

Facial Recognition Technology Could Save Your Lost Pet

Facial recognition technology for dogs and cats may sound far-fetched, but it's a reality now and in use in Nevada's major metro areas.

It can help you in your search to find a lost pet, it can help you safely and quickly report a stray pet you've found, and it can even help you find pets available for adoption who have a certain look you like.



By Mark Robison

The app is called Finding Rover, and you can also use [FindingRover.com](https://www.findingrover.com). Currently, about a half-million pets are registered on it.

Shyanne Schull, director of Washoe County Regional Animal Services, told me, "With the routine use of social media and other platforms, it is important to utilize technology advancements to our advantage. This innovative app is another valuable tool that our community can utilize to help reunite lost pets with their owners."

The largest shelter in the state – The Animal Foundation in Las Vegas – has also signed up to use it. If all of Nevada's shelters did, more lost pets would get back to their rightful homes.

I recently spoke with John Polimeno, the creator of Finding Rover, to learn more.

"My original concept when I started Finding Rover is that anybody with a cell phone who sees a lost pet could just click Finding Rover's app," he said.

The app has a button that generates the sound of a puppy's bark. This causes animals to look directly at the phone so you can snap a good face-forward photo.

"With that, if somebody has reported the pet lost, it'll instantly match the photo with 98% accuracy," Polimeno said. "So far, we've found over 4,000 animals already."

I was skeptical. If there was a photo array of black Labs or Maine coon cats, I would have trouble picking out my own pet.

Polimeno said he would, too, but that the algorithms behind the technology aren't looking at the overall animal but instead at about 128 specific points in the eyes, nose, ears, chin, etc.

He supports collars and microchips. "But collars fall off," he said. "With microchips, sometimes people don't register them. There are shortfalls with all technology, and there is with Finding Rover too, but the beauty is that a collar can fall off but a face can't."

To signup, download the app or go to the website and then upload a dog or cat photo. Finding Rover will continually scan for any found animals who look like that pet within a specified geographic radius and will alert you with matches, ranking them in order of similarity.



Finding Rover has evolved as other uses have been discovered.

For example, say you'd like to adopt a pet who looks like your beloved Siamese cat or pit mix. Or suppose you run a breed-specific rescue group for St. Bernards or Maltese. Finding Rover will let you know anytime similar looking animals enter a shelter.

If you find a stray animal, you'll also want to try Finding Rover. It can especially help if you don't feel safe getting too close or putting the animal in your car. Just snap a photo, upload it to the app, and if someone has reported that animal missing, the lost pet's owner will be notified.

After Polimeno began promoting the app, animal shelters contacted him. They saw the benefit of putting all the animals in their care into Finding Rover in case any match photos from owners who have lost a pet.

You might be wondering about the cost. It's free – free to report a lost pet, free to look one up, and free for shelters and rescue groups. The charitable Petco Foundation has invested in the app because it sees this technology as helping the well-being of cats and dogs across the country.

“Our goal is to get every pet in the United States in Finding Rover,” Polimeno said. “If that were the case, there would never be another lost pet because all anybody would need to do is take a picture, look it up, and there it is. It's amazing the accuracy, it's a wonderful thing.”

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