Live-Pigeon Shoot Sparks Protest in Illinois

The shooting of live pigeons at what are known as “flier shoots” seems to be gaining popularity in the North Central region. After being trapped at grain elevators and other locations, such birds are held captive in small enclosures for days, then released as “sportsmen” try to kill them with shotguns.

Although many states outlaw such events, Illinois and Minnesota do not. NCRO Director Frantz Dantzler recently attended a protest held at the scene of a flier shoot near Canton, Illinois. Only a few birds escaped unharmed.

In an opinion that The HSUS had requested in an effort to have the event canceled, the Illinois attorney general’s office stated that the shoot could be held because the conservation department had issued a permit for it. A bill outlawing flier shoots had been introduced by State Rep. John Matijevich.

Unfortunately, the measure died in committee.

More than 100 gunners had been expected to take part in a similar event held in Minnesota, but only about 20 showed up. Clearly, the negative publicity generated by the Illinois flier shoot was a factor in keeping people away.

According to Dantzler, investigation has found some shoots that have gone on, often in secret, for decades. “The organizers of some of these shoots know . . . that much of the population sees . . . gunning down captured birds as cowardly and despicable, and they prefer to keep clear of public scrutiny.

“Fourteen states have specifically outlawed this spectacle,” said Dantzler. “It is time for other states to do the same.”

Improving Lota’s Lot in Milwaukee

Sometimes the struggle to help an individual animal can be prolonged, frustrating, and painful. This can be especially true when the solution to the animal’s dilemma requires that those trying to help must jump through bureaucratic hoops and rely on the often reluctant cooperation of uninterested government officials.

Such has been the case with Lota, a forty-year-old Asian elephant that spent thirty-six years of her life at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Late last year, Lota was abruptly removed from her longtime home and transferred to the facilities of the Hawthorne Corporation, an Illinois business that trains elephants for circuses and traveling animal acts.

Lota’s case aroused national attention and outrage when television viewers saw a videotape of the elephant’s traumatic move. The tape showed an obviously petrified Lota being handled roughly in an attempt to load her like so much cargo on a truck. At one point, she fell and was clearly continued on page 2.
Lota’s Lot
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unable to get up, but that didn’t stop her handlers from continuing to shout at her and beat her.

The HSUS, with other organizations and individuals, urged Milwaukee County District Attorney E. Michael McCann to file cruelty charges against those who caused Lota’s pain and terror. Recently, however, McCann declared that no such charges would be filed in the case.

Despite that setback, concerned parties, including The HSUS, are still trying to find a way to rescue Lota. Some Milwaukee County Supervisors have taken the position that since Lota was county property, it was illegal for the zoo to give her away to begin with. The Wisconsin Animal Protection Society is spearheading a public-education campaign to make the zoo more accountable for its actions. Several national groups are attempting to block any permits that would allow the elephant to be moved to a circus or other attraction.

The HSUS believes it may be possible to invalidate Lota’s transfer from the zoo to Hawthorne through legal action under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

That legislation, passed in 1973, was designed as the country’s primary safeguard for endangered animals. The ESA has often been misinterpreted, bypassed, and ignored, however. We believe the time is long past to reexamine the original intentions of Congress in passing the ESA and to demand its proper enforcement.

One goal of Congress in passing the ESA was to end the commercial exploitation of endangered species, including animals in circumstances similar to those in which Lota found herself. What could be more commercially exploitative than to force Lota to give rides to customers or perform tricks in a circus? This is surely the kind of exploitation the ESA was framed to prevent.

Unfortunately, federal officials too readily grant permits to possess or use endangered species on the basis of ritualistic assertions in the applications that the animals will be used “to enhance the propagation of the species” or for educational purposes. As a result, instead of being protected, helpless animals are imprisoned and made to perform for profit.

The ESA was not written for the benefit of circuses, resort hotels, or entertainers. As long as circuses, zoos, and exotic-animal dealers are allowed to redefine the ESA to serve their own interests, the animals, including the Lotas of the world, will continue to be the losers.

**Television celebrity Bob Barker (center) is one of 200 protesters who demonstrated against the treatment of Lota by the Milwaukee County Zoo.**

By Frantz Dantzler

**Law-Enforcement Training Available to Humane Societies**

Training law-enforcement personnel and investigators is one of the services available to local humane societies in the North Central region. One such training session was held July 16, 1991, at Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville, Wisconsin. Thirty-five area law-enforcement and humane officers attended. Some may have never before had an opportunity to view tapes of dogfights and cockfights.

“These workshops can be pretty graphic. We have actual video of animal combat. However, videotape is one of the more effective teaching tools we have. It is very important for law-enforcement personnel to embark on an investigation and understand exactly the nature of the crime they are dealing with,” said Frantz Dantzler.

