

How Do You Know If It's A Stray Cat?

Did you know that the 'stray' cat that often travels through your garden, or turns up at your house daily for a bite to eat or even has kittens in your yard often has a family of their own?

Many of the 'stray' cats that come into our care have clearly lived in a home before and the owners will soon be missing them terribly. Without identification, less than 1% are reclaimed often because they have been brought many km from their home to AWL.

Cats will always come back to a reliable source of food so kind animal lovers believing a cat to be a 'stray' and feeding it are actually reinforcing those roaming behaviours. We know of many cases of cats that have up to 5 homes that they visit each day to get a feed (and ending up very chubby!) with only the true owner knowing that the cat is indeed a much-loved member of their family.

Common signs that a cat is just passing through and has a home to return to are:

- The cat confidently roams around in the middle of the day
- The cat appears clean and healthy
- The cat does not search for food
- The cat is wearing a collar

Another sign that a cat is owned or has been owned at some point are a desexing tattoo and/or a microchipping tattoo.



Desexing Tattoo

If a cat has been desexed it may have a tattoo on the inside of its left ear. The tattoo looks like this.



Microchipping Tattoo

In South Australia if an animal is microchipped it may have a tattoo on the inside of its right ear. The tattoo looks like this.

Please note that not all animals that have been desexed or microchipped have a tattoo so if there are no tattoos the cat could still be microchipped and desexed.

What are the first steps to finding out if this cat is really a stray

- Ask the neighbours if their cat is missing or if they recognise the cat
- Put up posters around your neighbourhood asking if anyone knows the cat and where he/she might live
- Check lost and found groups for your area

If you don't have any luck with locating an owner with the above methods, AWL advises that you 'ask' if the cat has an owner by placing a paper collar on the cat as detailed on our website awl.org.au

What To Do If You Find A Stray Cat

Often cats seem to be strays but actually have a home. Due to their nature they do tend to roam and can appear to be lost. A cat that is hanging around looking for food, or trying to get into your house may have a home not far away, so you need to be sure they are genuinely homeless before assuming they are stray and either taking it to a rehoming centre, or deciding to take it in yourself.

Can I keep a stray cat?

If you have exhausted all avenues to find the owner and it certainly is a stray the yes you can look to become the owner. The first step is to take them to a vet clinic to check for a microchip. If the cat is not owned and you want to take responsibility for vaccinating, desexing and caring for the cat, you can do so.

Sick and injured cats

If the cat is injured or unwell and you are able to place them into a cat carrier, please take them to:

- Animal Welfare League
- RSPCA South Australia
- A vet clinic

If the cat is injured or unwell, and you are unable to handle it, please call your council for assistance.

Healthy Stray Cats

If the cat appears healthy, please contact your council for the next steps. Your council may direct you to contact AWL or RSPCA.

Please do not trap or catch the cat without speaking to your council and AWL first.

I've found a litter of kittens; What should I do?

If you find kittens on their own, please keep a good distance to avoid disturbing them and possibly scaring mum into not returning. It's not unusual for mum to leave her kittens when she goes off to find food. Kittens have a much better chance if they stay with their mum, so it's very important to give enough time to see if mum returns before assuming they're orphaned.

If the kittens appear to be in danger because they're wet, cold or sick, please call AWL.

If the kittens are very young - with eyes that are still closed and little mobility - you should monitor them for around two hours before phoning AWL as their mum is very likely to come back.

Older kittens can usually go a little longer without food, so for those who have their eyes open and can walk, you should monitor for mum's return for around four hours before calling AWL for advice. It is best to leave the kittens where they are unless AWL advises otherwise.

There is a cat in my garden giving birth!

If you've found a pregnant cat who you think is in labour:

- Give her space - avoid disturbing her.
- Try to locate her owner - post on local social media groups or speak to neighbours to see if anybody knows her. If you can't find the owner, please call AWL for advice on what to do when the kittens arrive.
- Provide food and water nearby - be quiet and keep your distance.
- If it is a hot or cold day, provide some shelter for her but keep your distance from her.
- Keep an eye on her to check she's doing ok, but avoid disturbing her as it could cause her to reject the newborns.

Many cats give birth without needing any help at all, but signs she may be having difficulty include:

- If between 30 and 60 minutes of intense straining she doesn't produce a kitten or a kitten seems to be stuck.
- The mother seems to be noticeably distressed.
- If she seems lethargic, has passed an unpleasant discharge or is bleeding heavily from her vulva (green, brown or red discharge while the kittens are being born is normal).
- If you see any of these signs or if mum is at risk because she's near a busy road or building, please call AWL. Never put yourself in danger.