



## THE MAN WITH A PLAN

*From rescuing cranky critters from a chimney to saving feral cats from a bulldozer, The HSUS's Dave Pauli is a one-man traveling act for animals*

BY KAREN E. LANGE

**L**ife brings surprises. The second raccoon up the chimney was one of these. Lying on his side below a fireplace in a home two doors down from the Wisconsin governor's mansion, Dave Pauli reached up into the darkness. He had already used forced air to get a nesting mother raccoon up onto the roof, where he trapped her. Now he was trying to gently remove the raccoon's offspring from the smoke shelf. (He'd reunite mother and babies later.) The homeowner had invited some friends over for tea to observe. All eyes watched Pauli extend his arm into the chimney. As expected, out came the first baby. Pauli deftly placed the little guy in a plastic trash bin, then reached back. This time, though, his groping hand encountered a much larger, angrier animal—another mother raccoon. She sank her teeth between Pauli's thumb and forefinger, then tried to pull him up into the chimney.

**PAULI'S APPROACH IS "LOW, SLOW, SOFT." HE PICKED THIS UP FROM SKUNKS.**

"Is this supposed to happen?" the homeowner asked politely while the animal tugged on Pauli's arm and his head hit the bricks.

"No," he replied, as casually as he could manage.

When the raccoon finally let go and Pauli brought his hand out, blood spurted all over the white-carpeted living room (these days, following HSUS protocol, he'd be wearing gloves). Luckily, Pauli had laid down tarps. He put a makeshift bandage over the wound and, since there were still a bunch of raccoons up the chimney, continued his work—calm, sure, upbeat.

That's Pauli's professional demeanor to this day, decades later. As senior director of The HSUS's wildlife innovations and response team, he's deeply acquainted with the unexpected. Rule No. 1, he says: Don't panic.

You may find yourself, as Pauli has, in post-tsunami Sri

**On the trail** of wildlife in Montana's Centennial Valley (opposite page), Dave Pauli examines scat that's been sniffed out by a dog trained to detect bears, wolverines, fishers, and large felines. Far to the south (right), Pauli cradles a sedated macaque about to undergo a complete physical at The Fund for Animals' Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch, an HSUS affiliate. That same day he helped a kangaroo get dental work and a camel receive treatment for an abscess.

Lanka or post-Katrina Louisiana or post-earthquake Haiti, without electricity, not knowing how you are going to get your next meal or where you will sleep. In such situations, he says, it's best not to worry about anything but the present moment—and stay safe.

Pauli's approach is "low, slow, soft." He picked this up from skunks (he's rescued more than 2,000 of them). When a skunk is alarmed, she will thump her feet. Then, in preparation for spraying, she will twist her body into a horseshoe, with her face looking back at you to aim. Two glands on her backside will become erect. At that point, if you swoop in quickly or move in a threatening way, it's over.

"I learned pretty early: Get down," he says. "Then by talking softly, you can actually see them relax."

Pauli began working with animals as a country kid trapping wildlife, including the creatures who wanted to eat his family's pigeons. At age 10, his father bought him a non-lethal cage trap, and he still remembers the first creature he found inside: an ermine in a white winter coat, with a black-tipped tail. Soon he was trapping for people in the community at large, making money—ironic, since today he often spends his time trying to persuade people to use less intrusive eviction and hazing techniques instead. In the



Navy, he ended up doing rodent and insect control on an aircraft carrier. When he was in college, he spent more time following up on referrals from the local humane society than studying.

"To me, it was natural from the get-go," he says. "There's still that little boy in me saying, 'See animal, catch it, touch it.'"

After graduation, Pauli got a job as the head of animal control in Billings. A 14-day training program offered by The HSUS changed his life. Suddenly, he saw what he was doing as a career. That was more than two decades ago. This year marks 22 years with The HSUS.

