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The Case of the Purloined Pooch

Dogged effort leads to recovery of a poached papillon.

By [Bruce Goldfarb](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 12, 2011

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Magoo is safely back at his Columbia home after a month-long ordeal that ranged from Ellicott City through Lansdowne to the Brooklyn Park neighborhood of Baltimore, with the assistance of a Catonsville organization that uses tracking dogs to help locate lost and stolen animals.

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This time, Magoo didn't come back. Around a corner and out of sight, Magoo vanished.

Later that day, an unknown man called the cell phone numbers on Magoo's collar, but didn't leave a message.

Adam called the number on Caller ID. The man claimed that he had found Magoo in a parking lot by a stream in the state park, but let him go because he had to go to work.

In hindsight, people involved in Magoo's recovery think that was a lie. Instead of letting a valuable and well-maintained dog loose beside a stream, it's more likely that the man took the dog, launching an extended game of cat and mouse.

Through Ellicott City resident Denise Bretholz Harris, counselor at [Camp Bow Wow](#), a boarding facility and pet care firm in Columbia, Adam learned about [Dogs Finding Dogs](#) (DFD).

Based in Catonsville, DFD is a nonprofit organization that deploys trained tracking dogs to trace lost or stolen animals.

According to founder Anne Wills, DFD teams have recovered at least 600 animals since its creation in 2008, with a success rate of about 95 percent.

Although dogs are the most common animal to track, DFD has helped recover cats, horses, ferrets, hamsters and iguanas, Wills says.

On any given day, two or three of DFD's 11 human and dog tracking teams are out on cases. Although DFD doesn't charge for its service, it asks for a \$175 donation to cover fuel and other expenses. A fund is available for those unable to offer a donation.

"Nobody is ever turned away," Wills says. "We can always provide some help."

Once DFD is on a case, the organization see it to its conclusion. "We stick with it until the dog is recovered or the owner gives up," she says.

In nearly half of the cases, dogs are stolen. "Dogs are stolen, sold and passed around," Wills says. "It happens all the time. I am shocked how much theft goes on and how heartless people can be. It's appalling."

Adam and his girlfriend, meanwhile, were heartbroken.

"We were crushed and devastated," he says. "Every waking moment was spent doing something. We couldn't help but wonder: Would we ever get him back? Was he dead in a ditch somewhere?"

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pretty large scale.”

Wills’ dog Heidi confirmed that Magoo had been in the parking lot of the state park. Adam printed up posters and distributed them in neighborhoods where Magoo might wander. He set up motion detectors and gentle traps at the park. He set up a [Facebook page](#) to spread the word online.

On Easter weekend, Adam received another puzzling call. A woman in Lansdowne called and said she found Magoo. But while she was speaking with Adam, a neighbor interrupted and claimed that the dog belonged to her, and the woman hung up.

Heidi confirmed that Magoo had been in that Lansdowne neighborhood, so Adam distributed more posters. A kid in the neighborhood called and identified the family with the dog. Adam says he was unable to get help from Baltimore County police in recovering the dog.

Through searching public records, Wills and Adam created a family tree of the people they believed had Magoo and worked to narrow down possibilities.

The daughter of the Lansdowne resident lives in Brooklyn Park, and neighbors there reported seeing Magoo.

On April 26, Wills and Adams, along with a group of others, went to Brooklyn Park and formed a perimeter around the house where they suspected Magoo was being held.

The group flagged down a patrol car, and two Baltimore City cops went to the door to ask about Magoo.

The family denied having Magoo, but inconsistencies in their story led police to conclude that they were lying.

As the police huddled with Adam and the others on the sidewalk, giving them directions to the courthouse to file for a search warrant, a man exited the house with Magoo in his arms.

“He said, ‘Take him, just leave us alone.’” Adam says. “It was unreal. We couldn’t believe that after that amount of time we got him back.”

“It took six cops to shake these people up,” Wills says. “It was quite an ending.”

Magoo is safe and sound at home in Columbia, and won’t ever be off the leash again. “We can’t let him out of our sight,” Adam says.

Here’s what Dogs Finding Dogs recommends for owners of missing pets:

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search. Decide what you think is a fair amount. Include your telephone number.

- Put your poster up around town. Post it on street corners and in area shops. Many places like libraries and supermarkets have bulletin boards you can post it on.
- Flyers! Flyers and More Flyers! Put them up everywhere! Hand them out to everyone!
- You can post a report on the Internet with many different sites.
- Call local animal shelters to check if they have your animal. If not, ask if you can leave a description, along with your telephone number, in case your pet turns up there. Even better, go to the shelter and look for your pet.

To contact [Dogs Finding Dogs](#), visit the [website](#) or call 410-908-6374.

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Lorna D. Rudnikas

8:51am on Friday, May 13, 2011

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Great story! Happy Ending! Good lesson and information for all us who are lucky enough to have animals as part of our family.

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