In Charley’s Wake, MWRO Responds

By MWRO Director Diane Webber

My experience responding to Hurricane Charley as part of HSUS’s National Disaster Animal Response Team was gut-wrenching, heartwarming, and rewarding—all at the same time. Charley was the first hurricane I’ve responded to, and I wasn’t quite sure what to expect. I’ve been part of animal disaster relief for tornadoes, so I did expect to see a great deal of destruction. But unlike the aftermath of a tornado, Charley cut a swath immensely larger in scale, and those affected by it were much greater in number—including the animals.

Countless were left homeless. Public shelters don’t accept animals, so having pets can make finding shelter (temporary or permanent) difficult. In many cases, people were left with no choice but to leave their pets behind. Our temporary animal care facility was set up in Punta Gorda, one of the hardest hit areas in Charlotte County. There we cared for hundreds of animals brought in by the continued on page 2

MWRO’s Diane Webber with one of the many animals HSUS teams helped care for in response to Hurricane Charley.

Iowa: An Animal Fighting Haven No More

By MWRO Director Diane Webber

Iowa was gaining the dubious distinction of being a haven for animal fighting. The state’s animal fighting law was one of the country’s weakest. Because it was surrounded by states that had made animal fighting a felony offense, it was no wonder that these barbaric activities were crossing the borders into Iowa. And if animal fighting weren’t bad enough, illegal gambling, drugs, weapons, and violence tend to accompany the activity. Iowa needed stronger penalties to provide the support law enforcement needed to make arrests and gain convictions.

Our office began working toward passage of just such a piece of legislation more than a year ago. Scarcely a day went by that we didn’t field and make calls about it. We sent out numerous action alerts to our members, urging them to contact their legislators in support of the measure. And we attended key committee hearings and legislative sessions to offer testimony and support.

As introduced, Iowa’s felony animal fighting bill prohibited the possession, ownership, purchase, or sale of a dog or bird for fighting, as well as the possession, ownership, manufacture, or transfer of certain animal fighting implements. It also increased the penalty for crimes related to animal fighting from a serious misdemeanor to a class D felony.

The bill passed unanimously out of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, but hit a snag when it was assigned to the Public Safety Committee. There it was amended, and all penalties were reduced to aggravated misdemeanors. When the bill went up for debate, several legislators expressed their opposition to the amendments. One even read aloud a chat room e-mail from a dogfighter in Nebraska advising others that if they wanted to fight their dogs they needed to take them into Iowa, that a person could “get away with anything” there.

Finally, the Speaker called for a vote on the amendment. After a handful of “ayes,” a resounding shout of “opposed” rang through the House—not once, but twice! It was a stirring moment for animal welfare in Iowa.

When the unamended Senate version of the bill, now designated S.F. 2249, came up for a vote, the “ayes” were 98, with only two absent or not voting.

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By HSUS President and CEO Wayne Pacelle

At the age of 50, any individual or institution passes 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 animal protection movement, 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 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 unremitting 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 millions of healthy and adoptable animals are needlessly killed; to shutter “puppy mills” and factory farms.

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.

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public and by our rescue teams. The facility took in found animals as well as those pets voluntarily surrendered by displaced owners. It was the voluntary surrenders—made by owners who knew they would have no way to shelter or care for their beloved pet for a long time—that were the hardest. When one man brought his Australian shepherd mix to the Carmelita Animal Compound in Punta Gorda, he was in tears. He and his pet had survived the hurricane together, but they had lost their home. The man explained that he had walked the streets with his dog for three days, trying to make a decision about what was best for his companion of 11 years. The man had no home, no family, and less than $60 in his pocket. “I have no place to take her,” he told me. So he turned his dog over to animal rescue workers, who placed her for adoption. I’m not sure I could be that brave.

Our goal was to reunite lost animals with their owners, and we saw several reunions. After losing so much, the joy shared by pets and owners alike made everything else worthwhile. Tail wags and puppy kisses can brighten up the bleakest day!

As public information officer for our team, I was rewarded by the attention the media gave our efforts. Thanks to their coverage, we were able to help hundreds feed and shelter their pets, find those lost, and care for those injured. I look at this way: Every time the media plays up the plight of the animals in a disaster such as Charley, we take another huge step toward improving the situation when the next disaster hits, because more communities include animals in their disaster plans. It was rewarding to see a state disaster plan tested successfully for the benefit of all.

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For those of us who’d been working to see the law’s passage, its signing by Gov. Tom Vilsack was equally exciting. Encouraged by a local radio station that had been supportive of our efforts, the governor took advantage of a local animal shelter’s weekly pet-of-the-week air time to visit the station and sign the bill on-air. MWRO staff members were there to celebrate and receive a signing pen.

Now that this much-needed law is on the books, our work is just beginning. MWRO hosted a workshop July 19-20 in Des Moines on investigating animal fighting. The workshop coincided with a National Illegal Animal Fighting Task Force meeting. Our goal is to educate animal control officers, law enforcement agents, prosecutors, and veterinarians about how to investigate and prosecute animal fighting effectively. Thanks to Iowa’s new law, that job is now much easier.
Director’s Report

By Diane Webber
Director of the Midwest Regional Office

Cruelty Comes Out in the Open

Too often these days our office receives reports of horrific acts of cruelty to animals. Last year, dragging an animal behind a motor vehicle seemed to be the thing to do. This year, almost anything goes. In just one month, MWRO offered rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those involved in five cases of intentional cruelty ranging from the poisoning of neighborhood dogs to slashing horses’ throats.

It’s disturbing to consider that our society has degraded to such a point that these unconscionable acts of violence are becoming almost commonplace. Or are they? I don’t recall hearing about these ghastly crimes when I was growing up. But we all know that such brutality was happening all along—even in the days of Ozzie and Harriet. Sadly I believe, society just turned a blind eye to it. Now after years of humane education, society’s awareness has been raised to realize that violence is violence, and whether it’s directed toward a human or inflicted upon a defenseless animal, it’s a serious crime that deserves serious attention.

In 1997, HSUS launched its First Strike campaign. One of the main goals of the campaign is to increase public and professional awareness about the connections between animal cruelty and human violence. The tragedy at Columbine High School and others have shown us that our children can be part of this link.

MWRO has made a concerted effort to promote First Strike through presentations at state association conferences, providing handout materials at vendor booths, and through direct contact with prosecutors and judges dealing with specific animal cruelty cases. Most recently, we worked with domestic violence and social service agencies to advocate relationships with local animal shelters and provide a life-saving alternative for family violence victims and their companion animals.

Celebrate the Season and The HSUS’s 50th Anniversary

The 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.

Contacting HSUS

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Promoting the protection of all animals

HSUS’s new Safe Havens for Animals program is designed to assist these animal care professionals, domestic violence shelters, veterinary clinics, and other community organizations in establishing temporary sheltering options for pets of domestic violence victims. I believe this is the ideal next step in combating the problem while protecting companion animals.

With this in mind, MWRO’s goal is to provide the information and resources necessary to assist regional shelters in establishing a Safe Haven in all our communities. It won’t be easy, but it’s important to protect our children, our pets, and our families. For more information about how you can help accomplish this goal, contact our office.

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