

## Lost cats caught, but travelers warn others to prepare

By LILA FUJIMOTO, Staff Writer



KAHULUI – When Maria and Larry Fischer decided to take two newly adopted cats from Maui to California, they didn't realize they would have to take the animals out of their carriers at a security checkpoint at Kahului Airport.

Phyllis Tavares of 9th Life Hawaii checks on Alex, a cat captured in the Kahului Airport parking lot after he had fled from his owners before they boarded a flight to California on June 7.

The Fischers each had a cat in hand when another passenger set off an airport metal detector June 7. “They just bolted out of our arms, they were so scared,” Maria Fischer said. “We were just devastated. I was in tears.”

While the female cat was caught by state officials and returned to the couple three days later, 9th Life Hawaii volunteers spent six nights in the airport employee parking lot before finally trapping the male cat two and a half weeks later.

“Something’s got to be done,” said Fischer, who lives part time in Kahana as well as in Los Gatos, Calif. “If they would have told us, we probably would have gone and gotten harnesses.

“I’m really concerned. I don’t want this to happen to anybody else.”

Phyllis Tavares, executive director of 9th Life Hawaii, suggested keeping cats on a tight harness that is attached to a leash and threaded through an opening of the carrier so it can be held while opening the carrier door to take the animal out.

People traveling with cats should be told ahead of time that the animals will have to be taken out of carriers so that security personnel can look at the animals as well as examine the metal carriers they’re in, Tavares said.

“It’s a simple fix for the airlines to tell people about,” she said. “It is too late by the time the person walks up to the security screener.”

The Fischers had paid \$100 each to have the two Bengal cats ride under seats in the airplane cabin. The cats, which had been roaming in their Kahana neighborhood, had spent only three days in their house before their trip back to Northern California.

While friendly with the Fischers, the cats weren’t accustomed to being restrained and caged. Maria Fischer said she still has the scar from trying to hold on to one cat at the airport.

After days went by without success in capturing the male cat, Alex, Fischer called 9th Life for help. She reached Tavares, who enlisted volunteer Alisha Jensen to help.

The two spent hours, sitting or lying on asphalt to be less obtrusive to the cat, before using a drop trap borrowed from the Feline Foundation of Maui to catch the cat June 24, Tavares said.

She said the cat, which had been seen begging for food at the airport, was “a bag of bones.” He was fed and kept for a few days at 9th Life’s no-kill cat shelter before being shipped on to the Fischers.

The shelter, in an Upcountry location, houses about 135 cats, following recent construction projects, Tavares said. She said the organization needs additional funding to do more construction for additional cats.

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