



Friends reunited

*Cats Protection reunites many lost cats with their owners every year, thanks to their microchips. We also take in thousands who are not chipped, making it harder for us to find their owners. **Rebecca Evans** explains the benefits of this simple procedure*

Microchipping cats is a safe and permanent way of identifying them. If a microchipped cat gets lost, he is much more likely to be reunited with his owner than a non-chipped feline. And yet, despite the obvious benefits of this quick and simple procedure, many owners do not get their pets chipped.

Jacqui Cuff, Cats Protection's Advocacy Manager, says: "86 per cent of all the stray and unwanted cats that are brought to Cats Protection are not microchipped, making it very difficult for us to reunite any lost or missing cats with their owners.

"It also costs us more than £200,000 each year to microchip cats in our care, taking precious resources

away from our core work of finding homes for unwanted cats, promoting the neutering of cats and providing cat care information to the public."

Unchipped cats can cause vets a headache – and owners heartache. Nathalie Dowgray, Veterinary Officer at Cats Protection's National Cat Adoption Centre in Chelwood Gate, East Sussex, says: "If your cat wanders off and is not microchipped then your chances of getting it back are low. You're relying on the person who finds it to put up posters and make an effort to find who the owner is."

Vets often have to treat cats who have been injured in road accidents, and, if the cat is not chipped, they might not be able to find the owner.

Even worse, if a cat does not survive his injuries or is dead when brought into the surgery, then the owner may never know what became of their beloved pet.

Nathalie says: "The vet can hold on to the body, but in most of these cases the cat will go unclaimed."

Plenty of benefits

All of these potential difficulties can be anticipated and overcome with one simple procedure, microchipping, which is Cats Protection's preferred method of cat identification. Microchips don't come off, or put cats at risk of collar-related injuries. And if you ever get into a dispute about the ownership of a cat, the presence of a microchip registered in your name may count in your favour.

Another benefit of microchipping is that your cat will be able to use the latest chip-controlled cat flaps, ensuring that only your pets can gain access to your household. The cat is held next to the flap as the technology is tuned to its microchip. These high-tech cat flaps have made a huge difference to cat owners whose homes are being invaded or pets attacked by other cats. Microchip-operated models shut out such invaders.

Because of the many benefits the procedure brings, Cats Protection microchips all of the cats adopted from us that are older than 12 weeks. This gives new owners peace of mind. We help adopters register their details with the microchip database at the time of adoption.

If your cat is not from CP and you need to get him chipped, then the process is relatively simple and can be performed by vets, local authorities and trained and insured members of animal welfare organisations. Vets often suggest that the procedure is done at the same time as first or second vaccination, or neutering, but it can be done at any time after this.

There's no minimum age for microchipping; that is down to the preference of the person carrying out the procedure. A good rule of thumb is to get it done before you let your pet outside for the first time. You can expect to pay around £20 to £30 for the procedure and vets sometimes offer special deals so it's worth checking around.

A simple solution

A microchip is a little smaller than a grain of rice and is inserted under the cat's skin between the shoulder blades with a device known as an implanter.

National Cat Adoption Centre vet Nathalie Dowgray says: "The microchip is inserted around the back of the neck, where the cat doesn't have many nerve endings. The whole process takes around 20 seconds."

The procedure is simple and no more painful than an injection – your cat won't be aware of the chip's presence once it has been inserted. Once the chip has been implanted, the person carrying out the ▶

Microchip helps missing mog back home

Debra Wood had given up hope of ever finding her cat, Nugget, who'd been missing for four years.

So she was astounded to get a voicemail message from her local branch of Cats Protection in August, who told her that her beloved pet had been found.

"When I got the message I couldn't believe it," says Debra. "I called Cats Protection every hour until I got through!"

The tricoloured feline had gone missing from Debra's North Norfolk home in 2009 after a neighbour's cat frightened her. Debra had asked around the area, put up posters and contacted vets to no avail.

Four years on, a lady staying in a nearby caravan park had been looking after a little stray cat that had been hanging around the area for months. When the holidaymaker's stay came to an end, she took the feline to Cats Protection's North Walsham Branch as she was concerned about its long-term welfare.

Volunteers found the cat was microchipped and a call to the database company revealed that Debra was the owner.

Soon after she was contacted, Debra was on her way to branch Fosterer Kelly Payne's house to be reunited with her cat.

Debra says: "When we walked into the pen she was really friendly. The woman who'd looked after her at the caravan park had been calling her Toffee...but when I called her Nugget she looked right at me."

"Within five minutes of being home she was on my son's lap. Now, wherever I am she's there. She's not a lap cat but she likes to be near me."

Debra adds: "I'd recommend owners get their cats chipped. I also think it's important that if someone finds a lost pet they should get them scanned for a microchip."



Debra and Nugget were reunited after four years

Photo: Eastern Daily Press



procedure will place a hand-held scanner over the cat to check the implantation has been successful and the chip is readable.

You should be sent microchip registration documents within a couple of weeks of the procedure taking place. It's important to keep these safe, in case your cat goes missing and it's vitally important to let the database company know if your contact details change to ensure you can be contacted if your cat is found; there's usually a charge for this.

Some owners ask to have their cat's microchip scanned during its annual check-up. While it's rare for a microchip to fail, a yearly check will reassure you.

Should your cat go missing, and be handed in to a vet, animal organisation or local authorities, they will be able to scan for a microchip. The hand-held scanner will display the chip's unique number; then the person doing the scanning will contact the database company and ask for the owner's contact details. Then a quick call to the registered number will hopefully reunite owner and cat.

Microchipping is safe, reliable and effective. For a relatively small fee and a few seconds on the vet's table, your cat will be permanently identifiable as belonging to you. You'll also be able to make the most of cat-flap technology, ensuring only your pets can access your house, protecting them from intruders. And, if your cat goes missing, you'll know you've done everything you can to improve your chances of being reunited with your feline friend. ●

Cat trackers on trial

Ever since the screening of the BBC TV programme *The Secret Life of the Cat* this summer, Cats Protection has been fielding enquiries from supporters and the public about the GPS tracker-type devices used in the programme.

We recommend microchipping as the safe and permanent means of pet identification. We recognise that devices designed to track the location of cats may be beneficial when trying to trace a lost or injured cat. However, current devices are often quite bulky and so the benefit to an individual cat must be weighed up against:

- a) The risk of fitting a collar (which should feature a quick-release mechanism and be fitted correctly)
- b) The risk of attaching the device, which may hamper or aggravate the cat, may become caught on objects outside, or may affect the efficiency of quick-release type collar-mechanisms, depending on fittings. Some devices may cause claws or other body parts to get caught or stuck if they come apart
- c) The fact that, unlike a microchip, they are not permanent, rely on a battery and on the collar staying on
- d) Many devices work within a limited range (which can be smaller than the normal roaming range of many cats)
- e) Whether the device will determine a cat's location while it is being worn, and how this is done, to allow a lost/trapped/injured cat to be quickly found, or whether the data can only be downloaded from the device once taken off the cat, to appease curiosity

Cats Protection would not recommend GPS devices in place of microchipping.