

It's important to keep a record of all sightings and track a dog's travels on a map until the search is over.

Go to a gas station, drug or office supply store and buy a **street map** (or atlas) that identifies all roads in the town where the dog was lost. The map should include all bordering communities, as dogs often cross city/town limits. Street maps identify major points of interest and help you find a sighting area's exact location without delay. Use a highlighter pen to mark the spots where signs got posted and the streets where fliers have been distributed. Mark the location of every sighting using a pencil so you can make corrections if it turns out to be a false alarm.

Change the greeting on any phone (regular/land line or cellular) listed as a contact number on your flier.

You must encourage callers to stay on the line - some people hang up as soon as they hear a recorded message. A sample greeting: "Hello, if you're calling about our lost dog (name or not), we need the day, time, street, and nearest cross street *or* the exact location you saw (him or her). We'd appreciate it if you'd leave your name and number in case we have a question. Thank you for calling - please wait for the tone to leave your message."

A critical piece of information can be lost when a sighting call ends up as a recorded voice message.

List *at least* two phone numbers on all notices to help callers reach a "live" person who can ask them questions. A cell phone that will be answered 24 hours a day is ideal - keep the battery (and a spare) charged at all times. Don't tie up a contact line for an extended time unless you have call waiting or another phone line remains open. Prepare a short list of questions and keep a pen and paper handy - a call can come in when you least expect it. Sometimes you're so grateful and excited to receive a sighting call that you forget to ask things you need to know. **Take detailed notes - there will come a time when you have to remember exactly what a caller said to you.**

It's easy for two people to see the same dog but give entirely different descriptions.

One person will look at a dog's picture and say "white with black patches" while the other says "black and white." You'll get calls on dogs that are white with black spots, white with black patches, and all black with a little white.

Your lost dog can be seen at dawn, mid-day, dusk or late at night - just now, last night, or two weeks ago.

It's *not* easy for most people to remember small details about an unfamiliar dog. Collars might not be seen, especially at night. Colors can get distorted in low light conditions or be hard to distinguish from a distance. A leash may or may not be seen, depending on its color, the amount of daylight, and the angle of viewing. Ask people to estimate the size and weight of the dog they saw and compare it to a breed they're familiar with. How high was its head or back in relation to the knees or waist of an adult of "average" height? Let everyone tell you exactly what they saw *before* you start describing your dog in great detail. Sometimes people won't remember anything special about the dog they saw, and not know what direction it came from or in what direction it headed. Once in a while you can jog their memory a bit by mentioning distinctive and obvious features such as pointy ears, or an extremely curly white tipped tail, or by briefly talking about your dog's quirky habits or personality.

Keep an open mind and never dismiss a sighting because the description isn't a perfect match.

You can convince yourself and a caller that they did OR didn't see your dog *when just the opposite is true*. Make sure every caller has a picture flier or gets to see pictures of your dog to help confirm their sighting. Write down everything, thank the caller, and then go to the sighting location and try to find the dog they saw.

When you get a sighting, go to the area immediately or as soon possible. Bring food, pen and paper, and fliers. Tape a "Lost Dog" sign to outside of your vehicle to alert residents that your dog is in their neighborhood. Get out of the car to see if anyone else saw your dog recently - residents *usually* know all the local, loose dogs. The dog could have been one that looks like yours, or a "stray." The stray could be lost and needs to be reported. If a resident says they've seen the "new" dog around for awhile, ask HOW long? Has *your* dog been lost that long? Don't forget you need bait in your pocket in case you have to lure it to you. Lost dogs don't normally rush out of hiding, but some have watched from a distance or discreetly followed a person who talks to it and leaves it food. Assume your dog can hear you and talk to it - a lost dog needs to hear its name, especially from its favorite human. Slowly walk paths your dog was seen on and keep talking to it. Stop, sit, and give the dog a chance to watch you. Most searchers drive too much and walk too fast. Don't leave food all over the place - pick a few spots where your dog can stop and eat, be safe and yet have a good chance of being seen by you or the residents in the area.

A lady is sure your dog was in her yard, and though she couldn't see the color of the collar, the ID tags were noisy. If your dog wasn't wearing a collar (thus no tags) then it's probably not your dog - but stop to think for a minute. If your dog didn't have a collar, but chances are *very slim* there's a look-a-like in the immediate area of previous sightings, DO make sure someone didn't pick up your dog (for whatever reason) and put a collar and tags on it.

Dogs can travel a great distance in a short amount of time by taking routes not accessible to searchers.

They find the most convenient routes that provide a quick, direct access to places for shelter, food, and water. Cutting through fields or power line paths can lead to multiple sightings at separate locations at the same time. Use the map to figure out if a dog uses shortcuts to cover a lot of ground, making those multiple sightings valid. Lost dogs can look for food or shelter at night *or* at the crack of dawn, reducing the odds that someone sees them. Dogs can't afford to waste energy and stay close to a reliable source of food (cat food outside, bird seed, rubbish), water (stream, lake, or pond) and shelter (underneath porch decks, inside open barns, under a thick evergreen tree). They make the most of limited resources and will usually settle down in an area if overall conditions are favorable. A lost dog is constantly making decisions as to what's acceptable and what's not, then it stays put or moves on. A dog can return to previously found shelters or places for food if it doesn't find "greener pastures" elsewhere.

Don't be discouraged by the infrequency or lack of sightings - there are never enough until a dog is caught.

Unfortunately, many lost dog searchers go for days or weeks without a sighting - but there's always a reason. Did you skip too many houses delivering fliers? Did you visit the quiet house on the end of the street or the farm with all the open barns? Is your black Lab running around with another one and the residents don't realize they're seeing two different dogs - one at a time? Many dogs are assumed to be dead when they're not. Even if they are, you don't always find a body, but without a body there's no proof. If the dog was out alone in an unfenced area, go look for its collar, bits of hair, remains, or other signs that indicate your pet *did* cross paths with a predator.

Don't give up too soon - a dog can be in an area, adept at hiding, and not be seen for weeks or longer.

Lack of sightings doesn't necessarily mean a dog is dead or that it's left the area. Dogs are intelligent and many won't venture out of hiding until human activity has ceased and it's really quiet. People on vacation, at work or sleeping won't see your dog coming out from under their deck. If there's no sightings, keep looking for leads by talking with people, house to house, street by street, always starting from the point where the dog bolted from and working your way outbound. Residents will make a special effort to be more observant after talking with a searcher and when they see that someone is actively looking for the dog. If you "disappear" for too long, most people think you've caught your dog or have given up. Make sure a town's Animal Control Officer is advised well in advance that your dog is close to crossing into their jurisdiction. Keep those actively involved up to date on all sightings. Don't depend entirely on animal control/humane officers or rescues to find and catch your dog unless you have to. You can't expect them to devote all their time looking for your dog and ignore their other work. Animal control and Humane officers can be of immense help due to their knowledge and professional experience. They have (or can usually find) access to a variety of equipment for catching dogs, including such things as: humane cage traps, nets, net guns (shoots out a big net) or tranquilizer dart guns with or without a tracking device. Note – A tranquilizer gun is not a "simple" way to catch a dog and is commonly used as a last resort (if at all).

If you *do* see your dog, remain calm and immediately assume a non-threatening posture by *slowly* lowering yourself to the ground, below his/her eye level. Talk in soft, reassuring tones, using familiar phrases. Try luring the dog to you by offering food tidbits with very slow, gentle motions. Your dog will slowly and eventually come right up to you IF it thinks you can be trusted. **Patience and food can buy a lot of trust from a hungry lost dog.**

See "SPOT THE DOG! – NOW WHAT?" document