

To the Rescue

TEXT BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON



On land and by small response boat, The HSUS's Dave Pauli helps rescue domestic ducks before the Montana lakes freeze over completely.



LOCATION: Billings, Montana

ANIMALS RESCUED: 27 ducks

It was early December and unseasonably warm. The melting ice on Lake Josephine was complicating the rescue of nearly a dozen domestic ducks: white-feathered Pekins dazzling with orange bills and feet, Indian Runners waddling penguin-like, and fat mallard-looking Rouens paddling beside their smaller wild cousins.

Timing is everything when it comes to saving these flightless birds, says The HSUS's Dave Pauli. Too early in the season and the ducks simply flap their wings and scoot across the unfrozen water in quick escape. Too late and they'll die when the lake ices over completely.

"They sit on these ponds long after the fair-weathered public stops feeding them popcorn and bread, living in small pools kept unfrozen only by their leg activity as they try to avoid dogs, foxes, and avian

predators," Pauli says.

A popular children's gift around Easter, the ducklings are often abandoned once people grow tired of caring for them. Hailing from breeds typically raised for their eggs or meat, they are unable to fly and become captives to their new environment.

Pauli has been coordinating the annual rescue of ducks from Riverfront Park for nearly two decades. Each spring, new animals mysteriously appear. Over the years, he's rescued more than 100 birds from Lake Josephine alone.

Arriving at Riverfront this time, rescuers encountered birds who appeared to be uneasy due to duck season shooting on surrounding public lands. Not wanting to scare birds into hunters' sights, they left for nearby Lake Elmo State Park.

Wearing a wet suit and grip-action boots, Pauli waded through the water with his landing net, ladling three ducks in one swoop. Volunteers Sheila McKay and Mark Hall from WJH Bird Resources caught several

by baiting them away from the water's edge and tossing a net on top. The team captured 10 domestic ducks in half a day.

Early the next morning, Pauli set live traps at Riverfront and filled them with fresh strawberries, pumpkin, and cracked corn. But while the wild ducks loved the treats, the domestics wouldn't bite. "Somehow they got the text message we were going to remove them," Pauli says with a chuckle.

Rescuers again turned to luring them onto land, with volunteer Bill Pirami scattering bait. The birds followed along trustingly. "When we rushed them, all the wild ducks took off, leaving the domestic ones behind," Pauli says.

All told, 27 were rescued. With half relocated to a sanctuary, and the rest adopted by a private land owner, they now have access to vet care, aerated ponds, predator-safe enclosures, and cozy nest boxes.

ON THE IPAD: View additional images from the rescue.

THIS PAGE: THOMAS LEEF FOR THE HSUS; OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TWO: DAVID SOKOL FOR THE HSUS; BOTTOM: KATHY MILANI/THE HSUS



NAMES: Ellen and Robbie

CASE HISTORY: Rescued with **226** other dogs and cats from a Gordon, Alabama, hoarding case

No one knew how long Ellen and Robbie had been living on the 22-acre property in rural Alabama. When HSUS responders arrived to assist the Houston County Sheriff's Department on that February day in 2011, they found Ellen alone in a beehive of pens and Robbie chained to a tree.

As responders navigated a narrow path through heaps of trash and rusty pens, they also discovered mange-infected dogs with cracked, thickened skin and open sores. Other animals suffered from fleas, untreated injuries, and swollen, weepy eyes. There was almost no dog food onsite, just stockpiles of expired hoagie rolls. Only a few pens offered water, rank with green algae.

While Robbie appeared healthy, Ellen had an ulcerated sore on her belly and wounds on her ears, possibly from clashes with other dogs. Robbie welcomed human touch, but Ellen cowered in the corner. Both were infested with heartworm, hookworm, roundworm, and tapeworm.

But their spirit to survive was strong. After receiving emergency care, they were transported from Alabama, and the two then bonded at a Maryland boarding kennel before finding their way to Second Chance Animal Shelter in East Brookfield, Mass., where they made a full recovery.

Hearing their story, Wanda Johnson immediately agreed to foster the pair at Devereux Massachusetts, a residential school for children with developmental or behavioral problems.

Johnson runs the school's animal care program, in which students feed fostered dogs and cats and keep pet areas clean and tidy. Each day, Ellen and Robbie—now formally adopted by the school—enjoy a morning roustabout in the fields, then head to the classroom where the kids groom, play with, exercise, and read to them.

Working with animals is invaluable for kids who've been in the system their whole life, says Johnson. Like the 8-year-old boy who sidles up to Robbie whenever he's having a bad day, or the 20-year old girl who'd never had a dream until envisioning a career in animal care. "The right kind of human-animal bond can create miracles."



Ellen (left, with Wanda Johnson and a student) and Robbie (right) now help brighten the lives of students in Massachusetts.

ANIMAL RESCUE UPDATES

"Malamutes love to howl,"

says The HSUS's Adam Parascandola. But a Montana property lay eerily quiet the day HSUS rescuers arrived with sheriff's deputies in October 2011 ("To the Rescue," January/February 2012). Most of the 162 malamutes were emaciated, and carcasses were also discovered. The HSUS contributed more than \$400,000 toward the rescue, care costs, and investigation, and in late 2012, breeder Mike Chilinski was convicted of 91 counts of animal cruelty and sentenced to five years in prison.

As emergency animal shelters closed in the months following Superstorm Sandy, St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center forged a plan to match pet owners still in need with foster caregivers. FosterASandyPet.org has helped dozens of pets—like the special needs parrot who would have plucked himself if separated from his rabbit and guinea pig buddies. HSUS grants of \$20,000 helped fund the program, and more than 1,000 people have signed up to help, like one Katrina survivor now fostering two displaced dogs in her New York home.

Battling an August wildfire

near Salmon, Idaho, firefighters discovered a bear cub clinging to a tree. With severely burned paws and mom nowhere to be found, Boo Boo was taken for emergency care to the Idaho Humane Society, where HSUS state director Lisa Kauffman secured funding for his treatment. Boo Boo's paws have since healed, and he's now living in a forested enclosure at Snowdon Wildlife Sanctuary. He'll be released this summer with other orphaned cubs.

▶ See the latest animal rescue videos at humanesociety.org/videos.



The HSUS's Adam Parascandola surveys the scene in Alabama, where Ellen and Robbie were rescued from a hoarding situation.