SC Takes on Dogfighting

Last year, South Carolina’s Attorney General got a glimpse for himself of the ugly world of dogfighting. He didn’t like what he saw, and SERO has joined his campaign to stop the blood sport in his state.

In June 2003, just days after SERO Program Coordinator Sandy Christiansen taught a law enforcement training class on animal fighting, officers in Orangeburg seized more than 70 dogs, training equipment, medical supplies, and other dog-fighting tools of the trade, including a bloody pit. Attorney General Henry McMaster visited the scene and was appalled. Shortly after, he gathered together representatives from animal protection organizations across the state, law enforcement officials, attorneys, and The HSUS with the goal of sharing information about the blood sport. Out of that meeting, the South Carolina Dogfighting Task Force was created to proactively combat dogfighting.

One of the task force’s top priorities was to gain in-depth intelligence about suspected dogfighters in the state. Fortunately, the State Law Enforcement

SERO Takes Charge in Charley Response

Hurricane Charley hit Florida on Friday, August 13, as if it carried a grudge. The storm not only defied all expert predictions by rapidly developing into a Category 4 ‘cane, but it also took an unexpected right turn into the heart of Charlotte County—an area dotted with dozens of trailer parks and populated with thousands of senior citizens who had little time to evacuate.

By Monday the extent of the damage was beginning to become clear: 17 dead, more than 2,300 people living in temporary shelters, more than $7 billion in insured damage, and nearly 1 million residents without power. Countless companion animals, livestock, and wildlife were among the victims, too. But the difficult conditions didn’t stop The HSUS and other animal groups in the region from setting up animal relief centers, arranging for emergency shelter space, securing veterinary supplies, and calling in tractor trailers to provide not only veterinary space but also alternate power sources.

Base of Operations

The focal point for emergency animal care in Charlotte County was a temporary facility in a sports/recreational complex in Punta Gorda called Carmelita Park, which is about a mile away from the county’s Emergency Operations Center.

Activated earlier by the state of Florida, The HSUS’s Disaster Animal Response Team (DART), which includes nearly 30 volunteers from around the Sunshine State, set up tents in Carmelita Park to serve as an animal services area. It’s there that volunteers cared for animals brought in by the public and by rescue teams. The temporary facility also took in found animals as well as those pets voluntarily surrendered by displaced owners. Livestock was kept on a series of baseball fields across the street and held there until the animals could be sent to temporary shelters. The goal, of course, was to reunite all lost animals with their families.

To call the Carmelita Animal Compound “makeshift” would be a disservice. The facility may have been temporary, but it was state of the art, thanks to an HSUS-affiliated DART team member from Sumter County who owns Prosthetics Research Inc., which, among other things, designs products for lame horses. The owner sent down three large vehicles, including an air-conditioned RV and a 30-foot semi trailer. DART team members organized the vehicles into a U shape and set up a tent at the base of the U, continued on page 2
continued from “Charley,” page 1 where all animals were processed. The number of animals handled at the facility steadily rose in the days after Charley passed. “The numbers keep rising because the animals keep emerging,” said Laura Bevan, SERO director and one of the raid organizers. “Each bird had to be caught, cataloged, photographed, and, on several of the properties, safely placed in crates for transport back to the humane society: It was a huge undertaking!”

At the humane society, other workers and volunteers hurriedly built temporary housing for the birds removed from the properties, as veterinarians evaluated each animal. Christiansen worked with Indian River Sheriff Roy Raymond and his investigators to make sure the case against the game farm owners was solid. “We commended the sheriff’s office for its dedication to the enforcement of the new animal fighting law,” he said. “This is a wake up call to those who fight animals for entertainment and profit that law enforcement agencies in Florida will use their resources to shut down these illegal operations,” he said.

In June 2003, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed a law prohibiting any involvement in animal fighting ventures, including keeping, selling, breeding, and training animals for fighting. The law also made being a spectator at an animal fight a felony instead of a misdemeanor and allows for the seizure of animals kept for the purpose of fighting. Previously, although the law prohibited animal fighting, it was interpreted to allow the breeding and training of the animals. This allowed animal fighters to flourish in the state, even advertising the sale of their fighting dogs and roosters in local newspapers and magazines.

