THE HSUS CHALLENGES ANIMAL SACRIFICE CULTS

The Southeast Regional Office of The Humane Society of the United States and the City of Hialeah have won a major battle to ensure that animal sacrifice does not become an accepted practice in Florida.

Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth has issued a formal opinion declaring the gruesome ritual of animal sacrifice, as practiced by the Santeria cult, illegal under the state’s animal cruelty statutes. The opinion was prepared at the request of the Hialeah City Council, which is seeking to block the ritual killing of animals at the first public Santeria church in the United States. With the law on our side, the HSUS/SERO is pushing for the prosecution of all persons or groups who use live animals for ceremonial sacrifice.

Santeria blends the spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Yoruba tribe with the saints and rites of Catholicism. The two divergent beliefs were merged when slave traders tried to force Christianity on blacks being transported to the Americas from Africa. African gods became identified with Christian saints of similar characteristics; for instance, Babalu-Aye, the Yoruba god of pestilence and disease, became identified in Santeria with the Catholic Saint Lazarus, who rose from the dead.

Santeria rituals, including the sacrifice of animals, have so far been held largely in secrecy. The results of the ceremonies, however, are much more visible. Beheaded and bloodless bodies of chickens, pigeons, sheep, and goats are found on a daily basis in neighborhoods, canals, alleys and graveyards throughout South Florida.

Santeria first came to the attention of The HSUS in the late 1970’s. Our investigators and legal staff collected enough information to persuade Miami State Attorney Janet Reno to request a legal opinion from then-Attorney General Jim Smith. Smith responded with an informal letter agreeing that animal sacrifice is prohibited in Florida. The Humane Society of Greater Miami thereafter joined with local police to investigate complaints and seize evidence involving ritual sacrifice. The cases were referred to Reno’s office. Regardless, the state attorney never pursued the cases by prosecuting Santeria followers for the alleged crimes.

The cult’s membership in the Miami area received a boost in 1980 when the (continued on page 2)
For a few weeks, the City of Hialeah has been in the midst of a battle with a bloody cult whose practices clash with our modern society and civil rights. We are concerned over the health and appearance of the debilitated appearance of their animals. In the case of cockfighting, we have seen the pit bull known as the pit bull terrier. It is a breed that has been around for some time, but is now becoming more popular as a family pet. However, the pit bull has received a bad reputation due to its aggressive nature. While they may seem friendly and docile, pit bulls can be unpredictable and dangerous when provoked or when protecting their territory.

The action by Butterworth is a major step in the battle against Santeria and animal cruelty. We will continue to fight for animal rights and the protection of the animals. It is important to remember that the animals are innocent and deserve our respect and care. We hope that this action will lead to a decrease in the number of animal abuse cases and a greater awareness of the importance of animal protection.

Director's Comment

Marc Paulhus, director of the Animal Welfare Division, stated: "We are pleased with the recent action taken by the Attorney General. It is a significant step forward in our efforts to stop cruelty to animals. We will continue to work with the city to ensure the safety and well-being of the animals."
cannot be adopted out because of their inbred aggressiveness. They present a problem when being held in custody because they have to be housed in separate cages to keep them from attacking one another. Those euthanized must be incinerated or buried deep in the ground because many cockfighters feed their birds strychnine, believing it will give them added stamina in the pit. The presence of poison in the birds makes them unsuitable for consumption by man or animal.

GBI agent White says the current difficulty in battling cockfighting is the lack of strict laws prohibiting it. White contends it can be hard to justify the time, manpower, and expense of a cockfighting investigation when only a misdemeanor crime is involved. He will support any legislative action to upgrade cockfighting to a felony in Georgia.

The SERO has worked with the GBI in the past and ranks the organization as the most professional state agency in this region, with the strongest commitment to eliminating illegal animal-fighting activities. Cockfighting is prevalent throughout the Southeast, but few law enforcement agencies in these states have made a concerted effort to ferret out clandestine blood sports and prosecute violators to the fullest extent of the law.

Hats off to the Georgia Bureau of Investigations!

These three-inch surgical steel gaffs are instruments of death in the cockfighting ring.

