What Is the Greatest Animal Tragedy?

We continually hear about new atrocities inflicted upon animals. It may be laboratory cruelty or the mistreatment of performing animals. Or, perhaps, a stray neighborhood animal is cruelly treated. To all of these, as humanitarians, we react with shock and an urgent desire to take corrective action.

Unfortunately, animal problems that have been around for a long time tend to lose their impact and be overlooked. Euthanasia to control pet overpopulation is this kind of problem.

In every city and county throughout our Gulf States region, lovable and healthy pets are euthanized daily by the hundreds. No one wants to do it, but there seems to be no alternative unless and until animal births are controlled.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has demonstrated, in city after city, that this tragic taking of life can be greatly curtailed. If every animal shelter, big or little, will require spaying and neutering of each adopted pet, thousands of animals will be saved from this sorry fate. Public awareness and education programs combined with strong enforcement of leash laws also are part of the solution.

Unfortunately, many shelters still adopt out animals without requiring surgical sterilization. Many different excuses for this are given. Some fear the extra cost, or that adoptions will decrease. Others mistakenly think it is more important to get the animal into a new home even if the pet produces more surplus animals.

Our Gulf States Regional Office will gladly help shelters overcome this misconception. We can help set up spay/neuter programs (often at little or no cost to the shelter) and maintain pet adoptions at the same time. Check your local shelter’s policy soon and get in touch with us for any advice or information needed.

Animals as loving and cute as this puppy and kitten are born every day, but often no homes are available. Many forms of cruelty or neglect pale when compared to the tragic consequences of surplus-animal breeding. Fortunately, there are solutions, if people will act promptly.
Humanitarians and societies in Louisiana were partially successful during the past legislative session.

An Easter Pet ordinance was passed that will help end the cruelties involved in the Easter pet trade.

A minimum shelter standards bill was enacted. Unfortunately, the legislation weakened the effectiveness of the law by making its adoption optional to parish shelters. Apparently motivated by fear that income might be reduced, the coalition of Louisiana humane societies and pet-breeding associations opposed the bill. It is tragic that this solution to a great animal suffering was defeated by such monetary greed.

Around the Region

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA—Three animal-welfare groups, local veterinarians, and two television stations sponsored "Save the Animals Week." Low-cost spay/neuter operations were made available to the public during this upbeat promotion.

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS—Primarily Primates Inc., an excellent orphanage for unwanted primates, is seeking donations. They need fruit, nut, and greenery treats as a food source and for privacy. If you can help, call (512) 755-4616.

AMARILLO, TEXAS—Animal Rights Groups have uncovered the deceptive use of decompression at their city shelter. Kudos to them for speaking out so forcefully for animals' welfare in the face of local opposition.

METairie, LOUISIANA—The Jefferson StPCA lost the lease on its shelter building. They are forced to stop taking animals until a new building has been constructed. $50,000 already has been raised but additional donations are badly needed.

HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS—the city animal shelter celebrated the sixth anniversary of its founding. The HSUS and Arkansas humane organizations have joined forces as the National Coalition to Protect Our Pets (Pro-Pet) to achieve this goal.

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Stronger enforcement of laws against dog fighting is helping end this so-called "sport." New laws, recently passed, have increased penalties and jail sentences for spectators.

Heavy Fines Levied Against Arkansas Dogfighters

Twelve people in Fort Smith, Ark., were fined $2,000 each for attending a dog fighting event. One hundred spectators were fined $100 each. The HSUS and the Arkansas humane organizations had worked hard to get a strong anti-dogfighting law passed. Now the results are speaking for themselves.

In the past, people attending dogfights could not be charged with any violation. Under a new law, anyone watching, promoting, engaging in, or owning a dog for fighting can be fined not less than $1,000 but not more than $5,000. This dogfight was uncovered during a drug investigation by the state police. A dozen lawmen raided the fight and arrested 15 people. Among those attending were children and a pregnant woman. Charges were filed against 30, mostly minors, and 15 people. Among those attending were children and a pregnant woman. Charges were filed against 30, mostly minors, and 15 people.

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The penalties in each state are:

- **OKLAHOMA**—a felony violation for fighting, promoting, or owning a fighting dog (up to $7,500 fine or imprisonment).
- **LOUISIANA**—a violation for fighting, promoting, or owning a fighting dog (up to $10,000 fine).
- **ARKANSAS**—a violation for fighting, promoting, or being a spectator (minimum fine $1,000 to $5,000).

Stronger enforcement of laws against dog fighting is helping end this so-called "sport." New laws, recently passed, have increased penalties and jail sentences for spectators.
Decompression chambers face increasing nationwide disrepute. Their use is not advocated by any national humane society. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) urges that "other methods of euthanasia are preferable."

The infamous decompression chamber, still used for euthanasia in a small number of shelters, is vigorously opposed by The HSUS. Regional Director Bill Meade stated, "We have attempted to identify every shelter using decompression to educate them to the possible pain they are inflicting on their animals."

Recently the cities of Austin and Houston, Texas, have dropped decompression. Dallas outlawed it several years ago. Nationwide, 24 states have completely banned this cruel method of destroying unwanted animals.

Meade recently testified before Amarillo officials and also urged El Paso humane society officers to switch to humane injection of sodium pentobarbital, the preferred method of euthanasia. The Texas cities of Irving and Garland also still use decompression, and, unfortunately, officials there are reluctant to change methods even for the animals' benefit.

When first manufactured, decompression chambers were considered humane. The process was thought to be similar to a pilot ascending in an open plane and passing out due to lack of oxygen. New insight and experience during the last ten years, however, has established that animals can suffer severe pain during this process. Many animals are unable to equalize pressures inside their body cavities, resulting in extreme bloating. If the animal has upper respiratory blockage due to disease, the resultant inner ear pain can be excruciating.

The HSUS urges animal shelters to use only the best methods of euthanasia. Best current methods are injection of sodium pentobarbital and use of bottled (cooled and filtered) carbon monoxide. Protest strongly to your city officials if one of these is not being used in your community.

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