Showdown at the OK Corral

April 17, 2004, was a new day for decency in Oklahoma, and helped bring about passage of the state’s new felony anti-cockfighting law.

Earlier that week, our office had received a tip that there was going to be an illegal cockfight at the Hilltop Cultural Center in Cotton County, Oklahoma, just north of the Texas-Oklahoma border near Wichita Falls, Texas. The promoters of the event wanted to challenge the new felony cockfighting law in the state by hosting a cockfight to intentionally violate the new law so they could be arrested and test it in court.

Jay Sabatucci, SWRO regional coordinator, went to Oklahoma to assist the county sheriff’s office. Sheriff Paul Jeffery was well prepared, with close to 30 deputies and reservists. Since it is now a federal crime to transport poultry across state lines for the purpose of fighting, the U.S. Department of Agriculture also sent agents from its Inspector General’s Office to arrest anyone transporting birds from Texas. Thanks to Sheriff Jeffery, the USDA, and The HSUS, the cockfight that day was cancelled and no roosters were maimed or continued on page 2.

Humane and law enforcement agents wait at the location of an Oklahoma cockfight that was cancelled thanks to their intervention.

SWRO Assists in Largest Dogfighting Raid in OK History

Early on the morning of May 25th, suspected dogfighters woke up to find police entry teams at their front doors, as various state and local law enforcement agencies culminated an 18-month investigation in simultaneous dogfighting raids throughout eastern Oklahoma. Twenty-two people were arrested, including a former NFL player who allegedly had participated in dogfighting all over the United States. In addition to the dogs and dogfighting paraphernalia, teams also found illegal weapons and drugs. The court cases are pending.

Jay Sabatucci, SWRO regional coordinator, assisted in Tecumseh, helping officers collect evidence and providing information to streamline the investigation. Agents seized more than 40 alleged fighting dogs. The dogs were found living within eight-foot dirt circles in the dogfighter’s backyard, tethered by heavy logging chains to stakes in the ground. Some had no water, and many showed horrific injuries, allegedly from the fighting pit. Holes were discovered on the property where dead or dying dogs had been thrown to rot.

The police seized several treadmills. Fighting dogs are often made to run on these treadmills to the point of exhaustion, increasing their stamina in the pit. Police also found a “jenny,” which is similar to a horse-walker. Fighting dogs are often chained to the jenny and forced to run in a circle to build strength. A “sled” was found at another location. The dogs are often tied to a heavy load of weights and forced to pull the load along rails.

At a location near Wetumka, agents discovered a full-sized fighting pit. The blood on the walls and carpeted floor of the pit told the sad tale of the many poor creatures forced to fight for the amusement of the crowd. When asked by reporters about the scene, Mr. Sabatucci replied, “It’s good to see people who treat animals this way going to jail.”

Oklahoma City Animal Control staff, who spent the day at the various sites collecting the dogs for the police, transported the animals to their shelter. Theirs was a somber procession as they led the animals to be photographed, and then loaded them onto trucks for transport to the shelter. Most of the more than 100 dogs seized had to be euthanized because they were not adoptable.

Dogfighting is a felony in Oklahoma, and most other states in the country, and is illegal in all 50 states. You can help stop dogfighting by reporting it to your local police or sheriff’s office. Dogfighting is a crime, and must be investigated by law enforcement. The HSUS offers assistance and training to help officers become better at investigating dogfighting. For more information, contact our office. continued to sidebar on page 2.
Cats Safer in Dallas/Fort Worth

The Safe Cats campaign—a new HSUS program that educates cat owners about the fact that cats are safer, live longer, and are healthier and happier when kept indoors—launched in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex this past spring. The presentation of the Safe Cats campaign was a great success!

SWRO received proclamations from mayors declaring Safe Cats Weeks in 17 cities in north central Texas. The support from the city councils in each of these cities proves that these communities care not only for the well-being of its pets, but also for that of its feline citizens.

Following in the footsteps of their mayors, a number of area municipal animal shelters, humane organizations, and libraries also agreed to promote this important message by distributing Safe Cats materials to their many clients. This joint effort ensured that thousands of people hoping to adopt a cat from Dallas/Fort Worth shelters received the Safe Cats message and learned about the importance of keeping their beloved pets safely in their homes.

