

Is It Really a Stray Cat?

Stray cats differ from [feral cats](#) in that a stray has clearly been someone's pet and is not overly afraid to approach humans. Many people still allow their pets to roam outdoors, in spite of the dangers they face from speeding cars and rabid raccoons. If you have a cat coming around to your house begging handouts, he may have a perfectly adequate home to go to, and just enjoys making the rounds. You may discover your neighbors are also feeding the same supposed stray. If the begging cat looks well-fed and well-groomed, he's probably not a stray at all, but simply an opportunist.

On the other hand, a stray cat with sunken hips and ribs showing is in dire need of [food](#) and shelter. This could be a cat who has gotten lost from his family (and cats do get lost, especially if his people have recently moved), or has actually been abandoned.

It is unfortunate but true that many people will move away and leave their cat behind to fend for himself, on the premise that he can always find a good home, or feed himself. In truth, cats left behind when their owners move are unprepared to survive on their own and only have a rudimentary understanding of hunting. They survive by going through garbage and begging from kind strangers.

What to Do With a Stray

If you have stray cats in your neighborhood that you would like to help and these cats are very thin, start by setting out food for them. If they are wary of your approach, some may have been ill-treated. Allow them time to get used to your distant presence, and over time, move in a little closer. Soft words and food ought to win most of them over, and maybe give you a chance to take a few to your local animal shelter.

You may want to bring a particular stray into your home, especially in winter, while you search for his people. If you do, keep him separate from your family cats until he has been examined by a vet and tested for [infectious diseases](#). It would be heart-breaking if your act of kindness cost you the health or lives of your own pets.

To locate the stray's owners, try these:

- Post a notice with your phone number in your local newspaper, such as "Found stray orange [Tabby cat](#) with white paws and bib on February 18. Weighs approximately ten pounds".

- Post signs on mailboxes around your neighborhood, and ask your neighbors if someone has moved recently.
- Post notice at your local veterinary office.

Since many people who have lost pets will notify their vet and/or post notices on the vets' bulletin boards, phone around to all your area vets' offices. Use Yahoo maps to find all the vets within a few miles radius of where you found the cat.

What Happens If You Can't Find the Owner?

If you can't find the owners of the stray, or you find out that he has been abandoned by moving neighbors, your next decision is what to do with the cat?

If you want to keep him, congratulations, you now have a new cat. Take him to your vet's and make sure he has all his [shots](#) and has been [neutered](#).

If you would love to keep him but already have too many pets, or your existing pets veto his inclusion in your family, find a shelter that places pets for adoption. Many shelters are 'no-kill' establishments that do not euthanize pets after a period without finding a home. Since grown cats are harder to place than kittens, please find a no-kill shelter. These organizations will often place adoptable pets in animal clinics and vets' offices where they can be seen and adopted by pet owners.

Don't Be Afraid to Get Involved

Looking after stray cats can be a wonderful experience and is the way many people acquire their heart's best pet. Who knows, maybe there's a stray in your future?