

Dog Detectives: Sniffing out Lost Pets!



Cade working with Karin TarQwyn on a case.
Photos courtesy of Karin TarQwyn

On a rare warm Oklahoma winter day, Pat Pearce had decided to let her pack of dogs out of the house to roam in the yard for a bit. As she left the house that morning, she was certain that all gates were securely closed. But upon her return, the gate had been opened and two dogs had gone missing: French Bulldogs Hunter and Robin.

Several months would pass before Karin TarQwyn, a local private pet investigator, and her pack of search and rescue dogs were asked to assist in the search. Within moments of picking up the missing dogs' scents, TarQwyn's search dog located the missing dogs' trail, and Hunter and Robin were eventually returned home.

When your dog goes missing, the last thought on your mind is to send another dog out on its trail. But with organizations such as the Maryland-based [Dogs Finding Dogs](#) and Washington's [Missing Pet Partnership](#) the dog-finding-dog hunt is on!

Pet search services offer owners a means of locating missing pets in a timely and methodical manner. Through a variety of tactics, including poster/flyer distribution and lost pet behavior profiling, these search organizations assist owners in retrieving missing pets in a more efficient way. These services also include teams of dogs that with the guidance of a trainer are sent out on the scent of the missing pet in the hopes of finding them quicker.

“When we take a case on, we counsel the family from the start,” said Anne Wills, Executive Director and founder of Dogs Finding Dogs. “We tell them the alerts that can be done, the methods of laying scent trails for their missing pets, how to do flyers, how to post on the websites, what shelters to call and more.”



Dodger and Karin TarQwyn on the scent! Photos courtesy of Karin TarQwyn

Karin TarQwyn, a private investigator specializing in missing pets, has been rescuing lost pets since 2004. Originally training search and rescue dogs in search of missing children, TarQwyn decided to focus her efforts on missing pets when her very own dog went missing for four months. Once he was found, she made the permanent switch to specializing in missing pets and has assisted in the rescue of many more dogs since.

In addition to her personal search and rescue efforts, TarQwyn also helps other eager “dog detectives” learn the process of searching for missing pets. Through her **Pet Detective University**, she educates students on proper training and effective searching procedures.

“People are entering the field with poor intentions and/or inexperience and lack of knowledge. These hobbyists and in some cases outright scammers, create undue stress for pet owners with a missing pet,” said TarQwyn of her efforts to professionalize the field. “Millions of pets go missing each year in the U.S, and of these, over 25 percent are considered family members. The need and requests for committed and knowledgeable professionals in this field is staggering.”

If you are unable to access a pet search service in your area, Karin TarQwyn offers the following tips to help find your pet in a timely manner:

1. Be consistent in your strategy and do not go off on unlikely tangents. If grief or anxiety occurs, stop and experience the moment but then pick up and get back to your search. Always remember your dog is out there somewhere; we only need the leads, clues and sightings to find out where.
2. Perform only those actions and activities that are specific to the scenario your missing dog is most likely experiencing.
3. Encourage help from people who are supportive in your efforts. This is not the time to enlist help from naysayers and/or people who do not understand your relationship or love for your dog.

4. For most missing pet scenarios, it is a volume game. In my experience, 90 percent of all missing pets are found due to other people's eyes and ears. The more people that know your pet is missing the higher the likelihood of recovery. This is no different than a missing person investigation except there is no support or help from outside agencies and community groups.

5. In most cases, hiring a professional will not only increase the likelihood of finding the missing dog but will make the recovery time shorter. Once a dog has been missing for 5 days or longer, the advice of a professional may be the only chance of finding the dog.

And as always, remember to stay calm and assertive.

Also remember that proper identification helps ensure that your dog can make its way home in the case of theft, loss, or other emergency situations. Using more than one method of identification can increase your dog's chances of being returned.

Microchips are an effective way to ensure proper identification of your pet. Microchips are inserted under the skin between the shoulder blades and can then be read with the proper scanner. The procedure is safe and relatively inexpensive, running between \$20 and \$60. Microchips must be registered with your current contact information, and this registration should be updated if you move. Unlike tattoos, it is hard to remove or alter a microchip.