

# Should I rescue this cat?

How can you tell the difference between a neighbor's curious outdoor cat and a cat that needs to be rescued?

Many families choose to let their feline companions live indoors with them; however, there are circumstances where owned cats may be suitable living outside (for example, if they have litterbox issues, are high arousal, or are working "Career" cats). Some cats may also be allowed supervised or restricted outdoor time to stretch and get fresh air. This may cause confusion for neighbors about whether the cat they see roaming the neighborhood is lost and need to be rescued – or if it is an owned outdoor cat.

Even with good intentions, removing a cat from the environment and bringing him to the shelter may inadvertently deprive the cat of his home and actually cause him to become lost. Although the likelihood of finding a lost cat is high, only 2% of families find their missing companion at a shelter.

## How can I tell if a cat is lost or an outdoor cat?

#### **CHECK HIS APPEARANCE**

- Is his coat in good condition?
- Is he clean?
- Is he at a healthy weight?
- Is his tail up?
- Are his ears forward?
- Is his ear tipped?

A healthy, relaxed-looking appearance may signal that the cat has a home and is not distressed. If you think this may be the case, follow the steps below before bringing him to a shelter.

A tipped ear indicates the cat is feral and has been altered through a TNR (trap-neuter-release) program. Do not attempt to trap a feral cat — this will do the cat more harm than good.

### **CHECK HIS BEHAVIOR**

- Is he making eye contact?
- Is he rolling around, playing, strolling, or resting in the open?
- Is he making vocalizations and do they sound relaxed?
- Is he relaxed around other cats in the area?

Like his appearance, if he is exhibiting any of the behavior above it may indicate that he has a home and is not distressed. If you think this may be the case, follow the steps below before bringing him to the shelter.

### **CHECK HIS SURROUNDINGS**

- Does he have a collar?
- Do you see any "lost cat" posters in the area?
- Have you checked with neighbors?
- Are there other cats or kittens nearby?

Cats may wander a few streets down, so make sure to check with everyone in the area. Have you or any of your neighbors heard of any missing cats?

If you see newborn kittens (eyes and ears closed), do not move them - the mother may be close by looking for food. Keep an eye on them and only bring them in after you have used your best judgement to determine that they are not feral.

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A nation-wide campaign to keep orange collars on inside-only cats may also provide a clue. If you notice the cat has an orange collar, it may indicate that the cat is a lost indoor-only cat. If the cat appears to be healthy and/or is not in distress, please take some time to investigate before bringing him to a shelter by following the steps below.

#### I think this cat is lost. What do I do?

If the cat is in obvious distress or is sick or injured, bring him to a shelter. If the cat appears healthy and relaxed, you have investigated the cat thoroughly, and you have determined he may be lost, get the word out!

- Create flyers to post throughout your community. Make sure that the words "FOUND CAT" are large
  at the top. Use bright colored paper and current photos of the cat that are eye-catching. Post the
  flyers in visible areas of the neighborhood where people will see it, and include your contact
  information on the flyer.
- Check community message boards or forums. Some neighborhood watch email lists will also post the found cat's photo and information.
- Check Nextdoor.com and Craigslist for any postings about missing cats in your area that match the description. Post the found cat on these websites with your contact information.
- Some neighborhood groups and local rescue groups will also post the found cat on social media. Spread the word through social media platforms as much as you can and encourage others to share the posts as well.
- Don't forget to check with neighbors and ask them to spread the word!
- Take the cat to a nearby veterinarian to check for a microchip.

If these efforts prove unsuccessful, contact your local animal shelter.

For further assistance identifying an outdoor cat, please call our behavior helpline at (916) 782-7722 ext. 258 or (530) 885-7387 or email <a href="mailto:behavior@placerspca.org">behavior@placerspca.org</a>.

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