



As pet ownership increases, so does pet detective work



Tan Weiyun

Detective Liu Wei often works late at night. He lurks in the long grass, peeps through underground pipelines, ventures into the demolished houses and searches in the parking lots. He's looking for lost pets, not criminals.

Since 2012, the 35-year-old man from Shanghai has led hundreds of large-scale searches and helped reunite more than 1,000 lost cats, dogs, birds, squirrels and lizards with their worried, sad owners.

"It's a great sense of accomplishment when I finally find a missing pet after days of continuous efforts," he said.

Before heading out, the detective asks his clients many questions regarding their lost pets, such as name, age, color, looks, health history, out-ings, temperament, among others. The profile he creates helps him analyze data more effectively.

Off-leash cats and dogs behave predictably. Cats hide in dark, small places like pipelines or beneath cars because they are shy, easily terrified, and have various worries, phobias and anxieties.

In Liu's experience, cats have a better chance of being discovered, "like 70-80 percent," he said.

"They just hide and do not go away. They might hide themselves somewhere in the building or in the neighborhood," he added. "They wouldn't go far."

Equipment like an infrared thermal imager is usually used to locate a cat. If it hides in a hole, tools such as a pipeline detector and a remote-control video car will also help.

"Some cats would respond to their owner if they were called, so a sound amplifier also works to identify the exact position," Liu said.

Cats are probably easier to find but harder to catch than dogs because



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their reflexes are faster, they jump higher, and they move with greater agility.

Words of comfort and treats from the owner can sometimes be more effective than any tool.

A cat owner on the 40th floor once sought help from Liu. Her cat had gone missing, but she claimed that the door and windows were shut.

The worst-case scenario was that the animal fell from the building, but Liu found no body on the ground.

After inspecting the apartment, Liu felt that the cat might have jumped from the balcony to the 39th floor. Sure enough, he found the cat hiding in a crack in the balcony wall on the floor below. He stuffed food into a trap cage and roped it up. The cat spotted the food and rushed in.

It was rescued.

A dog, on the other hand, is a more complicated animal.

Finding a dog is more difficult than finding a cat because dogs have a much wider range of motion, not to mention the fact that 80 percent of missing dogs are stolen, either by dog dealers or by people looking for a free dog of a popular breed. While cats are 70-80 percent likely to be found, with dogs it can be just 30-40 percent.

Different dog breeds have varying degrees of difficulty. If they are separated from their leash, they can become stray animals. Popular breeds in petite sizes, such as the Teddy and Pomeranian, are easily taken away, but Chinese rural dogs are not on the list.

One particular case that riles Liu was a failed attempt to trace a dog named Mimi, who vanished after a highway accident in Anhui Province. Mimi's owners, a couple, were injured and another dog died in the accident. Mimi took off at the sight of one of the couple trying to revive the dead dog with cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

After the couple searched nearby areas for two days, they approached Liu. He tracked Mimi down at an abandoned factory but the dog managed to evade them every time. Liu believes that Mimi was most likely terrified while watching one of the owners attempt CPR on the dead dog.

The heartbroken couple kept coming back every year, leaving food and water behind in the hope that Mimi would forgive them.

The pet detective business has grown in the country in recent years as more people raise pets at home.

Hiring a pet detective is not cheap; it can range from a few thousand to more than 10,000 yuan (US\$1,470) depending on the area, but pet lovers go to great lengths to find their pets.

"They are not animals. They are members of the family," Liu said.

He takes in sick or injured stray cats and dogs, and treats them medically. After that, he launches a pet adoption program to help them find a new home.

Liu now has a 12-person team working with him. He teaches them how to use appropriate equipment and gives them basic pet knowledge. Liu charges 1,000 yuan per day if the search is in Shanghai, but the fees are higher if it involves trips to other provinces. He demands full payment regardless of the outcome.

"In this industry, logical thinking is required, but we care more about true love and responsibility for animals," he added.