“When Florida enacted this animal fighting law last year, it gave local law enforcement a strong tool to use to crack down on this barbaric and despicable industry,” said Wayne Pacelle, new HSUS president and CEO. “Florida is a prime example of what states can do to decimate the animal fighting industry when the right laws are in place.”

CRICKEY! Willie Cirone, a disaster responder from New Jersey, patrons his reptile handling skills to work to capture an injured alligator.

Stories from the Storm

Amazing stories of hurricanes Charley and Ivan are being generated in Charlotte County, Florida. The hurricane contaminated much of the drinking water. Understanding how this dearth of drinkable water could affect rural horse farms, which dot the landscape in the outlying regions, the HSUS secured two large containers called “water buffaloes.” One holds 600 gallons of water, the other 1,000. DART teams used the containers to fill a smaller, 4- wheel trailer that carried 230 gallons of water. Then they visited the horse farms, spreading water that was as precious as gold to those dehydrated animals. The teams also brought the farmers hay, since food was equally hard to secure.

Parting with an Old Friend

Diane Webber, director of HSUS’s Midwest Regional Office, who was serving as public information specialist during the response effort, told the story of a hearing-impaired man, whose home had been devastated, who brought his Australian shepherd mix to the Carmelita facility. He apparently had had the dog for more than 11 years. He was there to surrender the dog for adoption. “He told us that he had no home, no clothes, no money—that he could no longer care for the dog as the dog deserved,” Webber said. “He told us that it took him a long time to come to this decision. That’s the part that gets to you.”

Webber and others, the scene was yet another reminder of how important it is to find new homes for every animal surrendered into their hands.

Families Reunited

On Friday, August 20, workers at the Punta Gorda facility got a small taste of what their work was all about. A woman whose home was badly damaged couldn’t find her dogs. She showed up at the compound and discovered two of them there, a mother and her young puppy. Animal control had brought the mother, a Lab mix, while a relative tracked down the puppy in the rubble mix. Nobody at the compound realized the dogs were related, but the owner did. “She was kissing and hugging everybody,” said Webber.

Bruzer’s Story

An older woman and her husband arrived at the Carmelita facility with their two grandchildren and their dog, Bruzer. The older child, a boy who looked to be around seven years old, had apparently spent two hours frantically looking for his family’s damaged home. The boy performed this heroic deed for his younger brother, a special needs child who claimed Bruzer as his own. Because the family was staying at a special-needs shelter, they couldn’t bring Bruzer along and had to put the animal up for foster care. The very thought of leaving Bruzer behind so upset the younger boy that he volunteered to sleep in the crate with the dog. “That, quite frankly, had everyone in tears,” said Bevan. “We promised he would get his dog back. In fact, Bruzer is such a little personality that workers there were lining up to foster him.”

Planning Pays

These stories and many more were made possible through the planning and training of animal disaster responders who came together in the wake of this tragedy. DART teams from all over the state lent a helping hand, each operating in conjunction with the Florida Emergency Support Function-17, the state’s official disaster response for animals. Those cooperative DART teams even included one from Okaloza County, located in the western-most reaches of the Florida panhandle.

“So much coordination and cooperation,” notes Bevan, “reflect the work that The HSUS has put into building Florida’s emergency animal response since Hurricane Andrew. Local DART teams in Florida have been developed through HSUS training and support in the years since Andrew. This preparation paid off with many locally trained personnel being able to help their neighbors.” That, in turn, may have saved yet more tragedy in a storm that caused too much.

Complete coverage of The HSUS response to this fall’s hurricanes will appear in the spring 2005 “SERO Regional News.”

Major Cockfighting Raid in Florida

SERO didn’t waste any time putting Florida’s new strict law against animal fighting to good use. In 2003 our office lobbied successfully for passage of the law. This year we saw it implemented when we assisted the Indian River County Sheriff’s Office and others in a coordinated raid, one of the largest of its kind in the nation, on several cockfighting operations in that county.

