signs to surfaces. If you and 3 others go out together to hang flyers and search, that will be 4 of you looking for your pet; if you put up 30 flyers and each one is seen by 30 people, that will be 900 people helping to look for your pet!!

**Does your HOA or neighborhood have a restriction on flyers?** RARELY do these organizations actually enforce the restriction or fine you for placing them. In most cases, the worst case is they will tear them down. We would prefer even a few hours of exposure from a well-placed flyer than no flyer in that location at all. Please be responsible and remove flyers timely after the conclusion of a search, to keep neighborhoods happy and to make things easier for the owners of other pets in the future. If your flyers are being taken down, consider hanging more of them on Friday late afternoon, so that they get maximum exposure over the weekend before they are potentially removed again on Monday, the next business day.


## Lost pet flyer tips

Brought to you by HARTT  
([azhantt.org](http://azhantt.org)) 




Purchase multiple rolls of clear packing tape.

Hang flyers using one strip vertical strip top to bottom (extending 3-4 inches past top and bottom to get solid coverage).



Print lost pet flyers on bright cardstock (yellow or orange) paper to catch attention. Do not clutter flyer with information - keep to the key information. Of note: having ANY flyer up is better than nothing!


As time goes on, make sure to replace any tattered flyers with fresh ones. Once your pet is found, promptly remove flyers so there is a clean slate available for any future lost pets.



Hang flyers in (at least) a TWO mile radius for lost dogs. Even the smallest of dogs, who have never been lost before, can cover long distances.

Hang flyers in a HALF mile radius for lost cats. Cats tend to stay close to home and don't run like dogs do.

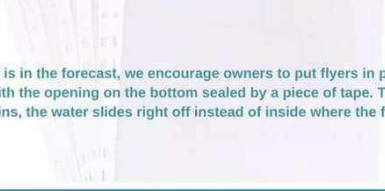
If you still aren't receiving sightings called in, continue to expand your flyer radius.




Hang at least 100 flyers on stop signs\* (3/4 ways up) located where neighborhood roads feed into larger roads. Also hang flyers on speed signs\* typically 50 feet into neighborhoods. You will get the most eyes in these locations versus light poles and mailboxes.

Be sure to not cover the reflective tape on the stop sign and do not wrap flyers around poles (leave the corners free so that it is easier to read).

When rain is in the forecast, we encourage owners to put flyers in plastic sleeves with the opening on the bottom sealed by a piece of tape. This way when it rains, the water slides right off instead of inside where the flyer is.





For rural areas, utilize old political boards or poster boards to stake into the ground.

If camping and you don't have access to poster board, use paper plates to create flyers (again - better to get something up versus nothing). Attach to trees.

\* Be mindful of local ordinances regarding signage

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**Flyers should be eye catching, simple, printed in color, contain a clear picture and minimal wording** (see sample under “resources” below), and have the phone number of someone who will answer their phone 24/7 and will be extremely thorough about keeping a log of all sightings called in. Flyers can be posted on community mailboxes, bulletin boards, traffic signs, and other locations where people walk or drive by. We suggest placing them upside down in sheet protectors to protect the signs somewhat from inclement weather.

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See sample flyer attached – you can leave out details the average person won’t be able to see from a distance, such as age, weight, eye color, or gender. **Please notify your HARTT consultant if you need help designing flyers – we are happy to create a design for you! We can order black and white or color flyers for you from a nearby print shop at a significant nonprofit discount – please ask your HARTT consultant how to reimburse our charity for the printing of these flyers.**

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### **Handbills and business cards**

These smaller versions of flyers are more suitable for distributing by hand. You can also save printing costs – the handbills are printed 4 per page, and the business card format, 10 per page. Hand these smaller handbills or cards out to:

- Neighbors – go door to door
- UPS, postal workers or Amazon drivers (people who drive for a living and can be your eyes)
- Trash or utility workers
- Joggers, walkers, park goers
- Veterinary offices, boarding facilities and groomers

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### **Yard signs**

HARTT has received donations of thousands of corrugated plastic political campaign flyers which you can spray paint a neon color and affix your lost pet flyer on top of the sign. These yard signs can be placed in your own yard and throughout your neighborhood at key intersections; they are very eye-catching. They are especially effective in rural, wooded and desert areas where there are no surfaces and signs for affixing flyers. Remember WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN. Be sure to promptly remove your flyers and signs after your pet is found; this will make things easier for other families to do the same in the future.

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### **Car painting or Car Signs**

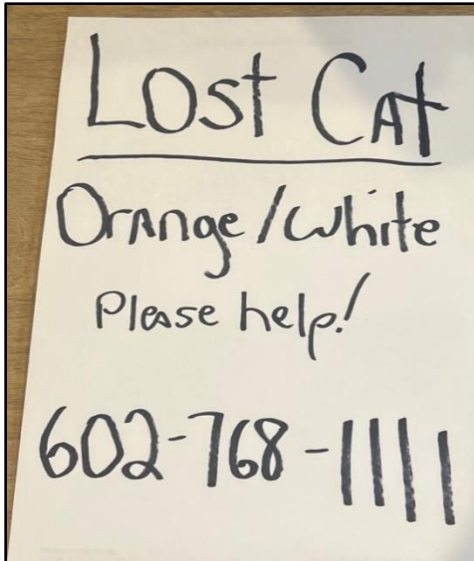
Stop at your local craft store and ask for markers or paint that can be used on automotive glass. Your car is a mobile billboard! Use your car as another way of getting the word out. Or, tape your lost cat flyers on your car as you drive about your community.

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**Call Arizona Humane Society** ([www.azhumane.org](http://www.azhumane.org)) – AHS receives most sick and injured animals – please check with them, and be sure to bring a copy of your flyer with you.

## Did you locate your cat, but you can't get her to come to you?

**Notify us IMMEDIATELY** by calling your HARTT consultant or emailing us at [info@azhartt.org](mailto:info@azhartt.org) – HARTT can get a humane trap to you, which will allow you to safely recover your cat! Until you receive a trap from us, do everything you can to not spook your cat from the area. This may mean you need to feed him in that spot for a few meals, so that he chooses to stay in the area. We can only set a trap if your cat is spotted in a defined area at least a few times.



## “Starter” Lost Cat Flyer

Even **TEMPORARY** hand-made flyers like this one (**big letters, clear description, LIMITED wording**) are fine to start – **get SOMETHING up IMMEDIATELY!** You can always replace them with a more attractive flyer afterwards:

# **LOST CAT**



**Orange  
Tabby**

**Call or Text 24/7**  
**602-653-9136**  
**602-768-5003**  
**info@azhartt.org**

## Sample Printed Lost Cat Flyer

### Flyer design tips

1. Clear, good quality photo
2. Clear, large phone numbers
3. Basic description/color
4. Large, bold font (easy to read if driving by)
5. No unnecessary wording – do NOT include:
  - Pet's name
  - eye color
  - gender
  - weight, if obvious by species or breed (chihuahua, cat, etc.)