Dogs Clubbed to Death at Missouri Animal Shelter

Recently, a horrifying program of animal destruction was discovered at the Macon, Missouri, city animal shelter. The sole animal-control officer admitted that within a year he had clubbed at least eighty dogs to death. He said that he considered the method the only “humane” way he could keep up with the increasing number of dogs that he had to destroy. The dogs had been buried in a grave behind the shelter.

The clubbing had gone undetected until two Macon residents discovered a dog still alive, although severely injured, in the grave.

They called the police. Capt. Norman Hewitt found the live dog and videotaped the scene for evidentiary purposes. He then shot the dog to end its suffering.

Reportedly, the animal-control officer had believed the dog to be dead when he buried it.

Mayor Dale Whitley called a special meeting of the Macon City Council at which officials ordered that the clubbings be halted. Agreement was also reached with a nearby city to house and euthanatize Macon’s stray animals in the future. Mayor Whitley said that the ultimate responsibility for the animal-control officer’s actions rested with the council because he had neither been trained nor given guidelines on how to dispose of unwanted animals.

MWRO Director Wendell E. Maddox had been alerted to the problems in Macon by an HSUS member. Maddox then interviewed the animal-control officer involved.

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An animal-control officer buried stray dogs in this shallow grave; he said he thought clubbing was the most humane way to deal with the town’s stray-dog problem.
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and later met with the Macon City Council in a session also attended by Norma McMullen, president of People for Animal Rights. Maddox reported to council members his earlier discussion with the officer. During the course of that conversation, Maddox said, the officer had been unable to produce a copy of the city animal-control ordinances or name his immediate supervisor. When he had asked the officer why he had clubbed the dogs to death, the officer had responded that he believed that the shelter dogs had parvovirus and thought that point to a broader and more basic problem—an absence of commitment among city officials to reevaluate their animal-control program. Maddox added that the practice of pound seizures is a betrayal of the public trust, because people believe that animals trusted to shelters will be reunited with their owners, adopted into new homes, or humanely euthanatized.

Not only is there a significant demand for these animals by the research community, which views shelters as little more than warehouses for research candidates, but there are also great financial rewards for those who sell used animals to breeders or dog and cat dealers. Maddox advised officials that the Kansas City Animal Control Department would be willing to provide appropriate officer training. The MWRO will continue to work for permanent changes in Macon.

In May, HSUS President John A. Hoyt was a featured speaker at the annual meeting of The Missouri League for Humane Progress, cosponsored by the Animal Protective Association, the St. Louis Animal Rights Team, and The HSUS. Approximately 100 people attended the gathering in St. Louis.

Hoyt stated that the pet-overpopulation problem is “the number-one challenge facing the animal-protection movement today.” He described a new HSUS campaign designed to enlist the support of potential pet owners by encouraging them to adopt companion animals from shelters. The campaign’s message is simple: “Until there are none, adopt one.”

Hoyt noted that in the past few years consumers have become a powerful force for change, whether they are influencing tuna companies to switch to dolphin-safe products or refusing to purchase fur coats or products made from ivory. Now, Hoyt added, The HSUS is urging consumers to make that same commitment to reduce—through adoption—the numbers of animals destroyed in shelters. He said, “We are calling upon the public to acquire pets from those sources now having to put them to death—the humane societies and animal-control facilities throughout the country.

Hoyt continued, “It is a travesty that healthy dogs and cats are killed in shelters when it is both possible and feasible that it no longer be necessary, and it is a disgrace that some are obliged to serve as executioners while others continue to fill the shelters.”

The new campaign adds another dimension to The HSUS’s longstanding efforts to combat pet overpopulation. The HSUS has addressed the issue through its popular “Prevent A Litter” campaign and a variety of materials dealing with pet-owner responsibility.

Grace Korsan Honored

Grace Korsan, president of The Missouri League for Humane Progress, was honored at the organization’s annual meeting for her decades of commitment to the welfare of animals. Korsan is also the former secretary of The HSUS board of directors.

She received awards from both The HSUS and the Missouri humane community.

In this issue, you’ll read about the actions of an animal-control officer whose definition of “humane euthanasia” was clubbing dogs and puppies to death. The Macon case may not be an isolated one. If the case can serve any purpose, it may be to point to a broader and more basic problem—a lack of commitment to animal protection in our society, on the part even of those who have been given the responsibility to serve as animals’ protectors.

The mayor of Macon acknowledged his responsibility and the city council’s responsibility for this particular tragedy. But mayors, city council members, and animal-control departments everywhere have to understand that animal control and the commitment of animal shelters have to have a higher priority than any other vital city service.

As news of the Macon dog clubbings reached other parts of the country, the MWRO received phone calls and letters from concerned people who wanted to know what they could do to help. We can suggest two things.

