

# LOST CAT BEHAVIOUR



When an outdoor access cat suddenly disappears it means that something has happened to interrupt the cat's normal behaviour of returning home. If an indoor only cat escapes outdoors they tend to hide in silence close to the escape point.

The recommended method of finding an outdoor access cat is very different to the method that should be used for an indoor only cat, understanding your cat's behaviour will increase the chances of a successful recovery:



## Outdoor Access Cats

Cats are territorial. If an outdoor access cat fails to return home it means that something has happened to interrupt or stop the cat's normal behaviour. The cat could be injured, trapped somewhere or even deceased within their territory.

The disappearance could also be caused by the cat being transported out of the area, either intentionally by an irate neighbour or unintentionally by the cat climbing into an open vehicle. It is also a possibility that the cat is displaced in unfamiliar territory, this can happen by a dog chasing the cat which can cause them to run in blind panic and then hide in silence.

The question we need to ask when an outdoor access cat goes missing is 'WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CAT?'

## Indoor Only Cats

The territory for an indoor only cat is the house it lives in. If the cat escapes outside they become displaced, the territory is unfamiliar to them. The cat will usually look for the first place to hide that will offer them some form of concealment and protection.



A cat will naturally use their instincts to protect them from predators which means they often hide in complete silence. The length of time that they will remain in hiding is down to the cat's temperament.

The question we need to ask when an indoor only cat goes missing is 'WHERE IS THE CAT HIDING?'

## Feline Temperaments



A cat's temperament will influence their actions and the distance they are likely to travel. The way a cat behaves within their normal territory will affect how they will behave if they become lost or displaced. A recovery strategy can be developed based on specific behaviour with the use of the following temperament guidelines:

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# Feline Temperaments



## Curious Cat

This is a gregarious cat that often runs into trouble, they are eager to greet strangers and are rarely afraid of anything. When they become displaced, they will initially hide but then they are very likely to travel.

**Recovery strategy** is to place posters within the immediate area. Approach neighbours in a door-to-door search, ask to search possible hiding places in nearby gardens and other areas close to the point in which the cat escaped. You must not assume the cat will come when you call.



## Care-Less Cat

These cats are typically aloof and don't seem to care about people. They are most likely to stand back and watch if a stranger comes to the house. If they become displaced they will initially hide but will eventually break cover and try to return. Care-less cats can often meow and will possibly even travel.

**Recovery strategy** is to search nearby hiding places. Approach neighbours with a door-to-door search and ask to thoroughly check their gardens. If you do not get results, you could consider the use of a humane baited trap.



## Owner Behaviour

The owners of missing cats can sometimes create problems that will reduce the chances of finding their cat. It is common to develop tunnel vision and focus on unproductive theories. Owners can experience grief avoidance and are quick to give up any search efforts. People around them can discourage the search because they don't understand the significance the cat has on the owner's life. Comments such as "it's just a cat" or "it's probably been injured and gone off to die" can leave owners feeling both helpless and alone.



## Cautious Cat

Cautious cats are a little shy but are generally stable, they do like people but will often hide from strangers who enter their home. Given a little time they will eventually come out to investigate a new person. When displaced they will hide in fear. If not scared off from their hiding place, they will often return to their escape point or meow if the owner calls for them. This behaviour is typically seen when the cat has built up some confidence. Generally this can take between seven to ten days when they become hungry and need food or water. **Recovery strategy** – Search the immediate area. Focus on neighbouring property. Use a humane baited trap.



## Catatonic Cat

Xenophobia is the fear or hate of strange or foreign things. These cats are afraid anything that is unfamiliar to them. They will hide from strangers in their home and will rarely come out until that stranger has left. They do not like to be petted and are very sensitive to changes in their environment. When they are displaced, they will bolt and hide in complete silence. These cats tend to become catatonic and remain in the same hiding place, completely immobilized by fear. They are often mistaken for "feral" if found by a stranger. **Recovery strategy** – The use of a humane baited trap.

One of the biggest problems is that owners simply contact the local shelter when their cat goes missing or post the odd flyer. These techniques are important and should not be overlooked but the more productive techniques such as conducting an aggressive search on neighbouring property or setting humane baited traps should be the primary recovery techniques used. Permission from neighbours should be obtained to enable you to perform a thorough, physical search of their property. A neighbour will not search aggressively and crawl around in tight spaces looking for someone else's cat and you can't expect them to!

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