Invitations:

Please join us in the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's fight to eliminate cockfighting. Our purpose is to educate the public about the dangers of this illegal blood sport and encourage support and cooperation in its eradication.

Get involved! By making a commitment to combat cockfighting, you can help to decrease the number of animals euthanized in animal shelters. From January 1st to March 31st, every cockfighting case will be handled to its fullest extent. Join us in our mission to end this illegal and inhumane sport.

The GBI, working with the GRI, invites all to participate in this important campaign to stop animal suffering. You can help by obtaining PAL posters and distributing them in schools, libraries, public halls, grocery stores, or anywhere else they may be displayed. 

Prevent a Litter, you too can be a PAL!
WILD CAUGHT BIRDS
(continued from front page)

tality rate than legally imported birds. Often they are drugged with substances like tranquilizers or even tequila, and trussed up to prevent noise or movement. If the birds accidentally breathe in tequila and even a small amount enters their airsacs, they can drown. The tapping of the beak, wings and feet can lead to fatal injuries and more often, to suffocation. Birds smuggled into this country from Mexico are found in tire wells, luggage, clothing and food containers. Entire shipments, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, may be dead on arrival. It is impossible to pin down a reliable estimate of smuggled bird numbers, but government sources concede that fewer than ten percent of smuggled birds are detected by authorities.

Smuggled birds that are found and confiscated and all legally imported birds also have to withstand the rigors of quarantine stations. They are confined there for thirty days under conditions that range from acceptable to deplorable—depending on who owns and maintains the quarantine facility. During a recent inspection tour of quarantine stations along the Texas-Mexico border, SERO Director Marc Paulhus discovered clean conditions and relatively knowledgeable personnel at the USDA-operated facility in Mission, Texas. Such was not the case at a privately owned bird quarantine station in another Texas border town. There, more than fifteen hundred birds, mostly un­fledged babies, were kept in three small rooms. As many as thirty birds were caged together in unsanitary conditions with only one perch per cage. One of the workers removed dead birds from among the cages, cradling more than a dozen in her arms until a trash receptacle could be located.

Sadly, bird quarantine stations are absolutely essential to safeguard the public health and safety. The imported birds must be observed and checked for diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease which can devastate poultry populations. From 1971 to 1973, one infected parrot caused outbreaks of Newcastle in California that required the destruction of 12 million chickens, at a cost to taxpayers of 56 million dollars. Wild birds can also transmit to humans such diseases as tuberculosis, psittacosis and salmonella.

All too frequently wild birds develop stress-related disorders from the unnatural conditions they are forced to live under after capture and sale. Some birds become so neurotic they begin to mutilate themselves by plucking their feathers, or in some cases, biting their own toes. Others destroy furniture, screech continuously, bite people or refuse to tame down, often leading to a succession of owners. Birds who normally have long life spans in the wild may only survive months or a few years in captivity. Many premature deaths are the result of nutritional disorders caused by an unchanging and inadequate seed diet.

The inherent abuse and cruelty of the wild bird trade has not gone unnoticed by the international community. Most countries, including the U.S., do not allow the capture and sale of their own native birds. More than half of the countries in Latin America now prohibit wildlife exports. Mexico stopped issuing export permits several years ago, though it continues to be a major source of smuggled birds. Australia considers some of its cockatoo species to be agricultural pests and allows limited killing of the birds, but the country refuses to allow them to be exported. It believes the pet trade is far more destructive and inhumane.

Only seven countries provide 65 percent of the bird exports to the United States, with Senegal accounting for 35 percent of the total number. Belgium and Argentina are the next largest exporters to this country, but their trade includes wild birds sometimes taken illegally from countries where they are protected. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) voted in 1976 to encourage all countries to ban the capture of wild animals for the commercial pet trade. Closer to home, New York State already bans the sale of all wild-caught birds as pets. Bird breeders are regulated and only captive-bred birds identified by leg bands may be sold.

