

# PET ESCAPING & ROAMING

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*How to keep your pet safe at home*



**JOSEPH ANDREW SAPIA & PATRICIA SAPIA**

# ***Pet Escaping & Roaming***

How to keep your pet safe at home

by

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and

**Patricia Sapia**

***Pet Escaping & Roaming***

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*For Midnight*



*and for  
Marama, Tra and Kitty*

*and for  
all the lost, missing and stolen pets—*

*it is for them this book is dedicated,  
with love*

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## *Roaming and Escaping*

As Americans, we cherish freedom above all else. Unfortunately, too many people extend the concept of freedom to their pets. In many places, especially in rural America, there has always existed a free-roaming attitude toward pets. That attitude persists today even though the dangers inherent in allowing pets to run free are common knowledge. It's not always just the pet who is at risk. Domesticated cats allowed to run loose can sometimes pose a serious threat to wildlife. In many places, it is illegal to allow your pets to roam.

### ***What is Roaming?***

We're not talking about a pet simply getting loose. By roaming, we are talking about a deliberate act on the part of pet owners to allow their pets to come and go as they please. It may be that they've simply given in to their animal's annoying behavior and persistent escape attempts.

No responsible parents would ever consider allowing their young children to run free and unsupervised. Children rely on the adults around them to guide, protect, and care for them. So do our pets. Every time you allow your pet to run free, you are risking its life, for a pet permitted to roam outside unsupervised faces a great number of mortal dangers.

## ***The Many Hazards of Roaming***

The most obvious hazard is, of course, being hit by cars. Some less obvious hazards include:

- Ingesting antifreeze or other toxic substances.
- Being killed, mauled, or maimed by wild animals. In states like Florida, for example, many pets are killed and eaten by alligators every year. Depending on what part of the country you live in, your pet may be at risk of attacks by wild dogs, coyotes, owls, and even eagles, not to mention exposure to rabies from raccoons, skunks, and other wild animals.
- Receiving abuse from humans, pranksters, or just plain sadists who deliberately harm animals and take pleasure in it.
- Being harmed by neighbors who get angry about people's pets invading their yards, digging in their flowerbeds, and going to the bathroom. Some have resorted to physically harming the animals (shooting them with pellet guns, poisoning, pet-napping, and even killing them).
- Being picked up by a pet thief and sold to a research facility, a dog fighting ring, or a puppy mill.
- Being caught in a hunter's trap. A New Jersey shelter recorded over 1,000 incidents of trapped pets in one three-year period.
- Being exposed to communicable diseases; roaming cats are at particularly high risk. (See [figure 16.](#))

## ***Keeping Indoor Pets Happy and Content***

Many indoor pets are quite happy with their sedentary lives, while others are not. It's these animals who constantly yearn for the out-of-doors and stage persistent and repeated escape attempts. They constantly complain, meow, bark, destroy furniture, etc. Such behavior has led many a

frustrated pet owner to simply give up and allow their pets to roam (or to relinquish them to the local animal shelter).

Many of these behavioral problems can be easily traced to separation anxiety or just plain boredom, the result of being left alone all day in an apartment or enclosure with little or no stimulation. Cats and dogs are complex creatures. Like us, they have physical, emotional, and psychological needs. It's quite likely that your pet's behavioral problems are its way of letting you know its needs are not being met.

Fortunately, there are many strategies for dealing with these situations. Providing your indoor, caged, or kenneled pet with an environment that is rich in stimulating activity can greatly reduce escaping behavior. It can also reduce and possibly eliminate other undesirable behaviors associated with loneliness, boredom, and separation anxiety. Even if your pet has access to the out-of-doors via a kennel or enclosure, it is your responsibility to provide it with physical and mental stimulation. The all-too-common practice of leaving a dog in an empty kennel for many hours at a time can increase isolation and aggression, and also motivate your dog to attempt an escape.

## **Environmental Enrichment**

Karen Commings defines environmental enrichment in a June 1998 article in *Cat Fancy* magazine as seeking "to turn a wild animal's unnatural habitat into an environment that satisfies its natural instincts and desires." According to Ms. Commings, "Although the domestic cat is not a wild animal, it retains instinctive behavior inherited from its wild ancestors."

The same can be said for dogs. The challenge for pet owners is to fill their pet's environment with a variety of stimulating and challenging activities, activities that not only provide physical exercise but also exercise the animal's intellectual muscles. The ideal environment is one, which is both complex and unpredictable, one that offers the animal



choice and a variety of sensory experiences, as well as regular interaction with people and/or other animals. This can include, but is certainly not limited to, objects to climb on and various safe chew toys for your dog, and scratching posts and window perches for your cat. There's a great book for working cat owners (*Cat Home Alone: Fifty Ways to Keep Your Cat Happy and Safe While You're Away*) by Regen Dennis. It can be purchased at bookstores or through various online book retailers.