The HSUS had worked on the investigation with the Humane Society of Vero Beach and Indian River County and the Indian River County Sheriff’s Office for more than a year. Sandy Christiansen, SERO program coordinator, organized teams of animal handlers from throughout Florida and elsewhere to carry out the multi-site raid. Approximately 70 officers and humane society and animal control personnel participated in the three-day operation that resulted in the seizure of more than 1,500 game fowl. No fewer than 700 birds were taken to the local humane society for evaluation and care.

“The coordinated effort of all the agencies involved was amazing,” said Laura Bevan, SERO director and one of the raid organizers. “Each bird had to be caught, cataloged, photographed, and, on several of the properties, safely placed in crates for transport back to the humane society. It was a huge undertaking!”

As the humane society, other workers and volunteers hurriedly built temporary housing for the birds removed from the properties, as veterinarians evaluated each bird. Christiansen worked with Indian River Sheriff Roy Raymond and his investigators to make sure the case against the game farm owners was solid. “We commended the sheriff’s office for its dedication to the enforcement of the new animal fighting law. This is a wake up call to those who fight animals for entertainment and profit that law enforcement agencies in Florida will use their resources to shut down these illegal operations,” he said.

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“When Florida enacted this animal fighting law last year, it gave local law enforcement a strong tool to use to crack down on this barbaric and despicable industry,” said Wayne Pacelle, new HSUS president and CEO. “Florida is a prime example of what states can do to decimate the animal fighting industry when the right laws are in place.”

Weather vanes roosters turn toward hundreds of fighting birds SERO helped authorities seize in Florida’s Indian River County. Below, SERO’s Laura Bevan on the scene.
continued from “Dogfighting,” page 1
Division (SLED) allows dedicated officers to investigate particular crimes—if the funds to pay the costs associated with their employ-
ment are reimbursed to the department. Charleston attorney Sandy Senn set out on a fund-raising mission, and following her success, a SLED officer was assigned to focus on building cases against dogfighters statewide. The HSUS is committed to the success of this project and believes it can serve as a model for other states. For that reason, The HSUS donated $5,000 to help ensure that this program can continue.

Since that time, more than a dozen busts have been made, including the arrest of a man suspected of being a major national dogfighter. But there is more work to be done. When law enforcement agencies arrest suspected dogfighters, the dogs are seized both as evidence and to stop them from ever being used for fighting again. This means they must be held at animal shelters and other locations while waiting for the criminal justice system to do its job. However, because each dog must be housed individually to prohibit fighting, most animal shelters have difficulty finding space for those dogs while providing safe housing for the other animals in their care. This can cripple an animal shelter operation, send its budget into a tailspin, and discourage

FL Animal-Friend License Plate To Fund Spay/Neuter

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y summer of 2005, Florida drivers will be able to sport a new specialty license plate proclaiming their support for spay/neuter efforts to reduce the number of unwanted pets wandering the streets and ending up in animal shelters. This year, legislators approved the animal-friend license plate, with the proceeds of plate sales designated to fund spay/neuter efforts throughout the state.

Florida has nearly 100 specialty license plates, but none that celebrate companion animals. Passed on the last day of the 2004 legislative session, S.B. 2020 authorized 12 new specialty license plates—including the animal-friend plate—and made it more difficult for new specialty license plates to be created in the future. Gov. Jeb Bush signed the bill into law nearly two months later, despite last-minute opposition from the National Rifle Association and some sportsmen’s groups who objected to The HSUS’s involvement with the plate.

“The animal-friend license plate is something SERO has worked with a larger coalition on for more than a year in order to fund sterilization programs to help reduce pet overpopulation in Florida,” says SERO Director Bevan. “Those groups opposing the plate didn’t seem to care that hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats are being euthanized in shelters each year, they focused on a totally unrelated issue—our philosophical differences over some hunting practices.”

In the end, the governor signed the bill creating the new license plates. Now work begins with the Department of Motor Vehicles to turn the animal-friend plate design into a reality. This could take a while, since 11 other plates are going through the process at the same time.

