The typically bustling seaside towns along New Jersey’s barrier islands lay eerily quiet. Days earlier, Superstorm Sandy had cast out residents and made mincemeat of the dense beach communities. Homes were gouged out. Debris lay everywhere.

“I don’t think anybody expected this much devastation and flooding,” says The HSUS’s Chris Schindler.

While most residents had fled with their dogs, many had left cats and other small animals behind with food and water, thinking they’d be back in a few days. When evacuees were prohibited from returning to their homes, an onslaught of frantic calls to the governor’s emergency hotline brought a request for support.

In the days and weeks after Sandy swept through, The HSUS responded to those calls—and more. The Animal Rescue Team coordinated search and rescue in hard-hit coastal New Jersey and New York, helped open emergency shelters for displaced pets, and joined door-to-door efforts bringing pet food, supplies, and medications to those who stayed behind.

Wearing winter attire, with flashlights in hand, they searched cold, wrecked houses and temporarily took in pets from struggling owners—many of whom had weathered Sandy only to lose their homes after a second storm dumped 6 inches of snow.

In Monmouth County, field responder Jennifer Kulina-Lanese and her team set up a feeding station, stocked daily with food and water for too-quick-to-catch cats. In a doghouse the team had excavated from the rubble and set up as a shelter, four cats were later seen snuggling inside.

Back in Ocean County, rescuers responded to a backlog of calls about trapped pets. Their first day, several cats were found in a house that had floated a block from its foundation. Another cat was later saved from the rubble of a just-bulldozed home, while six more were rescued from a house that a day later disappeared down a sinkhole.

All told, rescue teams helped save cats, dogs, ferrets, hamsters, parakeets, chinchillas, snakes, rats, iguanas, and even hermit crabs. Schindler remembers finding a goldfish floating on his side in an aquarium, nearly two weeks after the storm. “Nobody thought he was alive until we saw him open his mouth.”

Back at the shelter, the goldfish swam with new fervor. And the chinchillas enjoyed a dust pile set out for their bath. “They leapt in that dust and rolled around the cage and were so excited,” Schindler says. “They were warm and had all they needed.”

LOCATIONS: Nassau County, N.Y.; Ocean and Monmouth counties, N.J.

ANIMALS ASSISTED: 257 rescued in the field

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ON THE iPAD: View multimedia coverage of the Sandy response.
Other Relief Efforts

**Search-and-rescue** and emergency sheltering efforts weren’t the only focus of responders. The HSUS also helped stock distribution centers with tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of donated pet food and supplies for individuals and shelters, from blankets and cushy beds to collars, leashes, kitty litter, and toys.

**Days before Sandy made landfall,** The HSUS’s five-person emerging media team rolled up their sleeves, posting on Facebook and tweeting information about pet-friendly accommodations up and down the East Coast. They worked closely with federal and state government agencies to ensure accurate, up-to-date details reached residents in the storm’s path. Their unique “#sandyPets” hashtag gave at least a million Twitter users immediate access to pet-related information: emergency hotline numbers, a checklist of must-haves for disaster preparedness, suggestions on how to help victims, even advice on getting dogs to relieve themselves in the rain.

**Being located in Barnstable, Mass.,** means the Cape Wildlife Center is often exposed to violent Atlantic storms. But that location also means the rehabilitation facility is perfectly situated to receive wildlife injured during those same storms. In the days following Sandy, the center—operated by The Fund for Animals in partnership with The HSUS—took in turtles, ducks, an infant gray squirrel, songbirds, and many hapless seabirds who’d been blown off course, such as two petrels and a wayward brown pelican found foraging in a landfill.