## ***Some Excuses for Letting Pets Roam***

- **It's the Way I was Raised** – Like so many things in our adult lives, we learn from our childhood experiences. Many of us grew up in homes where it was the accepted practice to just open the door and let the dog out or to allow the cat to come and go as it pleased. Unfortunately, many people never question these behaviors: that's just the way they've always done it. This is why humane education should begin early. The way we care for animals will most certainly impact the actions and attitudes of our children.
- **It's Just Easier** – Sometimes people feel it's just too much trouble to deal with undesirable behaviors such as constant meowing or barking, destroying furniture, tearing through the garbage when left alone, persistent escape attempts, etc., and just let their animals run free or relinquish them to the shelter. One of the main reasons cited for shelter relinquishments is owner frustration over behavior problems. While frustration is understandable, allowing pets to roam freely or dropping them off at the shelter is not.

## ***Why Pet Containment Often Fails***

According to an *HSUS News* article titled “Electronic Aid” by Leslie Sinclair, D.V.M., “Many pet owners focus

their efforts on . . . preventing escape, without first determining why the dog is behaving the way he is.” When bad behavior is ignored or creative ways to redirect the animal’s energies are not explored, patterns of undesirable behavior continue. Often attempts are made to deal with escaping behavior. The typical pet owner’s reaction is to build a fence or take extra care when opening doors and gates. These are only strategies to physically block the animal from escaping. These tactics often fail because they treat the symptoms and do nothing to address the real issue of why their pet wants to roam.

### ***Why Pets Desire to Roam***

It is probably safe to say that the greatest contributor to the roaming impulse in pets is the desire to mate. Too many people put off sterilizing their pets until the pets are older or ignore it altogether, even though it is common knowledge that unsterilized pets are much more likely to attempt to escape than pets that have been altered. Each pet is unique, however, and there are many reasons why pets desire to roam. The first step in solving the problem is to identify the motivating factor behind your pet’s escape attempts. We are all for installing fences, constructing good solid enclosures and kennels. In fact, much of this section is dedicated to giving pet owners the information they need to make informed decisions about these things. However, building a fence will do nothing to curb your dog or cat’s instinctual desire to mate, but neutering him will. Having a kennel built will not alleviate your dog’s boredom (and can even exaggerate it), but providing environmental enrichment will, and so will teaching him tricks and practicing obedience skills. Constructing a good solid enclosure will not satisfy your cat’s curiosity or hunting instinct, but providing her with frequent opportunities to play with a feather on a string, or anything else that involves stalking an object, will. (See “Training.”)

- ***Boredom*** – When used properly, a kennel or enclosure is an excellent method of pet containment, even for a hardcore escape artist. However, there is hardly a crueler scenario than leaving an animal alone in a kennel or enclosure for long periods of time. How inhumane is it to make your pet live in an environment devoid of stimulation, with little or no human interaction, with the same dirty old chew toy, with no view of the outside world? Not only can it contribute to feelings of isolation (the underlying cause of many an escape attempt), but it can also lead to aggression and other behavioral problems (some of the very problems that frustrate pet owners to the point of allowing their pets to roam freely).
- ***Separation Anxiety*** – The dread of being away from their owners is another motivation for pets to escape and misbehave. Many people work long hours (something that should have been considered well in advance of taking on the awesome responsibility of pet ownership, by the way) and by the time they get home their pet's jumping for joy makes them anything but joyful. Many pets are fine being left alone in the house and simply sleep the day away. For a significant number of pets, however, long periods of separation can cause a variety of anxiety-related behavior problems, such as excessive barking, destroying furniture, etc.; the very things that have frustrated some pet owners to the point of throwing open the door and allowing their pets to roam freely. Let's be honest – most of us quickly become frustrated if we have to wait just a few seconds for an elevator or a couple of minutes for a bus. No one likes to wait. Consider then how your pet must feel. He loves you, but has to spend eight or nine hours every day alone, just waiting for you to return home. No one is

suggesting that you quit your job, but we implore working pet owners to make their animals a priority, to schedule quality time with them each and every day. And when they are absent, we ask them to provide their animals with an environment that is rich in stimulating activity; a habitat that provides a variety of choices and sensory experiences.

