

Stolen Horse!

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By Marcia King

4-23-2001

Each year, about 55,000 horses are stolen by bands of thieves who often work one area or state. Experts say the actions you take in the first 24 to 48 hours are crucial if you hope to recover your stolen animal. Robin Lohnes, executive director of the American Horse Protection Association, and Amelita F. Donald, president and founder of International Equine Recovery Net, have the vital information you need to help in the event your horse goes missing.

Steps to Take

Act Swiftly. "In a missing livestock incident, the more time that goes by after the first 24 hours, the less likely your chances are of ever seeing that animal again," says Donald. Part of knowing how quickly to move is knowing what to do beforehand. You should have documents, photographs and contact numbers up-to-date and readily available.

Escaped, Stolen or Mixed Up? Evidence of theft includes forced entry, fresh tire tracks, cut or broken fencing, missing halters or tack, open barn doors or gates, illuminated lights, missing trailers, or anything unusual in the barn or on the grounds. If your horse has escaped on its own, you may see bite, scrape or kick marks on its stall door, or spilled feed or grain.

Work With the Law. Report the theft immediately to local authorities such as the city police or the sheriff's department. Insist that authorities take a case report, even if only over the phone, including a description of your horse, noting any brands, frezemarks, scars or other markings. You may need the report later for insurance purposes, court cases, or to document to other agencies that a theft transpired. Also, get out your bill of sale, veterinary records, breed registration papers, other documentation and color photographs that will help identify your horse.

Distribute Flyers. Create flyers containing a clear photo and a description of your horse, and your day and evening phone numbers. Fax, express mail or hand deliver your flyers to slaughterhouses, rendering facilities, livestock sales and auctions, racetrack and rodeo managers, and middleman horse traders within a 500- to 600-mile radius. Also send flyers to the State Department of Agriculture (Division of Animal Services), the state veterinarian, state cattleman's association, breed association, state horse council, equine veterinarians, neighbors, and local farm or area equine newsletters. Post flyers at your local feed store and tack shop as well.

Visit Local Livestock Auctions. "Compile a list of local auction houses, especially the ones that meat buyers attend," advises Lohnes. Writes Donald in *The Equine Recovery Handbook*, "Check the parking-lot sales. Look in all trailers and holding pens. 'Hot' horses show up in the auction yards seconds before the actual sale begins."

Call Slaughterhouses. "Check in daily with the foreman," advises Donald, although she warns that a slaughter facility is more apt to look for an animal that carries identification. "If it has no identification, there is no way you can prove that any horse is your horse," she says.

Advertise. Place ads in local or regional equine papers. Sometimes leads may turn up.

Seek Professional Assistance. The International Equine Recovery Net (IERN) can spring into action as soon as they verify that a police or sheriff's report was made.

Explains Donald, "We fax broadcast to packers and auctions and, depending on their situation, to the individuals who are most likely to help with the recovery of a missing horse. We call the slaughterhouses every day. We work with the horse owner on the phone, advising them what they need to do within a 50-mile radius of their property."

Locating Your Horse. If you find your horse, inconspicuously keep it under surveillance, as the situation could be dangerous. Summon law enforcement authorities right away, and let them take care of the recovery.

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