In addition to receiving the support of local cities and shelters, the Safe Cats campaign was featured in a “Dallas Morning News” article by animal-friendly columnist Larry Powell. A popular morning radio personality for 99.5 The Wolf FM in Dallas recorded a Safe Cats public service announcement that repeatedly played this important message.

SWRO hopes to find a change in attitude and behavior after cat owners have been exposed to the Safe Cats message. The Safe Cats program is a permanent project of our office, which hopes to promote the campaign in additional cities within the region. But one question remains: How can you help promote the campaign? You can assist by encouraging others to keep their cats indoors—or safely confined when outdoors—and spread the word about the benefits of having indoor-only cats. For more information, please contact our office, or visit the Safe Cats Web site at www.safecats.org.

SWRO Staffer Goes the Extra Mile for Montana Breeding Dogs

The HSUS Northern Rockies Regional Office (NRRO) in Bozeman, Montana, had gotten calls for more than two years from pet owners who had purchased very ill puppies from a rural Montana breeder. Until this past summer, however, the office could not pinpoint the location of this particular breeder. After responding to a request from the Judith Basin County Sheriff’s Office, NRRO finally discovered where the animals came from when its staff aided in the confiscation of more than 100 dogs from two rural Montana locations.

A veterinarian present at the time described each of the dogs as living in inhumane conditions. Many of the dogs suffered from malnutrition, tooth rot, and various eye diseases. The dogs had no access to fresh food or water. There were even two dogs whom a judge ruled to be immediately housed because their coats were so overgrown and matted that rescuers could not determine which ends were the dogs’ heads.

After helping to seize these animals, NRRO asked for help from SWRO to manage the temporary animal shelter set up to house the animals, who were now held as evidence in the case against their owners. SWRO’s Program Coordinator Melissa Deloach flew to Montana the next morning. Upon her arrival, she found 70 dogs at the temporary shelter. The breeds represented included pooodles, spaniels, collies, German shepherds, chows, and St. Bernards. To name a few. The dogs had been receiving fresh food and water, veterinary care, and love and attention from a volunteers for a couple of weeks, and their condition was much improved.

In addition to managing the daily operation of the shelter, Deloach oversaw the rehabilitation of all the animals. She arranged for those who were completely unadoptable slowly became accepting of volunteers who came to feed and play with them. She saw a blind cocker spaniel adapt overnight to his new clean and warm environment. But the most important lesson she learned was just how little time it takes for animals to thrive and to trust again under the proper conditions.

Up until mid-September, the dogs were still being housed at the temporary shelter. The case then took some negative turns when the two defendants who owned most of the dogs had their charges dropped because of technicalities in the search warrant; their dogs were to be returned. A coalition of animal groups then banded together and did the only thing they could to help these dogs. They purchased 56 of the more than 100 dogs who would have been returned to the defendants. The Montanta Attorney General’s Office is still charging the remaining suspect with one count of felony animal cruelty; two misdemeanor counts of animal cruelty, and two counts of child endangerment.

While it is unfortunate that many of the dogs were sent back into the breeding operation, the facility is now under the close scrutiny of many county, state, and federal agencies. If conditions of animal care do not meet standards, our team will take the necessary actions. The HSUS spent more than $40,000 to shelter the animals for three months and is seeking donations to defend the costs. Anyone wishing to donate may contribute to NRRO, 490 N. 33rd St., Ste. 215, Billings, MT 59101. Please make checks payable to HSUS/SHAT.

Watch for “Game Dogs”

Many dogfights advertise their dogs for sale in the classified ad section of local newspapers. These ads will offer “game dogs.” This term is code for fighting dogs. When you see these ads, contact the paper and ask that they not run ads supporting criminal activity. Selling classified ad space to dogfighters is little different from selling ad space to drug dealers.

Battling Bird Fighters in the Bayou State

Moving southeast into Louisiana, this past summer saw some heating up in the battle to stop cockfighting. Randlerts, Oklahoma. Under the new Oklahoma felony cockfighting law, the suspect faces a term of up to 10 years in prison and a fine up to $25,000. It is an act that is illegal in the state of Oklahoma, and that the fighting of animals for amusement is breaching its last gasps.