- **Phobias** – Many pets are particularly sensitive to loud noises, so it is no coincidence that the busiest day of the year reported by animal shelters is July 5<sup>th</sup> (See “Holidays and Parties.”) Perhaps your pet is trying to escape the noise of a tractor at the construction site down the street or the taunting of the kid next door, or it may have developed a fear of thunder. Now any sound that even approximates the sound he fears can induce flight. Many factors can contribute to an animal’s phobias and subsequent escape attempts. Identifying them is one of the necessary steps in alleviating your pet’s fears and phobias. (See “Training.”)

## ***What Can I Do?***

Eliminating or greatly reducing your pet’s urge to roam will take patience, persistence, perhaps a little money, the proper information, and a serious commitment on the part of you, the pet owner. One of the most successful and cost-effective things a pet owner can do to curb their pet’s urge to roam, as well as to eliminate many of the undesirable behaviors associated with it, is to have their pet sterilized. This is especially true for male animals.

## ***Spay and Neuter***

Spaying is the surgical removal of a pet’s ovaries and uterus; neutering is the surgical removal of the testicles.

Unless you are a professional breeder (not the backyard variety) or own purebreds that participate in certain

competitive events (AKC Confirmation, for example) where the rules for eligibility preclude them from being sterilized, your animals should be spayed or neutered.

According to In Defense of Animals (IDA), an animal rights group dedicated to fighting animal cruelty, pets that have not been sterilized are at very high risk of running away, and so by not spaying and neutering your pets, you are putting them at risk of serious injury or death. Since spaying or neutering eliminates an animal's desire to mate, it makes your pet less likely to run off and subsequently less likely to be injured in a fight, stolen, or killed in traffic. It's no coincidence that a New Jersey animal shelter has reported that the majority of pets killed by motor vehicles are unaltered males. In addition, there are many health benefits associated with spaying and neutering. According to IDA, "Sterilized pets have twice the average life expectancy as unsterilized pets". This is partly because of a lower incidence of prostate, uterine, testicular, and breast cancers. The same IDA fact sheet states that "An unspayed female dog is 200 times more likely to develop mammary tumors than a dog spayed before her first heat, (and) an unspayed cat is seven times more likely to develop mammary tumors." It should also be noted that many municipalities have special lower licensing fees for sterilized animals.

Despite the obvious benefits, why are some otherwise well-intentioned pet lovers still reluctant to spay or neuter their animals? Generally, it is because they are misinformed.

## **Take the Quiz**

*The surgery is painful.*

**False** – Animals undergoing the procedure are fully anesthetized. They may feel discomfort immediately following the operation, and complications, while they may occur, are rare.

*Spaying/neutering causes pets to gain weight.*

**False** – Given a proper diet and plenty of exercise, the effects should be minimal.

***Spaying/neutering alters an animal's personality.***

**False** – According to a 1998-99 *Puppies USA* article by Susan Easterly, “A pet’s genetic makeup, along with the attention and training it receives, shapes its personality.” Spaying/neutering may, however, decrease aggressiveness in males and the moodiness associated with heat cycles in females.

***My pet is too young to be spayed.***

**False** – Puppies and kittens can be sterilized as young as six weeks.

***Spaying/neutering is expensive.***

**False** – It’s a lot cheaper to spay your pet than it is to raise a litter of puppies or to pay the medical bills if your pet gets hit by a car. Besides, many shelters offer spaying/neutering at a discounted rate when adopting an animal, and many veterinarians provide discounted or sliding-scale sterilizing services to the public. Call your local animal shelter, animal control agency, or talk to your veterinarian about discount spay and neuter services.

***I have a male pet. He can't get pregnant, and therefore he does not need to be neutered.***

**False** – While it may be true that he cannot get pregnant, it’s a selfish attitude when you consider both the overwhelming numbers of unwanted animals and the risk of injury or loss.

***It's a wonderful learning experience for children to see the miracle of birth.***

**False** – There are overwhelming numbers of stray animals, many of which are eventually humanely destroyed in the shelters because no one wants them. So this is the worst possible reason for not sterilizing your pet. If you want your

children to see the miracle of birth, have them watch the *Discovery Channel* or *Animal Planet*.

If you answered “true” to any of the above questions, you have been misinformed. The benefits of spaying and neutering in terms of lost pet prevention cannot be overstated. Besides the health benefits we’ve discussed, there is the issue of overpopulation. The statistics are truly heartbreaking. According to In Defense of Animals, “15 million dogs and cats are destroyed each year in the United States because there are not enough loving homes for all of them.”