Once it is available, Florida car owners will be able to purchase the animal-friend license plate for an additional $25 fee when they renew their annual vehicle tag. Proceeds from the first 2,400 plates sold will go to reimburse the state for the $60,000 required for development of the plate. After that, profits will go to a fund distributed by the Florida Animal Friend Coalition through grants to spay/neuter programs statewide. The goal is to raise enough money to prevent unwanted births of puppies and kittens and reduce the number of animals euthanized in shelters and abandoned on the streets.

Special recognition goes to State Rep. Nan Rich for her unwavering support and hard work to make the animal-friend license plate a reality. Thanks also go to State Rep. Dave Russell and Sens. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, Ron Klein, and Jim Sebesta, who made sure the license plate made it through the legislative maze.

For more information about the plate, how you can buy it, and when it will be available, contact our office or visit www.floridaanimalfriend.com, the Florida Animal Friend Coalition Web site.
HSUS Golden Anniversary: The Next 50 Years

By HSUS President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne Pacelle

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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.

In the decades since its inception, The HSUS can look back on its accomplishments with pride. The HSUS has grown and diversified since 1954, now employing more than 8 million members and professionals in companion animals, wildlife, farm animals, and animal research and advocating for more than 8 million members and professionals 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 build 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 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.

I want to learn how I can help our animal friends and The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Please send me information about:

Making a memorial donation to honor the life of a pet, friend, or relative.
Providing for my pet's needs in case of emergency.
Planning my estate and will to help animals and The HSUS.

Using charitable gift annuities and trusts to give to The HSUS.

Giving The HSUS a gift of stock.

Promoting the protection of all animals

HSUS President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne Pacelle and Grace.

Director's Report

By Laura Bevan
Director of the Southeast Regional Office

Being an "Old Timer" Has Its Advantages

It's official. I'm an "old timer." At the HSUS Animal Care Expo in Dallas earlier this year, it occurred to me, with great shock, that I was no longer one of the young whippersnappers who serve the organization with bright eyes and new ideas. After 17 years (Where did they all go?), I am one of the walking history books who remember battles and campaigns from years ago, and my thoughts and plans for the future are influenced, and sometimes tempered, by my knowledge of past victories and failures.

This, on the whole, is not a bad thing. You need to remember the past so that mistakes aren't repeated in the future. However, it is also vital to remember that times change and campaigns that may not have found success years ago may now be met with acceptance.

It is also wonderful to have the perspective of time. It is easy when you work to protect animals to become discouraged, because true victories don't come easily and often. Just when you think you have heard it all, the phone rings or an e-mail opens that stuns with its description of desperate animal cruelty. The act is done, the animal has suffered or died, and our job is to try to find some justice for its pain, while working to ensure that such things don't happen again.

However, looking back over the years I see tremendous strides made for animals. Four of the five states in the Southeast have felony provisions in their cruelty laws. Major efforts are underway to stop blood sports such as dogfighting, cockfighting, and so-called "hog-dog" contests. In these wild pigs is put into an arena with hunting dogs to see which one can catch and stop the pig first for money and trophies. It is a gory event already deemed a felony in Florida under its "animal fighting act," but still openly practiced in other states, with law enforcement working with prosecutors and law enforcement officials in those states to have it recognized and prosecuted as the animal cruelty that it is.

The Florida animal-frind license plate was another battle that has left me wiser and with more gray hair. It seemed like such an easy, upbeat effort—let's get a cute license plate that people could buy to show their love for their companion animals while at the same time helping to reduce pet overpopulation and even save some money on taxes. The topper was when those opposing the plate portrayed The HSUS as wanting to eliminate dogfighting, cockfighting, and so-called "hog-dog" contests. In these events a wild pig is put into an arena with hunting dogs to see which one can catch and stop the pig first for money and trophies. It is a gory event already deemed a felony in Florida under its "animal fighting act," but still openly practiced in other states, with law enforcement working with prosecutors and law enforcement officials in those states to have it recognized and prosecuted as the animal cruelty that it is.

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