If you wish to express your concern about the Macon case and urge officials in that city to take action to prevent further incidents, write to Mayor Dale Whitley, City Hall, 121 West Bourke, Macon, MO 63552, or David Masters, Macon County Pound, PO Box 338, Macon, MO 63552.

We urge you to take an active interest in animal welfare in your own community. Get a copy of your local ordinance, find out about the policies and procedures in effect at your animal-control facility, and assure yourself that animals are destroyed humanely.

If you don’t like what you find out about your animal-control laws and operations, do something about it. Let local officials know you don’t want the status quo to continue, and assure yourself that animals in your community are assured of protection and humane care.

MWRO Regional Director Wendell Maddox and HSUS President John A. Hoyt attend the annual meeting of the Missouri League for Humane Progress; Hoyt announced the creation of the HSUS “Adopt One” campaign.

SYMPOSIUM

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In May, pounds seized animals from 90 shelters in 30 states. We believe there is a need for community assistance to ensure that animals are cared for properly after seizure. The MWRO has been working to develop educational and training programs for animal-control facilities throughout the country.

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HSUS Announces New Adoption Campaign at St. Louis Gathering

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As the legislative sessions come to a close in our region, we can point to both successes and disappointments for the animal-protection community.

Kansas passed and signed into law S.B. 443, the primary objective of which is to increase the animal health department’s budget, through new and revised fees, in order to provide a more effective inspection and enforcement program for puppy mills and other animal-care facilities. Other provisions are intended to enhance the department’s ability to prosecute violators.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship revised the state’s code governing the care of animals in commercial establishments. The secretary of the department will now have the discretion to seize and impound animals based on an assessment of their health status and the adequacy of their care. Any history of noncompliance with regulations and/or unwillingness to take corrective measures on the part of the operator may also be considered justification for closing a facility. Finally, facilities that breed or house dogs, cats, rabbits, rodents, nonhuman primates, fish, or birds now qualify as commercial breeding facilities.

In Nebraska, State Sen. Merton L. Dierks’ L.B. 282, which would have provided for state licensing and inspection of pet breeders, was passed out of the agriculture committee but didn’t reach the full Senate. However, a successful Senate resolution to conduct an interim study of Nebraska puppy mills will keep the bill alive until the next session.

In Missouri, four bills pertaining to animal breeders failed and will have to be reintroduced in the next session.

The final status of other bills in the four state legislatures is summarized here:

- **MISSOURI**—S.B. 116, S.B. and H.B. 44. To create felony penalties for cockfighting. All defeated. Cockfighting remains legal.

- **H.B. 152. To legalize pari-mutuel dog racing. Defeated.**

- **NEBRASKA**—L.B. 191. To establish criminal penalties for those convicted of harassing hunters. Carried over to next session.

- **L.B. 312. To protect farm-animal and research facilities from terrorist activities. Carried over to next session.**

- **IOWA**—S.F. 167. To create a statewide low-cost spay/neuter program for low- or fixed-income pet owners. Defeated.

- **KANSAS**—S.B. 78. To transfer responsibility for licensing and inspection of animal-breeding facilities and animal shelters from Livestock Commission to Department of Health and Environment. Defeated.

- **S.B. 175. To exempt dog- and cat-breeding facilities from the Farm Animal and Research Facility Protection Act. (That law, passed in 1990, made it a felony to enter, photograph, or videotape a dog- or cat-breeding facility without permission from the owner and made it difficult, if not impossible, to investigate puppy mills.) Carried over to next session.**

- **H.B. 2281 and H.B. 2522. To abolish the existing requirement that animal-breeding facilities licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture also be licensed by the state and instead require only that they register with the state. H.B. 2522, defeated; H.B. 2281, carried over to next session.**

- **H.B. 2514. To remove responsibility for licensing and inspecting animal-breeding facilities from the Livestock Commission and assign it to a new commission created for that purpose; also to amend the Animal Dealers Act to provide broader enforcement powers. Enforcement provisions amended to S.B. 443 and signed into law; other provisions defeated.**

Reflect for a moment . . .

**HOW CAN I HELP ANIMALS EVEN WHEN I NO LONGER SHARE THEIR WORLD?**

By your bequest for animal protection to The Humane Society of the United States, your will can provide for animals after you’re gone. Naming The HSUS demonstrates your lasting commitment to animal welfare and strengthens the society for this task. We will be happy to send information about our animal programs and material that will assist you in planning a will.

**Please send will information to:**

| Name ____________________________ |
| Address ___________________________ |
| City ____________________________ State ____ Zip code _______ |

Mail in confidence to Murdaugh S. Madden, Vice President/Senior Counsel, The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037.