## **Where to Spay and Neuter**

Your veterinarian can do the procedure. In addition, many animal shelters and humane societies are now offering the service and may even have free or discount clinics. You can easily locate a low-cost clinic near you by calling SPAY/USA. (See [figure 17.](#))

## ***Pet Containment***

While spaying/neutering will certainly curb your animal’s desire to roam, it is not a total solution. You still cannot simply allow your pet to come and go as it pleases. If you want your pet to have access to the outdoors, it is your responsibility to make sure it can do so safely.

## **Traditional Fencing**

If you have a yard and want your pet to be able to run loose there, you really should have a fence. Chaining or tying an animal to an outside post (except in the case of an emergency) is both cruel and dangerous. Far too many dogs have become entangled and choked to death.

For most dogs, a properly-installed vinyl, wood, or chain-link fence will provide enough security. (Note: some dogs are able to climb up and over chain-link fences). The

quality of the gates and latches are as important as the material of the fence, since it is through open gates that many pets escape. A latch should be functional and easy to close, but not so easy to open. Childproof latches are ideal because they require a little effort to open. Spring-loaded gates that shut automatically offer the best protection of all, since guests, service people, and children may not always remember to close the gate. Locks are recommended since they offer a little more security, not only in terms of your pet getting loose, but also in keeping people (pet thieves and others) out. The height of a fence should also be proportionate to the size of your dog. Also, do not place objects, such as garbage containers, near the fence; many dogs have escaped by using them to climb up and over.

In selecting a fence company, check first with friends and neighbors who have had fencing installed (especially if they are pet owners). A reputable company will provide you with references, answer all of your questions, and address your concerns about your pet.

## **Electronic Fencing**

There are several reasons why a pet owner might choose the electronic fence option. Perhaps you have a beautifully landscaped yard and don't want it obscured by a fence. There may be a municipal ordinance or homeowners' association rule against fencing off your property. For others, fencing off an entire yard is simply too costly. Still others may not want their pet to have access to the entire yard. When used properly an electronic fence can be a safe and effective alternative to traditional fencing. As with most things, there are pros and there are cons. (See [figure 18](#).)

All of the electronic fencing systems on the market today basically operate on the same principal. A wire is buried or posts placed along the perimeter of your property. These are connected to a transmitter that transmits a steady, unbroken signal. Your pet wears a pronged, battery-operated



radio collar that detects the signal if he approaches too close to the boundary. At first, the collar emits a warning sound. If the animal continues toward the perimeter of the yard, either a mild electric shock or a blast of citronella is applied.

Pets must be trained to the system in order for it to be effective. (Some systems come with a training video.) Marker flags are placed along the boundary so as to be visible to the pet. While wearing the collar along with a long lead, the pet is brought near the boundary, just to where it can hear the warning sound. At this point, the owner then pulls back on the leash, bringing the animal to the safe area of the yard and offering praise. Once the animal has learned to run back to the safe area, it is brought just close enough to experience the shock or the citronella blast. Again, the animal is brought back to safety and praised. Once the pet has demonstrated that she respects the boundary, she is allowed to run free and the flag markers are taken away. Cats can be and have been trained to these systems. However, they were originally designed for dogs and while some, not all, manufacturers promote them as safe and effective for cat containment, this should be done with the utmost of caution. There are several manufacturers of electronic fencing. For a complete listing see ([“Resources/Pet Containment.”](#))

Some people object to the use of aversion-type training aids that shock animals into compliance. Many animal welfare organizations, however, approve of the use of electronic fencing, provided it is properly installed and pets are trained to the system. Pet owners must understand, however, that while an electronic fence can be very effective in preventing pet loss, it is in no way a substitute for a pet owner’s time and attention. It is only containment and doesn’t address your pet’s roaming impulse. ***The best advice is to never leave your pet unsupervised in the yard.***

Electronic fencing can also be used to supplement standard fencing; for example, if there is an area where your dog constantly tries to tunnel under the fence, a strand of

electronic fence can be buried at the base of the fence to keep your dog away from that area.

## **Kennels**

Either permanent or freestanding kennels can be customized to fit your specific needs. Permanent kennels set on a concrete slab are quite good at containing animals, but they can be costly. Freestanding kennels are easily assembled and are less expensive. Properly installed and with special attention paid to gates and latches, both types offer your dog access to the outdoors while still providing protection against pet loss. Modular kennels can be extended to meet your particular needs by purchasing additional panels. A rectangular kennel area is best because it can alleviate boredom by giving your dog room to exercise. It should be noted, however, that constant running and pacing in the kennel may be an indication that your dog is bored. There are solutions to this; see “Environmental Enrichment” above.