Despite the cruelties of the wild bird trade, a U.S. import ban faces heavy opposition. The pet industry, breeders and exporters all have a powerful economic interest in keeping the status quo. The total retail bird industry rang up gross sales of 229 million dollars in 1984. From exporter to final seller, those involved receive profits of 60 percent at every level. Though millions of birds die, overshipping and high prices guarantee a profit. Only a total bird importation ban would break this cycle of cruelty for profit.

There are enough breeders now to fill the need for all appropriate pet bird species. Birds bred in captivity are healthier, friendlier and more compatible as pets than their wild counterparts. Every purchase of a wild-caught bird contributes to the problem and ensures that the wild-bird trade and all its cruelties will continue and flourish. Every wild-caught bird confined now to a cage, should remind us that it once had the world under its wings and the sky as its only limit.
**Around the Region**

**ALABAMA**—Humane organizations lost their bid to strengthen Alabama’s animal cruelty laws but are making plans to reintroduce the legislation next year. The bill would increase the maximum sentence that could be imposed on persons convicted of cruelty to animals and give police officers broader discretion to seize an animal that has been neglected or abused.

**FLORIDA**—The HSUS/SERO was effective in strengthening current animal-protection and control laws this past legislative session, while effectively blocking an attempt to weaken “The Animal Fighting Act”. A seemingly harmless amendment to the law proposed by State Representative Arnhilda Gonzalez-Quevedo of Coral Gables would have made cockfighting legal once again in Florida. Fortunately, our opposition helped defeat the bill in committee.

State law will now give humane societies and animal-control agencies greater flexibility to investigate cruelty and neglect cases. Florida Statute 828.073, a civil law which authorizes the seizure of mistreated animals, was amended to permit investigating agencies to present additional testimony and evidence relating to a defendant’s fitness to own animals. The new law also provides for the courts to order payment by the owner for the costs of caring for any animals seized pending a hearing or trial.

**GEORGIA**—The first statewide organization of humane societies, animal-control agencies and animal-rights groups has been created. The Georgia Coalition for Animal Protection will provide training for shelter personnel and technical assistance to local groups and individuals on animal-related issues. Assistance will be available for those conducting animal-cruelty investigations throughout the state. SERO is working with the Coalition and State Representative Chesley Morton to introduce a bill promoting sodium pentobarbital, or its derivatives, as the preferred method of euthanasia at animal shelter facilities. The proposal specifically outlaws such atrocities as death by poison, gunshot, or electrocution.

The city of Waycross is taking steps to improve its animal-control program. Waycross, once known for electrocuting its unwanted animals, has now agreed to turn over the operation of its shelter to a newly formed humane society. The group plans on remodeling the facility and expanding its programs to better serve the community.

**SOUTH CAROLINA**—Florence police have made the first arrests for dogfighting under the state’s new felony law. Law enforcement and local humane society officials raided a fight and confiscated five adult and six young pit bull dogs. Six people attending the fight have been charged with animal fighting and baiting, which carries a maximum penalty of a five thousand dollar fine and/or five years in jail.

The Florence animal shelter and persons involved in the raid are facing harassment from dogfighting supporters in the area. The shelter has been broken into and vandalized several times. These intimidation ploys have not shaken the resolve of police and shelter officials who are standing firm in their efforts to abolish the blood sport from South Carolina.

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**Welcome Aboard**

We are pleased to introduce two new additions to our staff.

Andrea Mitchell has joined us in the position of Secretary/Receptionist. Her responsibilities include a multitude of office and membership service functions.

Laura Bevan has filled the position of Program Coordinator. Her assignments will include legislative activities, program implementation, publicity and public relations.

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**Director’s Comment (continued)**

The HSUS has been working to put the issue in proper perspective. I have stressed to the national media, on programs such as ABC’s NIGHTLINE, and to state and local government entities that the solution is not to ban the ownership of pit bull terriers, but to wage all-out war on dogfighters and others who breed or harbor any dog that has shown dangerous or vicious propensities. Strong anti-dogfighting laws already exist in all southeastern states, but they have not been effectively enforced. Local animal-control agencies need better ordinances which enable dangerous animals to be identified and their owners made responsible for the actions of their pets.