



Paw Prints

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Columnist

When your indoor cat becomes lost

It's spring and you're opening windows to let in the warm, fresh, fragrant air. And your indoor kitty can't help feel the warmth of the sun and smell the wonderful outdoors sitting near the window; she seems to develop "spring fever" and longs to be outside.

One day your neighbor inadvertently leaves your screen door slightly ajar, and kitty uses that moment to escape. She thought it would be nice to be outside and to lie in the warm grass and watch the birds and wildlife scurry around.

But once outside it can be a really scary and dangerous world for her.

Any lost cat requires immediate attention, and if

you did not actually see Kitty slip outside, be sure to thoroughly search your home. Cats have been known to hide in the most unexpected places.

Once you are sure she is outside somewhere, act fast and don't give up. It's how quickly and carefully you search, and how persistent and resourceful you are that can determine whether or not Kitty will be found.

Never assume your cat will simply come back. Once an indoor cat has gotten out, it is in an entirely foreign environment and easily disoriented.

When an animal is extremely frightened, its instinct is to hide and not make a sound. Even if your kitty is nearby, indoor cats usually don't meow back when their pet parents go out calling for them. Your lost kitty is not choosing to avoid you, it is an instinctive self-defense mechanism.

Unlike dogs, cats — especially indoor cats — are usually not big travelers and are often found within a five-block radius of their home.

It's time to play pet detective. Your cat's personality may help you find her.

According to pet detective and author Kat Albrecht, founder of Missing Pet Partnership in Clovis, California, all cats fall into one of four types of cat

personalities.

The Curious or Clown Cat with a very friendly and outgoing personality will run to the door to greet a stranger, is generally less afraid and may get into trouble when out on her own. She will hide at first and then most likely begin to travel. This is the cat that can get out of a five-block radius of home quite quickly.

The Care-less Cat is aloof and doesn't care much for people. When a stranger is present, she tends to stand back and watch. When she is displaced, this cat is likely to hide but eventually will break cover, attempt to go back home, and meow to be let in.

The Cautious Cat likes people but is shy and will dart away to hide if a stranger comes to the door. Sometimes she'll even peek around the corner and slowly come out to investigate. When she is out of her normal environment she will immediately hide in fear.

The Catatonic or Fearful Cat has a fear of anything strange or foreign. This fearful cat will hide when a stranger comes into her home and will not come out until well after the company has left. When this cat becomes lost outside she will bolt and hide in silence, remaining in the same hiding place, immobilized by fear. If someone other than her pet parent finds

her, she could be mistaken as being a feral, spitting and hissing out of fright.

When you're certain your cat is missing and have thoroughly searched around your home it's time to request help from your neighbors. They may have seen or even taken in your cat. Ask permission to search on their property and ask everyone you meet if they've seen your cat.

Call all the animal shelters and veterinarian hospitals in your area and provide them with a good description of your missing cat.

Post flyers and offer a reward, and include photos with specific cross streets where she was last seen.

Place an ad in your local newspaper and other local sources. Call *The Nugget* with lost-and-found pet information. They will put the information in the "Pet Place" print version and online version of the newspaper. They can also place the info and photo on *The Nugget's* and Furry Friends Foundation's Facebook pages.

The best time to look for your lost cat is when it's dark. She is most likely to come out of hiding between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. She will feel less threatened at night. Use a bright flashlight and use broad sweeps to look for your cats reflective eyes, under cars, across yards, in driveways, by

bushes, etc.

Try putting your cat's favorite bed/blanket (something that is covered with her scent) outside near her home area. Even her litter box would be beneficial, and the familiar scent can help your kitty find her way back home.

Dr. Nicholas Dodman, animal behavior clinic director at Tufts University, points out that there may be a new aspect to outdoors that's attracted your kitty's attention. It may be birds that have built a nest close by or maybe your feline sees a new cat in the neighborhood right outside the window.

Whatever awoke your cat's interest, there are some things to do to make her environment inside more appealing again.

Adding another cat to the family may be a solution if she is by herself. One cat alone can get bored more easily than two cats keeping each other company.

Try adding some new places your kitty can climb, such as a cat tree or a cat condo. Accentuate her outdoor view by having a window perch on every sill. Toys, especially food puzzles, can work well to keep her occupied.

Teaching your cat to walk on a leash is a great idea. This way she can go outdoors, chaperoned by you.

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