A kennel, when used properly, is a good alternative to traditional fencing, especially for those who cannot afford or who do not wish to fence off their property. Kennels, however, should not be employed as surrogate caretakers.

## ***Cat Containment***

The practice of allowing cats to roam freely, something that until quite recently was hardly ever questioned, is now considered unacceptable and even cruel. Despite the widespread knowledge of the dangers faced by loose felines, many cat owners still allow their animals to have free run of the neighborhood. The thrill of the great outdoors is available indoors, without the many risks: see “Keeping Indoor Pets Happy and Content”, above. The traditional fencing prescribed above for dogs provides no security for cats. Fortunately, there are other options for cat owners.

## Enclosures

Very popular today are the wire mesh units that offer a high degree of security against pet loss, while still allowing your cat to fully enjoy the out-of-doors. Modular enclosures that can be put together in various configurations are available in pet catalogs, magazines and on the Internet (key words “cat enclosures,” “pet enclosures,” or “pet cages”), or you can easily build your own enclosure by simply framing out an area and covering it with wire mesh. Be sure to provide your pet with some protection against extreme weather, and position the enclosure away from tree limbs and power lines that might be knocked down during a storm.

One of the best resources we’ve found is the Safe Cat Outdoor Enclosures manual. This terrific do-it-yourself manual comes complete with over 65 detailed drawings to help you build your own cat enclosure. Based on a modular design concept the enclosures can easily be modified or expanded to meet your needs. The manual can be ordered online at [www.just4cats.com](http://www.just4cats.com) or direct from the publisher. (See “[Resources/Pet Containment](#).”) Cat enclosures can be custom-designed to fit any yard, and then filled with all kinds of fun things to keep your kitty occupied. Just let your imagination go! This is what environmental enrichment is about – fill your cat’s enclosure with scratching posts, tree limbs, plants, and shrubs. Be careful though. Some plants such as oleanders and azaleas can be toxic to cats and dogs, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. For more information on pets and poisonous plants, visit their website at [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org).

## Cat Fencing

Cat Fence-In is a popular product for keeping your cat in your yard. Developed by a Nevada couple, the system has been on the market since 1990 and has won several awards, including being named one of *Cat Fancy* magazine’s 1992 Editors’ Choice Award Winners for best new cat products.

Also, the highly-respected Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine newsletter *CATNIP* gave Cat Fence-In a five paws rating. The system attaches to your existing fence, loops back in on itself, and prevents your cat from climbing up and over. Another model not only keeps your cat in your yard; it prevents other animals from coming into your yard.

This relatively inexpensive system has several advantages. It attaches to your existing fence and is easy to install even for a novice. The system is made with a polypropylene mesh netting that won't rust or corrode, and there aren't any jagged edges that might injure your cat. It prevents cats from climbing up and over fences. Cat Fence-In also makes a tree guard to prevent your cat from scaling trees. It's ideal for feral cats and cats that have been used to roaming freely and have difficulty adjusting to an entirely indoor lifestyle.

When used properly, this type of cat fencing provides a good level of security against pet loss; however, you must still supervise your cat and check on it frequently. Cat fencing can be found in pet magazines, catalogs, and now on the Internet at [www.cاتفencein.com](http://www.cاتفencein.com). (See "[Resources/Pet Containment](#).")

## **A Word about Feral Cats**

The Humane Society of the United States defines feral cat as "unsocialized cats who are one or more generations removed from a home environment and who may subsist in a colony of similar cats living on the fringes of human existence." The HSUS points out that "feral cats rarely make suitable pets". The fact remains that many people take in feral or alley cats. In terms of preventing roaming, feral cats can be a real challenge. While acclimating feral cats to indoor living may be difficult, it is not impossible. We believe that anyone taking in a feral cat must educate himself or herself about how to care for them properly. Fortunately,

there is a lot of help available. There are dozens of feral cat groups all over the country that provide literature and even counsel people that have opened their homes to these needy animals. Doing a search of the net, using the key words “feral cats” will lead you to dozens of sites with lots of helpful information. Two sites we found to be particularly helpful are the Feral Cat Coalition of San Diego, California, at [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com), and Safe Haven for Cats at [www.safehavenforcats.com](http://www.safehavenforcats.com). Those without Internet access can call Safe Haven at (650) 802-9686. They will be glad to offer some advice.

### ***Some Solutions to Behavior Problems***

While frustration over behavioral problems is understandable, we must be willing to accept our part in our pet’s having developed them. Are we perhaps working so many hours that our pets are not getting the time and attention they deserve? If so, then we must make time for them or accommodate them in some other way. (See “Pet Sitters, Boarding Kennels and Caretakers.”) Here are several ways to combat and alleviate behavior problems.