Despite this victory, Oklahomans must keep a watchful eye on the pro-animal fighting factions in the state Legislature. There was recently a move by pro-cockfighting legislators to decriminalize cockfighting in Oklahoma. This would have been a slap to the face to the people of Oklahoma who voted to end this barbaric practice once and for all. There are still rumblings that the felony penalty is too severe. The HSUS asks all Oklahomans of good conscience to contact their legislators and demand that cockfighting remain a felony in the state. Don’t let the cockfighters continue their bloody “sport.”

Oklahoma’s new felony cockfighting law is preventing the suffering of fighting birds in that state. Now The HSUS turns to ending the blood sport in Louisiana, one of only two states where it is still legal. The Bayou State has nursed a black eye over this barbaric activity for centuries. Eighty-five percent of Louisianans believe cockfighting should be outlawed, but are the sporting equipment in the light of truth. Moving southeast into Louisiana, this past summer saw some heating up in the battle to stop the suffering of fighting birds in that state. Now The HSUS turns to ending the blood sport in Louisiana, one of only two states where it is still legal.

The HSUS turns to ending the blood sport in Louisiana, one of only two states where it is still legal.
HSUS President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne Pacelle

At the age of 50, any individual or institution pauses to reflect on both the past and the future. That moment has arrived for The HSUS.

Five decades since its inception, The HSUS can look back on its accomplishments with pride. The HSUS has grown and diversified since 1954, now employing experts in companion animals, wildlife, farm animals, and animal research and attracting more than 8 million members and constituents. The HSUS has developed the most sophisticated government affairs, investigations, and humane education programs of any animal protection organization, and, recognizing that animal exploitation extends beyond our borders, now extends its programs across the globe.

Yet while our gains and our growth have made us the largest and most influential organization in the field, the challenges ahead are daunting. Animal abuse—especially in institutional forms, such as factory farming—remains more acute than ever.

As we look ahead, The HSUS will continue to pay attention to the wide range of issues that affect the lives of animals. We will never forget our birthright: the responsible care and protection of companion animals. We will also work to root out persistent forms of animal cruelty such as dogfighting, cockfighting, and other blood sports. But we must redouble our efforts to protect long-neglected classes of creatures, specifically animals reared for food, who are confined and killed by the billions every year.

We must become a powerful and unrelenting force in the public policy domain, working to halt intensive confinement of animals on factory farms; to compel companies to stop needless and duplicative testing on animals when alternatives exist; to shutter "puppy mills" that mass-produce dogs for the pet trade when millions of healthy and adoptable animals face abandonment or euthanasia for lack of suitable homes; to halt the fur trade; and to safeguard animals' habitats so they, too, have space and shelter.

The professional staff of The HSUS can do a great deal to achieve these goals. But we cannot accomplish them alone. Only when HSUS members in communities are active—in financially supporting our work, writing letters to newspapers and lawmakers, making responsible and humane choices in the marketplace, and educating people about animal issues in their communities—can we succeed.

Only with your active engagement will we see, on the distant horizon 50 years from today, a truly humane society that accounts for the basic needs of animals and treats them all with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Wayne Pacelle took over as The HSUS's president and chief executive officer this summer. He has been with The HSUS for 10 years and served most recently as senior vice president for communications and government affairs.
Max's family was facing troubled times. Out of work and evicted from their Dallas-area apartment, they were forced to return to their home state of Maine. The financial crunch forced them to take a bus for much of their trip. There was only one problem. One of their family members—a little five-year-old, named Max—wasn’t allowed on the bus.

Frustrated, yet hopeful, Max's family left him with a neighbor, along with a health certificate and $200 to cover the airfare to fly Max to Boston. The understanding was that the neighbor would ship Max within a few days. His family arranged to borrow a vehicle to drive down from Maine to pick Max up at the Boston airport. With the travel arrangements completed, the family left Texas without their beloved Max, but with confidence that they would soon be reunited.

When the family arrived at the airport to pick up Max as scheduled, he wasn't there.

Upon investigation, initial reports indicated Max had been taken to a local shelter. The panicked family called SWRO, relaying their story and asking for help. With our assistance, Max was finally found at the home of the apartment complex's maintenance man who took Max home when he learned that the little dog was homeless. Max's health certificate, crate, and the money for his trip were gone.

