

Finding Your Lost Border Terrier

...adapted from an article written by Mike McCann for the Greyhound Amber Alert Forum and reprinted here with permission.

He's missing! He slipped his collar, or ran out of the open gate; He wiggled through that weak spot in the fence or dug underneath in search of varmints; you dropped the leash or he took off after a squirrel when you had him off leash and this time he didn't come back. How he was lost doesn't really matter now: What matters are the steps you have to take to get him back. He's out there and he's depending on you to find him. He's lost and can't find his way home. It's been a couple of hours now: You've scoured the neighborhood, and you are hoping to see him in every yard and around every corner. But, you are beginning to realize that you can't find him. Here's what you have to do:

Change your mindset: This is most important and most difficult step. You have to stop checking every street and back yard yourself, and start recruiting an army to do it for you. Most dogs are found within a mile or two of where they were lost, but a two mile radius is nearly 13 square miles, an impossible area to search adequately alone. You have to stop looking for your dog, and start looking for people. Everything that follows depends on it. With every hour that goes by, your chances of finding your dog, on your own, diminish. You now have to find someone who has seen your dog. You need a sighting and in order to get a sighting, you need help! Ask everyone you know including your friends, co-workers, dog clubs and son's Cub Scout pack to help you. If you are in a rural area, contact hunters and ATV groups. Don't wait until tomorrow, do it now.

Get the word out: Whether you have help or not, you've got to get the word out about your lost dog. You and your volunteers are going to search yes, but while you're searching, you're going to post flyers on every available telephone pole and Community bulletin board, in every super market, drug store, school, church, police stations, vets' office, pet store, grooming parlour, hair salon, library, service station, laundromat, video store or any other public place or location, and at every intersection (check that it is legal to hang signs on light poles in your neighbourhood) surrounding the area and don't forget to put one in the back window of your car and those of volunteers. Ninety percent of lost dogs who are found are found because someone saw a flyer. The initial flyers don't have to be fancy, but get them printed on the brightest, most fluorescent paper available at least 8-1/2 x 11 inches.

Most people don't know a Border from a Cairn or a blue from a black, but do have an idea of what a "terrier" is. The purpose of these flyers is to be seen at a distance so a photo of your dog is not a necessity but a line drawing will work as an attention grabber.

A template you can download: add your own phone number to and use to quickly print some flyers can be found here. <http://www.cbtwelfare.org/lost-template-1.doc>

If your BT was recently clipped or stripped, you might prefer this one <http://www.cbtwelfare.org/lost-template-2.doc>

100 of the above is a good start, but you will need more flyers.

As soon as you have a photo, you can go with more specific posters. Templates into which you can insert the appropriate info and a photo can be found at the following links:

11 x 17 poster suitable for major intersections, worth having them plasticized.

<http://www.cbtwelfare.org/Big-flyer.docx>

8-1/2 x 11 poster suitable for faxing to business or posting where people walk. Should be inserted into plastic sleeves (open side down and sealed with tape) <http://www.cbtwelfare.org/one-page.docx>

300 is a good number to start with. The area should be so saturated with flyers that you can't turn around without seeing one. Don't expand your search area until you've totally covered the area where he was last seen.

4 to page cards, ideal for door to door, handing out to delivery men, postal workers, etc. (100 sheets will give you 400 cards making them very economical). <http://www.cbtwelfare.org/4-to-page.docx>

NOTE: All of the above are one-page flyers but you may need to adjust your default margins or the size of the typeface to insert your information. If you need assistance, contact info@cbtwelfare.org

The smaller flyer or four to a page cards for physically handing out and faxing include more information and include an appropriate photograph. This flyer should also encourage people to check their outbuildings, under decks, etc, especially in very hot or cold weather. Knock on doors and talk to everyone you see; the mail person, the UPS driver, the local landscaper, pizza delivery boys, the person responsible for taking the trash out at local restaurants. Any of these people may see your dog, and if they do, now they won't just think it's some dog on his way home, they'll know he's lost. Give everyone you talk to a flyer. Don't assume your Border Terrier will go up to the first person he sees, but in the event that he does end up in someone's home, plastering the area with flyers will reduce the possibility of his finders deciding he is unwanted and in need of a new home... theirs!