- ***Scheduling*** – Plan your pet’s activities (walks, play, and feeding times, etc.) Doing so gives your pets a routine; something they will look forward to. This not only can alleviate boredom; it has the added benefit of setting your pet’s biological clock. This can be very beneficial in terms of recovering a lost pet (*e.g.*, a pet that was lost at 8:00 a.m. may scurry home on its own around its regular 3:00 p.m. feeding time).
- ***Frequent Walks*** – Both you and your pet will benefit from brisk early morning walks. Set your clock 15 minutes earlier and walk your dog or your cats, too, for that matter. Take your pet for a ten-minute walk each morning and watch your relationship thrive. (It is important to note that cats should only be walked on a

leash attached to their harness, not to their collar). Regular walks are a fundamental part of responsible dog ownership. If you can't walk your dog regularly, then consider hiring a professional dog walker or a responsible youngster from the neighborhood.

- ***Playtime*** – Ten minutes of play a day keeps the boredom away. Regular play sessions twice a day is a good start. A quick game of fetch can counteract an entire day's worth of separation anxiety. Supervised play with a feather or a string with knotted ends will not only satisfy your cat's hunting instinct, it's inexpensive and great fun. As you take a more active role in your pet's emotional well-being, you will see your relationship thrive and your pet's behavior problems decrease.
- ***Tricks*** – You *can* teach an old dog new tricks, and contrary to popular belief, cats can be taught to do tricks as well. This is one of the best ways to build a healthy relationship with your pet. Not only is it great fun, it also combats boredom, isolation, and loneliness. Also, it reinforces your position as the leader. There are many books, videos, and online resources for teaching and training pets. (See "Training.")
- ***Family Affairs*** – Surveys have shown that most people consider their pets to be members of their family. That's great because things like walking and playtime can be divided up among everyone, even in the busiest of families. Involve your children in age-appropriate parts of your pet's activities, and everyone will benefit!
- ***Toy Variety*** – Toys are a great way of enriching your pet's environment and can help alleviate behavior problems. There are interactive toys, toys that comfort, and distraction toys. Purchase a variety for playtime with your pet and for safe solitary play (it's not nearly

as expensive as repairing damaged furniture or clothing!) Also, rotate your pet's toys regularly, preferably once a week, to combat boredom and give your pet a variety of sensory experiences.

- ***Digging Area*** – Select an area in your yard where your dog is permitted to dig. You can even box off the area with 4x4s to create a border and make a digging area similar to a sandbox.
- ***Window Perches*** – Many cats are better able to cope with indoor life if they have a view of the outside world. A window perch where it can see birds, insects, a falling leaf, or passing traffic will entertain your cat for hours on end and is a great way of combating boredom.
- ***Private Space*** – Just as we do, pets need their own space. Provide your pets with a den or bedding area, where they can retreat to whenever they are feeling stressed or just need a break.
- ***Training*** – Training is one of the most effective methods of preventing pet loss. Training is not just sending your dog off to obedience school for a week or two. It involves specific obedience skills, various conditioning techniques, and even teaching your pet tricks. Training is something that needs to be continually taught and reinforced for the lifetime of your pet. (See “Training.”)

The bottom line is that allowing your pet to roam is irresponsible. Even if it has returned a thousand times before, there will come a time when it doesn't (as thousands of grief-stricken and guilt-ridden pet owners will testify). Pet ownership is a major responsibility. It requires your time, money, effort, and commitment. If your lifestyle doesn't permit you to give a pet the time, care, and attention that it deserves, please reconsider your plans to bring a pet into your home. It is your responsibility to provide your pet with

a safe, interesting, and stimulating environment. Until people begin taking pet ownership for the awesome responsibility that it is, animals will continue to suffer.

**Figure 16**

***Roaming Cats: At High Risk***

Roaming cats run a great risk of contracting communicable diseases such as Feline- Leukemia. Although there's a vaccine for this disease now, it's not one hundred percent effective. Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a more serious danger since there is no vaccine and no known cure. FIV can be transmitted easily via the bite of another cat. It attacks the cat's immune system and is eventually fatal. According to Bruce Lawhorn, Associate Professor of Small Animal Medicine and Surgery at Texas A&M University, "Free-roaming cats and mixed-breed cats are at highest risk for contracting FIV infection. The disease is rare in cats housed strictly indoors." He offers the following advice, "You can reduce the risk by neutering your cat to reduce roaming and territorial fighting behavior, and by keeping your cat indoors."