“I introduced sessions such as the one at Janesville allow us to share our knowledge with those best able to implement it.”

**“Goldfish Grab” Sinks under Protest by Local Citizens**

For years, the Franklin Park (Illinois) Park District has celebrated the Fourth of July by stocking a public swimming pool with goldfish and inviting young children into the pool to grab the fish.

When citizens asked the NCRO to file a protest against this activity, Frantz Dantzler did so. He suggested to Franklin Park officials that the goldfish grab involved the “needless exploitation, injury, and death of living creatures” and “sent the wrong message to children.”

Over the objections of the park district director, the park’s board agreed to cancel the event.

“It’s a perfect example of the positive effect that local citizens can have [in stopping] exploitative events,” said Dantzler.

**“Saturday Night Live” star Kevin Nealon comforts Lota the elephant last January after her arrival at the Hawthorne Corporation.**

Kevin Nealon (right) and Bob Czaplewski, the zookeeper who alerted the media to Lota’s fate, protest on her behalf.

**DIRECTOR’S COMMENT**

By Frantz Dantzler

My work in the animal-protection field began in animal shelters. It was a long time ago and things were difficult—more difficult in many ways than they are now. My goal was to change animal-protection awareness, of course, foremost in our minds, but so was money, which was always in short supply. Even a decade ago, public awareness and sympathy for animal issues was much harder to find than it is now. It seemed as though we were always in a meeting (that still hasn’t changed)—meetings on how to increase the size of the shelter or whether we had enough money to buy light bulbs!

Animal-care and –handling equipment, for the most part, was homemade or adapted to the needs of specific circumstances. Oftentimes, the right equipment for the job simply didn’t exist for any price.

Seminars helped. It was such a relief to meet other people who were struggling with similar problems. We all learned from one another. Occasionally we even had a really “brilliant” idea or adaptation to share. Dedicated animal-shelter professionals have never lacked innovation and creativity, but back then, there were few adapted or home-built products that were effective for our needs were rare and those that existed were also in short supply.

Fortunately, times have changed. Animal care and handling are subjects that finally have the attention of manufacturing and service industries. Computer software, cleaning tools, professional advice about building designs—all are available. In fact, there are so many products in the marketplace that it’s difficult to keep track of them all.

Help is on the way in the form of Animal Care Expo ’92 (see the announcement in this issue). We have invited manufacturers and other vendors to display their wares in an atmosphere that will promote an exchange of ideas and information. You’ll be able to learn firsthand from the manufacturer or supplier just how a product will work and why it may, or may not, be the item for you. The Expo will continue for a full four days, giving everyone ample time to check out all the exhibits and meet other shelter professionals.

I hope North Central region animal-protection professionals and volunteers will reserve February 2-5, 1992, and attend this special show for animal people.
Minneapolis—H.F. 366, known as the spay-and-neuter bill, and companion bill S.F. 581 attracted regional and national attention during the past legislative session. The measure called for the placement of a 1 percent tax on dog and cat food to fund a state-wide program to combat pet overpopulation. Monies from the fund would be used for education and public-awareness campaigns designed to reduce the number of surplus animals in the state. A major chunk of the money would be used to offset spay/neuter costs by providing a voucher system for payments to veterinarians. The bill incorporated the findings of a study committee that had concluded that the measure would significantly reduce the burden on taxpayers by reducing the pet-overpopulation problem and animal-control costs. Both bills passed the general legislative committees in the state House and Senate, but the session came to an end before the bills could be heard by the tax committee. Not unexpectedly, the bills were opposed by pet-food producers. One comment from the pet-food industry was that, because pet-food buyers were already responsible pet owners, they shouldn’t be taxed further. We expect the bill to be reintroduced next session.

Minnesota legislators recently passed H.F. 179, which prohibits the use of live animals as lures in greyhound training or racing.

S.F. 355 allowed shelters holding seized animals while awaiting court decisions involving those animals to dispose of the animals unless the owner provides a security bond ensuring that the shelter expenditures for care will be repaid. The bill was passed.

North Dakota—S.B. 2481, which gave law-enforcement agencies the authority forcibly to enter an unattended vehicle to remove dogs or cats that might be in danger from adverse weather or other life-threatening conditions, was passed.

H.B. 1338, a bill making it illegal to break into, photograph, or videotape research facilities, was passed.

South Dakota—H.B. 1266, repealing the state’s pound seizure law, was passed. Public animal shelters are no longer required to surrender animals for medical research. Under the old law, research institutions needed only a $10 annual license from the state health department to obtain animals that had been held for more than five days.