- Schools are a great resource for search help. Ask the principal to make announcements about the lost dog and leave flyers to pass out and post on bulletin boards. Kids see everything in the neighborhood but will ignore dogs running around unless asked to look. If you hand one kid a flyer, five more will have seen it by the end of the day. Don't ignore the little kids either. They tell their folks everything.
- Call every veterinarian's office, animal control officer and police department within two or three miles from where he was last seen. In rural areas, expand your calling to every nearby town. Follow up with a flyer or several. Faxing them will save you some time but it is important that they see you, rather than just a piece of paper. If you show people how concerned you are they'll want to help you. Don't just call them once; call them every few days and in the case of the police, during every shift, to make sure everyone knows about your dog. If they don't seem interested in helping, don't become angry, just be firm and persistent.
- Run newspaper ads in the local papers, and while you're at it, talk to a reporter and see if she'll run a local interest story on your lost Border Terrier. Local cable access stations often will run your lost dog ad for free and local radio stations and TV stations will often run the story on a slow news night
- Check your local animal shelters every few days, in person. It is amazing how many folks who work in these places don't know dog breeds. Your Border Terrier could be hanging out at a local shelter, up for adoption, because they think he's a mix or a heaven's knows what.
- Get in touch with your local Department of Public Works, or Highway Department. Sadly, they often will pick up an animal's body from the road, and if there is no identification, the owner will never know. Collars may fall off when a dog is loose or struck by a car.

Tools you'll need: Print some maps of your area to give to the volunteers. Make notations of areas that have been well posted. Set up grids and utilize them to cover all the locations in your search area. Send teams to each grid area. Track sightings on an interactive Google Map. Get some heavy duty staple guns and use those for putting up your flyers on telephone poles and clear packing tape for other hard surfaces (Don't use duct tape; it looks messy and some localities bristle at having these flyers posted; you want the locals helping you, not trying to shut your search down). Plastic sleeves will help protect your posted flyers in inclement weather. If available, try to keep in touch with your teams with cell phones or walkie-talkie so that when you get a sighting, you can have them go immediately to the location.

Make sure that there is always someone available at the phone number you posted. You don't want people to call with a sighting, then hang up because they got a message service.

Don't assume anything: Don't assume your dog has been picked up, it's the trap that everyone seems to fall into: "No sighting, someone must have picked up my dog!" A person can walk right by a grizzle and tan Border Terrier lying in a pile of leaves and never even see him.

Sightings: Don't assume that the call you got about a dog five miles away is yours. Follow it up, yes, but when you start getting calls about dogs, ask questions: What color was the dog you saw? How big? Which way was it heading? What time and on what day did you see him? Have you ever seen him before? You don't want to be running out of your search area just to find that someone called you about a beagle they saw running through the yard. There is NOTHING distinctive about Border Terrier in the eyes of "Joe Public". One small rough coated terrier looks like another. This may result in a high percentage of false sightings even when people are shown photos of the actual dog. This is frustrating but don't give up. Flyer the area of any plausible sightings but do not abandon the locale around earlier confirmed sightings. These false leads are actually a positive sign, they mean your efforts are working; people are looking out for your dog. It's just that they don't know the difference between a Border Terrier and a Jack Russell terrorist.

Don't lose hope: A few days or a week of searching can be discouraging. A lack of sightings, or no word at all can be tough on a positive attitude. Just remember, your BT is still out there, and someone has seen him. All you have to do, is to find that person. It's only natural to start thinking the worst. But, as non-street savvy as Border Terriers are, they are survivors. Keep looking. Don't give up, your BT is counting on you.

A NOTE ABOUT REWARDS: Lost dogs, especially ones who have been spooked, or ones who have been out for some time may be extremely difficult to catch. Your goal should be to encourage people who see the dog to call you with the sighting. Rewards often work against getting sightings. What happens is that you will increase the numbers of people looking for the dog yes, but the new people tend to be bounty hunters; teenagers, or "cowboys", who just think of the money, not the safety of the animal. Often, when they see the dog, the first thing they do is chase, and sometimes they chase the dog right out of the safety of the territory the dog has felt comfortable in. These people rarely call in sightings, because they want to cash in. If someone does happen to catch the dog, and asks for a reward, you can still pay it, but we suggest you don't ask for trouble by offering money in advance. Would you rather have a hundred sympathetic animal lovers helping you look for your dog, or a couple of hundred clueless bounty hunters trying to cash in on him? If you do offer a reward, be sure to add "PLEASE, DO NOT CHASE HIM (or HER)" on your detailed flyer. In fact it is always a good idea to include this on the flyer.