He's helped move 500 prairie dogs from marginal habitat where they would have been poisoned or shot to the 18,000 federally protected acres of Thunder Basin National Grassland. And organized the rescue of 800 llamas, horses, donkeys, cows, emus, bison, camels, and other animals near starvation in Montana in the dead of winter. He's dug gopher tortoises out of burrows in Florida in advance of construction that would have buried them alive. And taught dog owners how to extricate their pets from leghold and body-crushing traps. He's helped veterinarians spay and neuter dogs and cats in an Alaska clinic with no running water. And darted wild horses with immunocontraceptives.

"This is a guy who never gets rattled ... and he's a crack shot with a dart gun



**Persuading prairie dogs** from their holes with patience and ingenuity, Pauli holds an animal who finally left his burrow after dishwashing detergent and water were poured down it. The black-tailed prairie dog was one of several hundred translocated to Wyoming's Thunder Basin National Grassland in 2010 so they wouldn't be poisoned on private lands. "You have to celebrate the little victories," Pauli says.



ON THE iPad:  
Watch Pauli in  
action as he narrates  
highlights from  
his career.

**Pauli comforts** a street dog in Haiti, where he traveled with an HSUS disaster response team after the 2010 earthquake. Much of his work is dictated by crises, whether natural emergencies or individual animals hurt by the side of the road. "It's what I'm hardwired for," he says. "I keep the Golden Rule of acting in the best interest of the critter and try to make the rest fall into place."

on top of that," says Jay Kirkpatrick, the developer of the contraceptive vaccine. "Working with him, you have no doubts."

When not in the field, Pauli's an inventor. Among his ideas: Creating "worry toys" that trapped animals can chew on when stressed so they don't injure themselves; installing tight, Plexiglas doors to prevent them from rubbing their skin bloody trying to push their way out.

Pauli visits HSUS headquarters in a suburban Maryland office park about twice a year—no more than he has to. He kids that he has ADD: He doesn't just know how to operate in chaos; he requires it.

Bearded, 6-foot-1, he often wears a bolo tie and cowboy boots, which at first raised eyebrows among his HSUS colleagues, as did his background as a trapper. But pretty soon, they understood he was just perfect, says Laura Bevan, HSUS southern regional director. She remembers having to get a bunch of feral cats off an island where the houses had just been leveled by a hurricane. The bulldozers were on their way. She and Pauli would trap all night and try to sleep during the day. And, she says, "He looked like the happiest person in the world. It doesn't matter what

he's doing, he finds joy in it."

Pauli makes people, as well as animals, relax. He greets them with a hug (and jokes). He gets those on opposite sides to talk to each other. Dave Pauli in person, or just the thought of Dave Pauli—the mere mention of his name—makes people smile.

"I want to be Dave Pauli," says Bevan, and she's only half kidding.

"He's Superman," says another colleague, one-time supervisor Melissa Seide Rubin.

Or maybe MacGyver.

"If I were going to be stranded on a desert island, there's probably no one I'd rather be with in terms of survivability," says Eric Sakach, senior law enforcement specialist for the HSUS Animal Rescue Team. "With Dave Pauli you stand not only a good chance of getting off, but probably building a nice resort while you're stranded—and it would be an animal-friendly resort."

When a dog was abandoned on an oil tanker way out in the Pacific and people were wondering how to get the animal off, The HSUS sent Pauli. He helped coordinate the ensuing rescue.

Day to day, his assignments aren't quite so dramatic. Instead, his career has been built on small, mundane interventions in the lives of thousands of animals. He says he could wonder whether he's having a big impact on the world. Or get hung up on the animals he couldn't reach in time or couldn't keep alive. But instead of wondering, he acts. And the animals saved and wisdom gained have made all the difference. ■



**Pauli rehomed** this sulcata tortoise when she grew too big for her owner, later transporting her to a more suitable climate at a Texas sanctuary.

FROM TOP: KATHY MILAN/THE HSUS; DIANE PAULI