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Article

Frequency of Lost Dogs and Cats in the United States and the Methods Used to Locate Them

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Simple Summary: Dogs and cats are a common member of the family in homes across the US. No population-based data exist on the frequency of pets getting lost from the home and lost pets can be a source of human and animal suffering. Our primary objective was to determine the percentage of owned dogs and cats that were lost, and of these, what percentages of pets were recovered. We examined the recovery success for dogs compared to cats and the methods used as well as the relationship between lost or found pets and pet and owner demographics. While 15% of dog and cat owners lost their pets, dogs had higher recovery rates (93%) than cats (75%) as well as being returned using different search methods.

Abstract: A cross-sectional national random digit dial telephone interview was conducted between September and November 2010. There were 1,015 households that had owned a dog or cat within the past five years. Of these 817 households owned dogs and 506 owned cats. Fourteen percent of dogs (95% Confidence Interval (CI): 11–16%) and 15% (95% CI: 12–18%) of cats were lost in the past five years. No owner demographic variables were associated with losing a pet. Ninety three percent (95% CI: 86–97%) of dogs and 75% (95% CI: 64–85%) of cats were recovered. For dogs, searching the neighborhood and returning on their own were the most common methods of finding the dog; 14% were found through an identification tag. For cats, returning on their own was most common. Dogs were more likely than cats to be lost more than once. Cats were less likely than dogs to have any type of identification. Knowledge of the successful methods of finding dogs and cats can provide invaluable help for owners of lost pets. Since 25% of lost cats were not found, other methods of reuniting cats and their owners are needed. Collars and ID tags or humane trapping could be valuable approaches.

Keywords: lost dog; lost cat; collar; identification tag; stray cat; stray dog

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