[\[Back\]](#)

**Figure 17**

***SPAY/USA***

The goal of SPAY/USA is to reduce the number of unwanted cats and dogs and to put an end to animal suffering.

"SPAY/USA is a national referral service for affordable spay/neuter services. People who need assistance spaying and neutering their pets can call our toll-free number, (800) 248-SPAY (7729). They will be referred to a veterinarian or program in their area that provides affordable spay/neuter services. For some, affordable prices are an incentive to spay or neuter a pet."



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SPAY/USA operators are available Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST.

For more information visit their website at [www.spayusa.org](http://www.spayusa.org).

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## Figure 18

### ***Electronic Fencing: Pros and Cons***

#### **Pros:**

- **Allows Freedom** – Allows pets to have access to the out-of-doors with a reasonable assuredness of safety.
- **Cost-Effective** – The cost can be as low as \$150 for a do-it-yourself fence, or from several hundred dollars up to \$1,500 for more elaborate custom installations, home consultations, and training. This is still quite cost-effective, considering that fencing off a large yard area with a traditional fence can cost many thousands of dollars.
- **Thwarts Tunnelers and Jumpers** – Electronic fencing also has the unique advantage of not being able to be tunneled under or jumped over.
- **Aesthetics** – Some people spend many thousands of dollars landscaping their yards. Electronic fencing is invisible and so preserves not only their view of the neighborhood but the beauty of their property as well, all while allowing their pets to enjoy the out-of-doors.
- **Ordinances** – Electronic fencing can be installed in places where local ordinances restrict fencing-off of property. This is one reason that many veterinarians and humane organizations approve of electronic fencing when used properly.

### **Cons:**

- **Not 100% Effective** – Not even the boldest of the electronic fence manufacturers boasts complete success. Some animals have a very high pain threshold and will bridge the electronic barrier. With proper installation and training, however, these systems can be very effective.
- **Breeds** – Some dogs, especially those bred for hunting, may be particularly difficult to train to the system.
- **They Don't Keep People, Predators, or Other Pets Out** – An electronic fence may keep your pet in, but they won't keep anything or anyone else out. Someone wandering inside the perimeter of your yard could be bitten, exposing you to liability.
- **Not Maintenance-free** – Because these systems rely on batteries in the pet's collar, they are not maintenance-free, although some systems provide a warning signal when the batteries are running low. Also, the underground wires are susceptible to damage from tree roots, freezing and thawing of the ground, etc.

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## ***So You're Gonna Let Your Cat Roam Anyway***

The purpose of this chapter is to inform pet owners about the hazards faced by roaming pets and to offer our readers concrete solutions for curbing roaming and escaping behavior. While few people allow their dogs to roam freely anymore, many still feel it is fine to allow cats to roam. We respectfully but strongly disagree. The fact remains that

many people will, despite the dangers, continue to permit their cats to come and go as they please. While we can empathize with pet owners whose cats may be particularly difficult to keep indoors, we cannot condone this practice. If you are going to allow your cat to roam, please, for your cat's sake, take the following precautions:

- **Secure Your Pet's Collar and Tags** – Before you open that door, be sure your cat's collar is fastened and its tags are securely attached.
- **Use Multiple Forms of Identification** – Including a registered ID tag and at least one form of permanent identification.
- **Do Not Delay Searching** – If your cat does not return around its usual time, do not delay actively searching for it. This is a serious problem with roaming cats. Many people wait days before searching for cats that have been allowed to roam; by then the holding time at the local animal shelter may have already passed, with tragic consequences.

Please visit the Dumb Friends League website: [www.ddfl.org](http://www.ddfl.org). Under Services look for their Resource Center. You will find some great resources to help you not only address your pet's behavioral issues, but they will help you find solutions. They have a Behavior Handouts Library (available in English and Spanish), and a Pet Behavior Helpline service.

# *Index to Resources*

[Pet Containment](#)

[Roaming and Escaping](#)

# *PET CONTAINMENT:*

## **Electronic Fencing:**

**Innotek Inc.**

[www.innotek.net](http://www.innotek.net)

**Invisible Fence (IF)**

[www.invisiblefence.com](http://www.invisiblefence.com)

**Radio Fence Distributors, Inc.**

[www.radiofence.com](http://www.radiofence.com)

## **Cat Fencing and Enclosures:**

**Just4cats.com**

*Safe Cat Outdoor Enclosures Manual*

[www.just4cats.com](http://www.just4cats.com)

**Cat Fence-In**

[www.catfencein.com](http://www.catfencein.com)

**Radio Fence Distributors, Inc.**

Electronic fencing for cats.

