

Factors associated with recovery of a lost pet. Lord, L.¹, Wittum, T¹., Ferketich, A.², Rajala-Schultz, P.¹, and Funk, J.¹. ¹Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio; ²School of Public Health, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Although reasons for relinquishment of dogs and cats to shelters have been evaluated, little is known about the process of reuniting lost pets with their owners. The goal of this study is to analyze the factors associated with recovery of a lost pet. A longitudinal, single cohort study design was used to collect information via a telephone survey from pet owners that had lost a dog in Dayton, Ohio between June 1 and September 30, 2005. From a population of 1,087 owners that lost a pet, 424 were selected for the survey. Of these 424 owners that were contacted, 325 (76.7%) were interviewed. Of the 187 dogs lost, 132 (70.6%) were found in a median of 2 days, and of the 138 cats lost, 73 were found in a median of 5 days. Dogs were recovered primarily by the owner initiating a call or a visit to an animal shelter (34.9%), a dog license (17.7%), and neighborhood signs (15.2%), and cats were recovered primarily by the cat returning home on its own (65.8%) and neighborhood signs (10.9%). Time to event analysis showed that dogs were more likely to be found if the owner ran an advertisement in the newspaper (RR=2.7; 95% CI=1.18-6.12), visited an animal shelter (RR=1.8; 95% CI=1.14-2.74), or called an animal shelter (RR=1.8; 95% CI=1.12-2.76). Dogs that were wearing an identification tag (RR=1.6; 95% CI=1.05-2.39) or were purebred (RR=1.6; 95% CI=1.08-2.30) were also more likely to be recovered. The owner's belief that the dog was stolen (RR=0.3; 95% CI=0.14-0.73) was associated with decreased rate of recovery. The findings from this study should help to educate pet owners on methods to search for their lost pets to increase reunification rates.