One thing we know a lot about at our shelter is lost pets. On any given day we take 5-10 lost & found reports about loved pets. We work diligently checking the pets in our shelter, Facebook Pet pages, email notices, etc. There has been a disturbing trend lately that we want to alert pet owners to. While following up on missing pets lately we have been told more than a few times of pets being recovered from quite far distances from where the pet was lost. Now we don't mean two roads over, we mean distances of 10, 20, 30 miles and in neighboring counties. In a few instances the pet owner found that their pet had been taken to another county where the person was trying to sell it. These thieves are trying to quickly sell pets, often for very little money but at great heartache to the pet's true owner. One owner found and purchased their own pet back!

Of course the first step any pet owner should take is to keep your pet as safe as possible. Free roaming dogs are easy for anyone to pick up and dogs on chains are also extremely easy to take since the pet cannot get away from someone intent on taking them. While it is a sad statement of our times, our advice is to lock your yard gates when you are gone to make it harder for someone to access your pet and take it from your yard.

If the worse happens and your pet goes missing, timing is everything. The faster you can get notices out that your pet is missing the greater the likelihood your pet will be safely returned. Facebook has become a tremendous tool for posting and reuniting lost pets so please use it. If you live in Elmore County we advise posting your lost pet to "Lost & Found Pets in Elmore County" & "Lost and Found Pets Montgomery, Alabama" & "Lost & Found Pets of Prattville, Alabama" at a minimum. Other Facebook pages to use are "Elmore County Pets" & "Lost and Found Pets in Central Alabama" and so many more. Don't forget to post to your own page as well. If you feel certain your pet was stolen from your property, also file a report with your supporting law enforcement! And we cannot stress this enough – photos, photos, photos! Nothing will help get your pet reunited quicker than having a few decent photos of your pet. Descriptions can be interpreted greatly but a photo gets everyone focused on looking for the same pet! Keep at least one good photo of your pet in your smart phone or in your Facebook photo album where you can access it readily. If you are vacationing and the pet sitter calls that your pet is missing, you will then be able to post your pet in a matter of minutes instead of waiting hours or days until you return home.

Alert area shelters if your pet is missing via phone or email (send photos with emails) and check with them every couple of days. Physically go and check at shelters as well as much as possible. If your pet is microchipped notify the chip company that your pet is missing. This also helps put them on alert if anyone tries to change the registration of your pet's chip! Again – perhaps put your pet's microchip number in your smart phone for quick reference and add the chip company phone number to your phone list.

Post large signs in high traffic areas about your lost pet making sure they can be read by people IN their car. No one is going to stop and get out of their car to read small print, so keep it simple – Lost Pet, photo or short description, phone number!

On the flip – if you have found a pet you can also do much of the above but please also make sure to take that pet to a veterinarian or shelter to be scanned for a microchip. Of course if you find a pet with an ID tag you can call the owner directly, if it has a rabies tag then please call the Veterinarian on the tag. Many Vets will then take your contact information and call the owner themselves for privacy and protection of all involved.

Nothing is more heart wrenching than losing a beloved pet and also more heartwarming than reuniting a pet with its frantic owner. Please keep your pets safe!