[www.radiofence.com](http://www.radiofence.com)

# *ROAMING AND ESCAPING:*

## **Spay and Neuter Resources:**

**SPAY/USA**

[www.spayusa.org](http://www.spayusa.org)

## **Feral Cat Resources:**

**Feral Cat Coalition**

[www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com)

**Safe Haven for Cats**

[www.safehavenforcats.com](http://www.safehavenforcats.com)

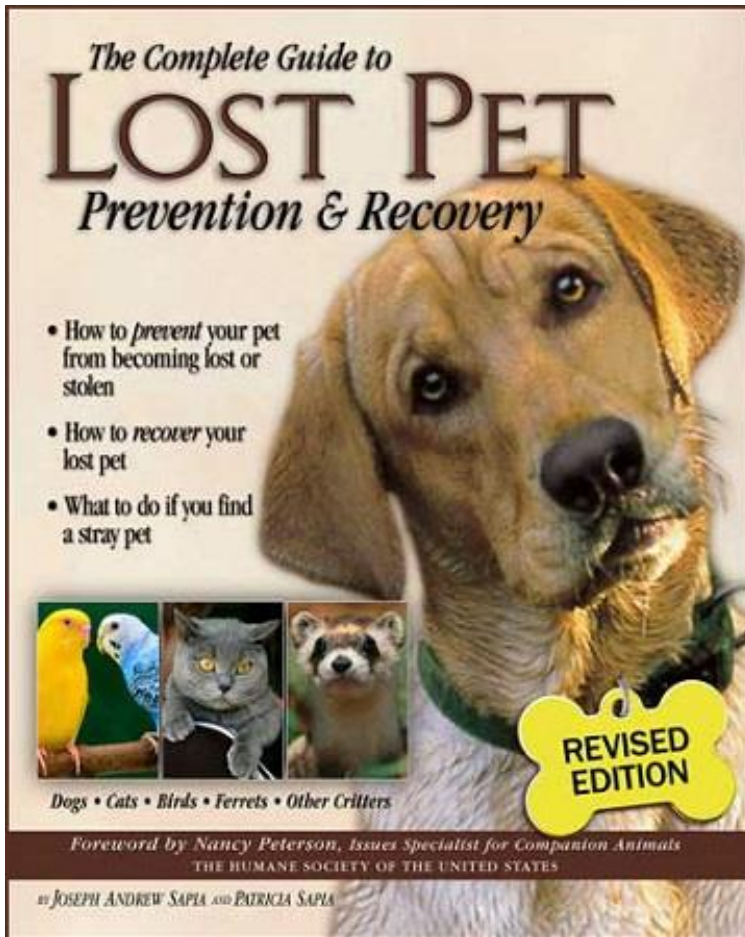
## **Roaming and Escaping: Book**

*Cat Home Alone: Fifty Ways to Keep Your Cat Happy  
and Safe While You're Away*

Regen Dennis / Paperback or Kindle / Andrews & McMeel

*Pet Escaping & Roaming* is an excerpt from [\*The Complete Guide to Lost Pet Prevention & Recovery 2<sup>nd</sup> \(Revised Edition\)\*](#).

Now available on [Amazon](#) as a Kindle and as a paperback.



The Complete Guide to Lost Pet Prevention & Recovery shows owners of dogs, cats, birds, ferrets, and other critters how to prevent their pets from becoming lost or stolen, how to recover lost pets, and what to do if they find a stray pet.

**What the experts are saying about [\*The Complete Guide to Lost Pet Prevention & Recovery 2<sup>nd</sup> \(Revised Edition\)\*](#).**

Now available on [Amazon](#) as a Kindle and as a paperback.

**Martha Armstrong, Senior Vice President for Companion Animals and Equine Protection, The Humane Society of the United States:** “This book is a must-read for everyone who is concerned about the ultimate safety of pet animals.”

**Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association:** “a remarkably comprehensive guide”.

**PetSmart:** “a must for every home with pets”.

**Cat Fancy:** “make a place on your bookshelf and buy it”.

**Dog Fancy:** “a valuable directory of resources”.

**Publishers Weekly:** “an excellent resource”.

**Animal Sheltering Magazine:** “well-researched and well-written”.

**Dumb Friends League:** “this book will make a difference for you”.

**Google Books Review:** “an invaluable resource for all pet owners”.

**Midwest Book Review:** “an absolute ‘must’”.

**Dog World:** “amazingly comprehensive . . . buy this book now”.

**Foreword magazine**—Book of the Year Award!

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To see our complete reviews [click here](#).



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