Teaching an Old Swan New Tricks

Capsized canoes, frightened boaters, and injured Canada geese are all on Genghis Swan’s rap sheet. Named by residents for his aggressive nature, Genghis was about to be deported when the town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, agreed to let The HSUS try to teach him some manners.

On a rainy spring afternoon, NERO Program Coordinator Linda Huebner accompanied Jessica Almy, wildlife advocate for HSUS’s Cape Wildlife Center, on a mission to teach the overly aggressive swan not to attack boats. The two canoed down the Eel River, avoiding his mate’s nest. When Genghis approached too close to the boat, Huebner sprayed him with methyl anthranilate, a chemical used in grape-flavored soft drinks. It seems birds don’t like fake grape, and will typically learn to avoid the stuff.

Almy has continued his training sessions, and so far, so good. The last few trips elicited no reaction from Genghis. He fathered six cygnets this season, which may have calmed him down. Hopefully he’ll continue to behave himself, and the community can continue to enjoy the river risk-free.

Genghis (bottom) enjoys a quiet moment with his mate on Plymouth’s Eel River.

Protecting Maine’s Black Bears at the Ballot Box

In November 2004, voters in Maine will have the opportunity to ban several cruel hunting methods, including the hunting of bears with bait, dogs, and leghold traps. Not familiar with these practices? It takes only a brief description to see why animal advocates and ethical hunters decry these techniques as unfair and unsporiting.

Bear baiting involves setting up stations stocked with donuts and greasy foods before the hunting season. Bears who become regular visitors at these bait sites make easy targets for hunters who shoot the animals at close range as they feed. Many of these hunters come from other states and pay handsomely for local guides and outfitters to make their trophy hunting experience a successful one. An average of 3,000 bears are killed at bait stations in Maine each year. Of the 27 states that still allow bear hunting, two-thirds prohibit baiting.

Another popular method of pursuing bears involves the use of dogs fitted with radio transmitter collars. Packs of dogs chase and corner their quarry, allowing the hunter to follow their signal, then drive in and shoot the exhausted bear out of his tree. In addition, Maine is the only state that allows the use of leghold traps to kill bears.

Opponents often claim that such ballot initiatives represent the end of state wildlife management and longtime hunting traditions. In fact, the bear baiting initiative allows exceptions for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to manage problem animals using bait, hounds, and traps when necessary. And contrary to alarmist cries that the state’s black bear population will spiral out of control, similar initiatives passed in other states have demonstrated quite the opposite. Importantly, it stands to reason that bait stations habituate bears to human foods, prompting an increase in human-wildlife conflicts as these animals lose their wariness of people and search out such edibles in campgrounds, cabins, and trash cans.

Polling shows that a strong majority of Maine citizens favor ending bear baiting, hounding, and trapping. In response, a diverse coalition known as Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting, with support from The HSUS and other animal protection groups, has launched a campaign to ban these cruel practices. Maine voters have a chance to protect black bears from traps, hounds, and baiting. Support the initiative and vote to protect bears in November.

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continued on page 2
line of people and animals stretched beyond the crowded waiting area of the 4-H building and out into the bright sunshine. Five makeshift surgery suites awaited the first animal patients, while teams of veterinary students hurried to complete the initial health examinations of their canine and feline charges.

It was day one of the HSUS Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) annual visit to the Rosebud Indian Reservation. I had left the blustery March weather of New England to spend a week in the southwestern corner of South Dakota with staff from the HSUS Northern Rockies Regional Office, as well as several volunteers, two veterinarians, and students from veterinary schools across the country. The purpose of this trip was to provide free medical care for animals on the reservation and to present humane education programs at the local schools.

By the end of the week, the RAVS staff had spayed or neutered 217 cats and dogs, provided rabies and distemper vaccinations for 1,009 animals in the communities of Mission, Rosebud, and Pine Ridge. The humane education team, of which I was a member, had also visited six schools serving grades K-8 and had talked to several volunteers, two veterinarians, and distemper vaccinations for 1,009 animals had sterilized 217 pets and provided rabies vaccinations for 1,093. The passage of H.B. 6338, which imposes a series of increasing fines for confining or tethering a dog for an unreasonable period of time.

The passage of H.B. 6066 allows animal control officers to have impounded animals spayed or neutered before adoption.

The Animal Welfare Program will receive a critical boost in funding through the passage of L.D. 1454, which provides for modest increases in dog licensing fees, as well as higher licensing fees for research institutions, kennels, pet shops, and shelters.

A bill to ban hunting in enclosed areas (also known as canned hunting) was struck down. Legislation to prohibit the use of snare traps was also defeated, despite overwhelming evidence that the state’s coyote snaring program causes great suffering to trapped animals and threatens non-target and endangered species.

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES
1100 17th Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
www.hsus.org

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Animal Hoarding: When is Enough Really Enough?

Headlines such as “Impurrfect Tenant: Cat Woman Creates Stink” and “More than 100 Dogs Seized From Home” capture our attention. They’re stories about the “accumulation” of animals is a result of animal hoarder? Hardly.

When is Enough... collection on their own health and well-being.” The worry is not so much the number of animals involved, but the pet owner’s inability to recognize the squalor, disease, and sometimes even death surrounding them. Despite their own responsibility for the conditions they live in, help for the people involved must go hand in hand with help for the animals.

I was recently asked to assist with a hoarding case in Bridgewater, Vermont, involving more than 65 cats living under one roof. The cats’ owners had refused spay/neuter assistance from the local humane society three years prior, and when dead kittens were found in plastic bags in their dumpster, neighbors finally called authorities to intervene. The overwhelming smell of ammonia and trash forced rescuers to wear face masks when the cats were removed. All of the cats—many of them already pregnant—were neutered at a local spay/neuter clinic. I assisted with the transfer of many of them to local shelters in both Vermont and New Hampshire. At press time, more than 56 of the cats had already found new homes.

While this case may have had a happy ending for these cats, it put a serious financial strain on the lead shelter, although The HSUS subsequently granted the organization $2,000 to cover its expenses. More importantly, the danger still exists that these people will start to accumulate animals again in a different location. The recidivism rate for animal hoarding is nearly 100 percent.

So what can we do as concerned citizens to fight this phenomenon? We can be alert. If you have concerns that someone you know may be accumulating animals beyond his or her means to care for them, contact your local animal shelter or law enforcement agency. For more information on animal hoarding, you can contact our office or go on-line at www.hsus.org/sheltering/library/animal_hoarders.html.

The HSUS has recently formed a National Hoarder Response Task Force to address solutions for this phenomenon. We may never fully understand the psychological dynamics that occur in an animal hoarder’s brain (although more research is forthcoming), but it is clear that we must take a multi-faceted approach to solving the problem—for the sake of both animals and people alike.

Animal Care Expo

When: March 10–13, 2004
Where: Hyatt Regency Reunion, Dallas, TX

Animal Care Expo is a world-class educational conference combined with a full-scale international trade show, designed to help those in animal sheltering, care, control, and rescue do the best and most efficient jobs possible. Go to www.hsus2.org/sheltering/general/expo_information.html to learn more.