

## Humane Society - Animal Identification

Proper identification of individual animals is critical to the operation of any animal control agency or sheltering organization and is the first step upon the animal's arrival to the agency. Proper identification can facilitate re-uniting an animal with its owner, allows for effective tracking of the animal during its time in the shelter, eliminates errors and facilitates successful adoptions through proper breed identification.

Animals will arrive to agencies individually and in groups. Each agency must have a system to track animals from intake to final disposition either manually or computerized. The first step is to assign the animal or group an identification number. Using some variation of an alpha-numerical type serial number system greatly facilitates record keeping as intake numbers increase so that records can be retrieved from volumes of files over time. While naming animals can work for groups with very small numbers of animals, in most cases it will be necessary to track animals using a sequential system at intake. Some methods could include:

Simple numbering systems – 1,2,3....750, 751....

Starting with the number sequence with the year of the intake if numbers are started on the calendar year (Jan-Dec) such as 060001, 060002, ...064320, 064321.....

Using an alpha identifier for species and then a number sequence such as C for Canine (or D for Dog), F for Feline (or C for Cat), E for Equine (or H for Horse), O for Other. Examples are C0001, C0002 .... D1250, D1251..... E0012, E0013, etc

It is also advisable to decide on what cycle your animals will be tracked for reporting purposes such as the calendar year (Jan-Dec) or a fiscal year (e.g. Oct-Sep). Be aware that many government agencies track statistics using fiscal years, and private groups can choose to do the same. Just decide which one to use so that "annual" performance/productivity statistics can be tracked accurately. Be sure to do intake entries with the animals' arrival as opposed to taking them in and figuring it out later – this will greatly increase the likelihood of errors. Having the correct date of the animal's arrival to an agency can further facilitate identification and is legally required in regards to laws governing hold periods.

Once a tracking number has been assigned, it is imperative to properly catalogue the physical and behavioral identification of each animal. Using accepted and defined descriptive terms for each species will ensure everyone within the agency can properly identify an animal and will reduce confusion. This will entail educating employees as to the proper terms for colors, coat types, tail carriage, size, breed identification, etc. Having breed identification books on hand is a good idea and teaching each other the proper terms is vital. And you can never be "too" descriptive. Paper or computer screens are meant to be written on so use all the space necessary to properly identify an animal. At a minimum you should address the following:

### Physical description:

Species – Dog, Cat, Horse, Bird, Reptile, Cow, Pig, etc.

Breed – German Shepherd, Dachshund, Domestic Short Hair (DSH), Persian, Quarter Horse, Grade Horse, Guinea Pig, Iguana, Goat, Hereford, Brangus, Pot-Bellied Pig, etc.

Sex – Male or Female, then spayed or neutered if known

Age – if a stray, use best judgment looking at teeth, condition, behavior, etc

Color – Black, Chocolate, Blonde, Tan Brindle, Blue Merle, Calico, Olive Tiger, Chestnut, Sorrell, Black & White, White with one black eye patch and black tail, etc. DO NOT

**SHORTCUT COLOR DESCRIPTIONS** - this may be the one area that distinguishes litter mates from another or from another in the facility or gets a pet back to its owner.

Coat – Short, Long, Wavy, Curly, Woolly, Wirey, etc

Ears – Erect, Cropped, Dropped, Semi-Erect, etc.

Tail – Long, Docked, Curled, etc

Size – try to use estimated weights (10 lbs, 25 lbs, 80 lbs) rather than small, medium, large as large to one person may be medium to another.

Other physical characteristics – Declawed, three-legged, scars, missing teeth, torn ears, tattoos

Collars/Tags – note type (leather, nylon, bandanna), color, accoutrements (bells, patterns, imbedded decorations), and any tags. If there are ID tags, record ALL information.

Miscellaneous – note things like ‘chain attached to collar,’ ‘rope around neck,’ ‘duct tape on right front foot’, etc.

Health Remarks – healthy, mange, severely emaciated, obese, eyes matted shut, coughing, etc

Immunization History – in case of owner surrender try to get all past immunization history to include heartworm preventive status.

Microchip – all agencies should scan incoming animals for microchips and, if found, annotate the chip number and manufacturer to then facilitate re-unification with the owner. Note – many chip manufacturers will provide scanners free of charge to legitimate sheltering agencies.

Picture – if at all possible taking a picture of the animal(s) at intake is the optimal addition to written physical descriptions.

#### Behavioral:

Temperament – friendly, shy, vicious, feral, semi-feral, skittish, calm, active, etc.

Training – leash trained, housetrained, no training, hunts deer, herds sheep, etc.

Other - good with other dogs, chases cats, loves children, prefers women, chases cows, kills chickens, hates small dogs, digs out of fence, etc. Get everything you can here from the owner or rescuer.

#### Reason for Turn-In

The reason for turn-in can help with identification (behavior) and is important to the care of the animal in the shelter. Potential adopters also want to know how the animal came to be at the agency.

#### Litters

For litters of puppies and kittens record the number, how many of each sex and their colors descriptions (by sex). Keeping track of puppies and kittens is far more onerous than tracking adults, so as much information as possible up front will reduce errors down the road. Track adoptions and euthanasia by sex and color as well to keep records straight.

Paperwork – each animal (or litter) must have an intake form/data entry for office/animal care tracking and a cage identification card that will follow that animal throughout its time in the shelter. Cage cards can be manual or automated (many shelter software programs produce a cage card for each animal). Suggested information for any cage card is: shelter intake number, date of arrival, date available for adoption, species/breed, age, sex, spay/neuter status, physical

## Humane Society - Animal Identification

description, reason for turn-in, in-shelter immunization/de-worming dates, behavioral info important to shelter workers and adopters, additional info such as known training, declawed, etc. As cage cards may be visible to potential adopters, make sure information is kept updated if there are changes in an animal's physical or behavioral condition (a dog recovered from sarcoptic mange should no longer have "mange" written on its card, previously un-socialized puppies that are now friendly should no longer have "feral" on their cage card).

Breed identification is the bane of animal control officers and sheltering agencies. And since 75-80% of most of our animals are mixed breeds, figuring out the 'mixes' can be challenging at best. Before you get too exotic with an identification keep in mind the typical dog breeds found in your geographic area. It may be tempting to call that unique looking dog or cat some rare breed, but you should be realistic as to the chances of a rare Chinese Foo Dog or a Norwegian Forest Cat showing up at your facility. Be aware of the popular breeds in your area and you will probably find a similar mix of those coming through your agency. Improper breed identification can lead to missed reunifications and disappointed adopters when the miss-identified breed's behavior does not live up to their expectations.

And when in doubt – get other opinions from fellow staff members and don't forget to add information to the animal's paperwork as your knowledge of that animal increases.