Max's family was ecstatic when they heard he had been found. However, one rather large problem remained. How could they transport Max to New England without a health certificate or airfare? SWRO director Lou Guyton issued a plea among area shelter volunteers and rescue groups. The HSUS Spay Neuter Clinic provided Max with a new health certificate. And a family by the name of Fortester did more than simply pay for Max's airfare. Dad, Jeff Fortester, carried Max on the plane and delivered him safely to a volunteer of the HSUS New England Regional Office, which had arranged Max's final leg of transport.

Max was always a polite and happy little dog, during his month-long stay in foster care. The New England office volunteer reports that Max became animated and excited upon his reunion with his family in Maine. "Even in times of difficulty we are always happy to take steps to preserve the human-animal bond," says Lou Guyton. "We are very fortunate to have been able to help Max get home."

RAVS Visits Arizona Reservation

The HSUS's Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) program offers free veterinary services to low-income rural communities throughout the United States and around the world. The RAVS program also provides the opportunity for volunteer veterinarian students from schools nationwide to work with experienced veterinarians and practice surgery techniques under close supervision. The services provided by the RAVS teams are visible to the animals who receive treatment often have never visited a veterinarian—not would they ever visit one—were it not for this free program.

Such was the case when RAVS visited the Colorado River Indian Reservation in Parker, Arizona, this past spring and SWRO staff accompanied them to make humane education presentations. The Colorado River Indian Tribe is composed of members of the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi, and Navajo Nations. The HSUS considers it an honor to be asked by the tribal councils to visit their communities and offer the services RAVS provides.

After speaking with school officials, a SWRO representative visited La Pera and Blake Elementary Schools. The children were more than eager to discuss the RAVS clinic and to learn more about how to properly care for their animals. In all, 278 second and third graders attended seminars and received educational materials explaining how to speak a dog's language, how to avoid dog bites and attacks, and what to do if they fall victim to a dog attack. Children and teachers enjoyed the presentations, especially those students who demonstrated for the audience—with a life-size dog puppet—how to react when a dog threatens.

Members of the Colorado River Indian Reservation were very grateful for the services provided by the veterinary teams at the RAVS’s clinic. Tribal members brought food, snacks, and drinks for the RAVS team to enjoy throughout the day.

Celebrate the Season and the HSUS Anniversary

T he HSUS is proud to have May Company department stores and Christopher Radko as sponsors of our 50th anniversary. As part of the celebration, May Company is offering three exclusive HSUS 50th anniversary products for sale this fall: a Radko ornament (shown here) and a dog and cat plush toy by Gund. For more information visit www.hsus.org/marketplace.

By Lou Guyton
Director of the Southwest Regional Office

There Ought To Be A Rule

Mom, if I were the president, I’d make a rule,” said my eight-year-old daughter after we recently watched a documentary about dogfighting. “I’d make all the people who do mean things like that to animals go to prison forever.”

This issue of the “SWRO Regional News” contains stories about dogfighting and cockfighting raids our office has participated in over the recent months, as well as our activities in the Oklahoma and Louisiana legislatures. What’s frightening is that many of these events have children present as spectators or participants. What rules do you suppose these children would make if they became president?

Our region is home to the two states where cockfighting is still legal. Dogfighting is illegal in all 50 states, but it still continues here as an organized crime. We continue to fight for legislation against animal cruelty, provide educational opportunities for lawmakers, and enlist the support of our dedicated members to fight these activities.

We’re also working to stop a local rodeo event in which 10 wild horses are released into arenas only to be captured by teams of three people and forced into submission in front of cheering crowds. The horses are sometimes injured, and often lay exhausted and in fear at the arena at the close of this timed event.

At SWRO we strive to do our best for the animals. Whether a case involves hundreds of animals (as in the Texas dog breeding case) or just one (as in our efforts to get Max home), we’re here to help. Please know that we appreciate your continued support on behalf of the animals.

And while I’m not sure I wish for my daughter to be president one day, I do hope she gets to make that rule someday. Sometime, as she acts on behalf of animals, she gets to make that rule somewhere, at a level she can influence. And I hope she gets to make that rule very receptive and many expressed thanks for the excellent instruction she received.

Our office works diligently to meet the animal-related training needs of police officers all over the Southwest. Through the generous help of HSUS supporters, we are able to offer these courses, making a huge difference in the quality of life for many companion animals in our communities.

If your local police department is interested in animal-related training, please ask them to contact our office.

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Promoting the protection of all animals

A young helper joins a volunteer veterinarian at the Colorado River Reservation RAVS clinics.