Finding him may only be the First Step

Locating a lost Border Terrier can be difficult: you may be surprised to learn that occasionally, catching a loose Border Terrier can be even more difficult. We tend to think of our dogs as being friendly and outgoing, ready to approach any stranger, but when a dog finds itself in an unfamiliar situation and unfamiliar surroundings it may go into survival mode in a matter of hours becoming distrustful of everything and everyone. *[I know of two such cases involving ordinarily friendly Border Terriers, one in a rural area and one in an urban area - within a couple of hours of getting loose the dogs were spotted, but even when their owners came on the scene it was several agonizing hours before they were safely in hand - Pam]*

Such a dog may hang around the neighborhood, and sightings come in about him every day, almost always in the same general area. People hoping to catch him, chase him, and of course, he runs. As every day goes by he becomes more spooked. Soon, the sightings stop as the dog moves off in search of another safe zone.

Far better to set up a feeding and watering station. It should be near where the dog has been sighted. He's going to be looking for food, and if he finds a source, he'll keep coming back to it. To help him find it, put some stinky cat food in his bowl. Be consistent, dogs are creatures of habit, and if you are consistent, he'll keep coming back every day to the same place at the same time

Two Methods of Capture

Finesse Capture : If you are trying to capture a dog that has become shy and spooked and don't have access to a live trap, a finesse capture may be your only option. Things to try are:

- When you or your volunteers see the dog, do not chase or follow him, make him think you have no interest in him. Turn away, don't make eye contact, sit down on the ground, and if you have another dog with you, give some treats to him: there is nothing that will make a hungry dog more curious, than watching another dog eat.
- If he approaches you, stay on the ground, avoid eye contact and toss treats in his direction; gain his trust through his food motivation. Lick your lips, and yawn, a lot. These are "Calming Signals." (The book "Calming Signals by Turid Rugass is a good primer on the use of non threatening signals for stressed dogs.) Have a looped leash handy in case he approaches close enough.
- If he won't approach anyone, and is fond of his crate, bring the crate to the location and set it up. Put his food in the crate and feed him there. Get him used to eating like he did at home.
- If he likes riding in the car, leave the car door open overnight: you may have a surprise waiting for you in the morning.
- Leave his own bedding in places where he's been sighted, near a bowl of food. He may connect the bedding and food with home, and stay close to the area.
- If possible, set up his feeding station in a fenced area with a gate. Closing a gate behind a dog is a lot easier than trying to get him to come to you.

Live Trap Capture : Some animal control officers and SPCA chapters have animal traps large enough for a dog. Make sure that it is a good size (larger than the size of crate you would use). A small trap will tend to trip prematurely, the door falling on the dog's back, allowing escape. Once a dog has a trap trip like this, it will be nearly impossible to encourage the dog to enter any trap again.

- Set the trap up in the area you have been feeding the dog. Once set up, feed the dog only in the trap. If the dog refuses to enter at first, don't take the food out of the trap. You want to train him to eat in the trap, he'll want to train you to take the food out of it.
- Most of these cage type traps have wire floors, so when setting the trap, put some sort of cushioning on the floor. A blanket, or straw will work well.
- It's not uncommon to catch other critters in these traps first. Just release them and hope for better luck tomorrow. In cold or hot weather, the trap will need to be monitored closely but discretely.

Staying the Course : Don't give up. If no sightings come in, or they stop after a while, then widen your search.

Every day we read of dogs being brought safely home after days, weeks and even months, on the lam.

And don't forget - remove the flyers at the end of the search. It is the respectful thing to do. It will make it easier on the next unfortunate person who needs to post about a lost child, adult or pet.

Here's hoping that this article never has to come off your shelf or out of your printer

Pam Dyer with sincere thanks and appreciation to Mike McCann