



HSUS rescuer John Sidenstricker helps a young horse during a February rescue.



LOCATION: Jefferson, Arkansas

ANIMALS RESCUED: 121 dogs, 20 horses, 18 chickens, 12 exotic birds, 9 rabbits, 3 cats, and 2 turtles

THE FACEBOOK POST advertised the teacup poodle pup so sweetly back in 2013: “Just wanted to show off a little. Shreck, male RARE SILVER CHOCOLATE will sell to right home for \$350. BED RAISED, HA HA BUT YES. BIRTH TO NOW IN MY BED ROOM.”

Little did readers know that bedroom was actually a living hell.

In late February, The HSUS helped the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office rescue more than 100 animals from the puppy mill, including Chihuahuas, German shepherds, shih tzus, Pomeranians, and Italian greyhounds. The operators, a husband-wife team, were each charged with 185 counts of animal cruelty.

In their trailer-home bedroom, where little Shreck had likely been “bed raised,” rescuers discovered trash piled high. Urine, feces, and rodent droppings littered the floor. In another trailer, they found wire cages stacked three-high, each holding several dogs. Roaches scuttled between their food and water bowls. The dogs were filthy, as excrement flowed freely from the top to bottom cages.

“The room couldn’t have been bigger than 10 feet by 10 feet, and there was no air circulation,” says The HSUS’s Tia Pope. “It was absolutely disgusting.”

Not long before the Facebook ad was posted, The HSUS had been tipped off to animal welfare concerns at the property, where horses, exotic birds, and other animals were also being sold. Residents had called the HSUS Puppy Mill Tip Line to report abuses they’d witnessed while visiting. Pope began gathering evidence for local officials and connected residents with law enforcement.

Once on the scene, rescuers found shorthaired and tiny breed dogs outside in 22-degree weather. Their doghouses were rickety crates with holes, says The HSUS’s Tara Loller, and they had no blankets for warmth. “They were burning calories by shivering, and emaciated.” One frightened poodle, curled up in his empty food dish, caught Loller’s eye. Using a slow and steady approach, she soon had him cuddling in her lap.

In an outdoor carport-like structure, several macaws and eclectus parrots were found crowded around a heat lamp the size of a small salad plate. “These exotic birds are usually kept in high heat,” Pope says. Beneath them were two turtles in a small Tupperware-like container, “basically living in bird sewage,” Loller says.

At the temporary shelters, staff treated the dogs for conditions such as extreme matting, severe dental conditions, infected eyes, and old spinal injuries. The turtles were placed in a large aquarium under a heat lamp, while the birds enjoyed themselves in plush indoor cages. “They are in there talking away and playing on the different ladders inside,” Loller says. “It’s really cute.”

LOCATION: Undisclosed

ANIMALS ASSISTED: 162 dogs

IT'S 12:45 P.M., and the shelter lights are off. Classical piano music plays softly in the background, while aromatherapy scents of lavender and cranberry mandarin drift subtly through the air. Except for the music and the sound of more than 100 dogs licking every smidgeon of peanut butter from their Nylabones, it's as quiet as an empty church.

Since last August, Daisy Balawejder and a team of HSUS staff and volunteers have been caring for the dogs, mostly pit bulls, who were seized when The HSUS helped authorities raid 13 suspected dogfighting operations in Georgia and Alabama. The immediate goal now is to ready the dogs for graduation on to rescue groups and shelters, and eventually, hopefully, a new home. Dozens have already taken those first steps.

The process, Balawejder says, isn't about rehabilitation. "They've known a dirt circle, a dog box if they're lucky, a chain, a pit, and a breeding stand." Rather, it's about learning new things: a couch, stairs, a compassionate touch—even the art of howling, picked up from the hound dogs who were found emaciated and neglected at two of the properties. It's about consistency and associating people with good things.

Afternoon naps are followed by outside time and walks. Volunteers read to shy dogs, encouraging them closer with food treats. That's how Ethel came out of her shell. She used to hide under her bed when volunteers approached. Now she lies in the front of her enclosure while they read magazines or notes from her file.

At home, Balawejder—coordinator for the HSUS Dogfighting Rescue Coalition—pores over behavioral notes, writing up new strategies to help those still struggling to integrate, like the dog who'd get overstimulated when out of his kennel. "I would just hold him in my arms," she remembers. "It's similar to pressure therapy, like you would do for a child with autism."

Within three days, Campbell was walking proudly beside volunteers—each step, another stride. At press time, he had graduated to a foster home.



Above, volunteer Linda Holman spends some time with Bodie in an exercise kennel. Below, volunteer Jenn Cherry gives the "sit" command to Meadow.



ANIMAL RESCUE UPDATES

THE CALL CAME in mid-February: Two feral peahens—the female counterparts of the peacock—were living on the second-story backporch of a Montana home. The tenants were apparently caring for the birds after finding them wandering the neighborhood.

But after a snowstorm that broke state records, The HSUS's Dave Pauli knew it was vital to get the birds someplace warm and safe from predators.

When Pauli arrived, he discovered the tenants had been feeding the mother and daughter bread and cereal from a cardboard box. Peafowl thrive on foods such as oats, corn, insects, mealworms, even birdseed and suet cakes. "They were about 25 to 35 percent underweight," Pauli says. "They were not surviving well."

It took only about 10 minutes for Pauli to capture the mom. Her young one, however, flew onto a neighbor's roof. After waiting nearly two hours for her to come down, Pauli corralled her into some bushes and flushed her into a net. He took the pair to a rehabilitation facility in Billings, where "they are finally eating good groceries and in a warm environment."

THE HSUS ANIMAL RESCUE TEAM packed a lot into one long January weekend in Alabama. First, The HSUS assisted authorities with a cockfighting raid, helping to seize roosters and cockfighting paraphernalia. Six suspects were arrested. The team then helped rescue 41 dogs from deplorable conditions at the Tuscaloosa K9 Training Academy.