



HOW TO RECOVER A DISPLACED (INDOOR-ONLY) CAT

by: Kathy "Kat" Albrecht Missing Animal Response Network, www.missinganimalresponse.com

If your indoor-only cat escaped outside or into unfamiliar territory there is good news -- **your cat is probably not lost at all!** That is because it is likely that **your cat is hiding** and, depending upon the terrain, he/she is probably closer than you think. In general, any cat that is transplanted into an unfamiliar territory is a **DISPLACED CAT**. The majority of these cases involve indoor-only cats that accidentally escaped outdoors. However, outdoor-access cats can become displaced into unfamiliar territory as well, like when they escape from their carrier while at the vet's office, escape from an RV while traveling on vacation, or escape from a vehicle during a car accident. We've even discovered that some outdoor-access cats can become displaced **when they are chased from their territory** (usually by another cat or a loose dog) and can be just a few houses down, hiding in a neighbor's yard. While some of these cats ultimately adapt after a few days and work up the confidence to return home, many become disoriented and are afraid to come home. Thus normally confident, friendly outdoor-access cats can be hiding in fear within a close proximity to their own home. This is why a physical search (by you) of your neighbor's yards is critical!

WHY DISPLACED CATS HIDE - When an indoor-only cat escapes outside (or when any cat is displaced into an unfamiliar area), the cat is likely hiding (usually near the escape point) in fear. That is because cats are territorial and your cat's territory was inside of your home. Once a cat is transplanted into unfamiliar territory, it seeks shelter because it is afraid. Cats that are afraid (and cats that are injured) will seek areas of concealment such as under a deck, under a house or porch, or in heavy brush and **they will not meow!** Meowing would give -up their location to a predator. Their behavior has nothing to do with whether the cat loves you, recognizes your voice, or whether it can smell you--it has everything to do with the fact that **a panicked cat will hide in silence!** Just because you do not see or hear your cat does NOT mean that he/she is not close to home! In a 2018 Missing Cat Study, researchers interviewed over 1,200 cat owners who'd lost and then found their indoor-only escaped (displaced) cats. **The majority of these cats were found within 50 meters (within 2 to 3 houses) of their home!** Our website www.missinganimalresponse.com has detailed info on lost cat behaviors as well as a link to the 2018 Missing Cat Study.

HUMANE TRAPS - The method that the Missing Animal Response Network has pioneered that has resulted in the recovery of thousands of "missing" indoor-only cats (and displaced outdoor-access cats) is the same method used to capture feral cats--the use of a humane cat trap. We call this "trap-and-reunite" or "TAR." Humane traps have a trip mechanism that when triggered by a cat (or other small animal), will shut the door and contain a cat inside. These wire cages are sold in hardware stores (usually as traps used humanely to capture raccoons) or available at some vet offices or at your local shelter. Many families have had success in leaving a window or a door (that their cat escaped out of) wide open at night and the cat came back inside. However, if you have an issue with raccoons or skunks in your area, this might not be the best method to use.

WILDLIFE CAMERAS - The Missing Animal Response Network also recommends the use of digital wildlife (or "game") cameras before you start trapping, especially in cases where a cat is displaced in an apartment complex where there are zillions of cats, in areas where there are many raccoons, or in other situations where a humane trap would be difficult to use. The concept is that you set out a plate of cat food along with a motion-activated wildlife camera overnight. The camera will snap photos of all the animals that eat that food so that when you come back the next morning, you can pull the SD card from the camera, put it in your computer, and see photos of raccoon, raccoon, raccoon, CALICO!! THERE IS MY CAT!! From that point, you'd work to strategically humanely trap your cat while avoiding the raccoons and other cats. Many cats, especially skittish cats, hide in silence **and require time** before they enter a humane trap. While some cats take only hours or a few days to catch, others take several days (**sometimes ten to twelve days**) before they respond to food and enter a trap. Do NOT get discouraged if you're setting traps but not catching your cat initially, especially if he has a skittish temperament!

ONE MORE THING - If you feel that you need advice from a professional who can answer your questions about wildlife cameras, trapping, or lost cat recovery, MARN has a national listing of trained volunteer / professional "pet detectives", many who do over phone consultations. **DO NOT LOSE HOPE!!** For more information on lost pet behaviors, effective advice on lost pet posters, and a national network of professional and volunteer pet detectives, visit www.missinganimalresponse.com.