Help for Haltom City Cats

Our office was recently called upon to assist the small town of Haltom City, Texas, in one of the most difficult cases of animal hoarding in the town’s history.

Haltom City animal control officer Aaron Carter made the initial investigation into the complaint. What he saw and smelled upon his visit appalled him. The tenant of the apartment, an elderly woman with a sweet smile and a gentle disposition, graciously invited Carter in to her 600-square-foot apartment to meet her pets, which she insisted were all well cared for and tenderly loved. But as Carter looked around, he knew he and the cats would need help. The overpowering smell of ammonia and cat feces was almost more than he could bear. Virtually none of the cats were socialized enough to handle safely, and all were suffering from varying degrees of hair loss, flea infestation, and malnutrition.

Two years ago, the woman explained, she had been given a tiny black kitten. Shortly afterwards, another showed up at her doorstep, and she brought him inside for care. The resulting 30-plus black cats, Now and Then: These are a few of more than 30 cats SWRO helped rescue from a hoarding situation in Haltom City, Texas.

Largest TX Dogfighting Raid in a Decade

Marion, Texas, in eastern Bexar County is a quiet, rural area just outside of San Antonio. It was the perfect secluded spot for Brian Bailey to raise his “game” dogs. He had allegedly been operating a large-scale dogfighting operation since the 1980s. However, on Saturday evening, January 8, 2005, this came to an abrupt end.

Acting on information about the planned dogfight from The HSUS, the Bexar County Sheriff’s SWAT team moved onto the property a litte after 9 p.m. Within an hour, they had five men in custody on multiple felony animal cruelty charges and had begun to issue misdemeanor citations to approximately 30 spectators who had come for the “show.”

After the SWAT team declared the site secure, staff from SWRO and the SPCA of Texas moved in to begin evaluating the animals. As spectators were cited and released, HSUS and SPCA teams accompanied their police escorts to the suspects’ vehicles and assisted deputies in the search for dogfighting paraphernalia.

Deputies found weapons, drugs, cash, and dogfighting training equipment both on the property and in the cars. Cars that were not claimed were impounded and towed. Custody of the dogs was awarded to the SPCA of Texas. Hearings in the case are pending.

Members of teams from the Sheriff’s Office, The HSUS, and the SPCA stayed through the night to watch over the 90 animals seized in the raid. SWRO’s Jay Sabatucci and Tammy Hawley were among those who stayed.

“We moved all of the animals with superficial injuries into the lighted area near the pit where the dogs were fought,” said Sabatucci. “It was surreal to look down into that fighting pit and see the blood left on the carpet by the dogs we were now caring for in crates.”

At daybreak, teams began moving the dogs to a secure location, where they would be humanely housed and would receive adequate care. Due to the remote location, dogs had to be loaded onto one vehicle, transported and reloaded onto another vehicle, and then taken to the off-site location, where they were once again unloaded into their kennels. It was backbreaking work, and the teams worked all day, even after getting no sleep the night before. It could not have been done without the cooperation of the volunteer teams from The HSUS and the SPCA of Texas.

The life of a fighting dog is quite grim. Usually, they are staked out on heavy logging...
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chains, and their whole lives (other than fighting in the pit) are spent in eight-foot circles of dirt. The luckier ones have some sort of shelter. Food and water are dependent upon the whims of the owner.

One team found very little food at the site, and the dogs there were badly malnourished. Some had been fought, and had old scars and injuries on their faces and flanks. Some exhibited open wounds on legs and paws. Most of the dogs were friendly to humans, and would allow us to pet them and give them some of the first healthy human interaction they had ever had. The only thing they wanted out of life was to please their owner, and their reward was to be thrown into a fighting pit so people could gamble on which one would win. The most tragic part of these creatures’ story is that they don’t have any future. They have been raised to attack either animals or without mercy. The ones who don’t do this are culled out and killed by the dogfighters. It is impossible to ensure that the public is safe from any of these dogs. Even if they are friendly to adults, they may not recognize small children as human, and a pit bull’s powerful jaws can crush bone easily, making them an unacceptable adoption risk.

Additionally, it is nearly impossible to guarantee that adopted dogs won’t end up back in the fighting pit. Dogfighting is illegal in every state. The HSUS works ceaselessly to end this barbaric crime. Your continued support helps curtail this shameful behavior by enabling The HSUS to lend a hand to police all over the United States. Whether assisting law enforcement in illegal animal fighting raids or teaching them how to identify and prosecute these types of crimes, we are determined to work to help the public end dogfighting in America. Raiding a dogfight is a costly operation, and we cannot succeed without your help. To report animal fighting in your area, contact your local law enforcement agency. If it needs help from our office, either with training or case preparation, we urge officers to contact our office.

The HSUS, Fund for Animals Join Forces

The HSUS and The Fund for Animals (The Fund) officially joined forces in an unprecedented and historic combination on January 1, 2005. This is the first time in the history of the animal protection movement that two national, high-profile organizations have united in order to advance their common mission.

“Our groups have decided to join forces not out of necessity, but because we believe we can do more to help animals together than we can do separately,” said David O. Wiebers, M.D., chair of The HSUS’s board of directors. The two groups plan to operate their advocacy programs under the banner of The HSUS, building a new external affairs department to focus on major defining issues such as fur, sport hunting, factory farming, and malicious animal cruelty, including animal fighting. They will pursue these goals with a multifaceted approach involving investigations, litigation, communications, and professional campaigning. “With our new campaigns, we will create meaningful social change for animals,” said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The HSUS. “Our goal is nothing short of a kinder society, where compassionate individuals join with us to ensure that animals are not abused either in random acts of cruelty or in institutional settings, such as industrial factory farms.

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now roaming the confines of the apartment were all offspring of the first two cats. The woman told Carter she didn’t believe in spay or neuter surgery, and she didn’t want to put any of her cats through “a cruel procedure.”

Upon hearing of the situation, SWRO Program Coordinator Tammy Hawley immediately agreed to help. Her extensive experience in similar situations gave her a unique perspective in resolving such cases. She recruited experienced help from neighboring towns, and put a plan into action. Hawley notified social service and government agencies that would be able to give the woman the help she needed. She then organized a group of volunteers to help clean the filthy apartment, once experienced animal control professionals safely removed the cats. Salt Lake City Animal Control took in all the cats, and through Hawley, was able to arrange for sterilization surgery and vaccinations for two of the cats so that they could be returned to the owner. A local senior citizen’s center will offer the woman daily contact and guidance. Local housing authorities agreed to help the woman stay under certain outlined conditions, which include ongoing counseling services and therapy. She also agreed to regular inspections of the property in order to prevent a recurrence of the same tragic circumstances.

Not all holding cases end happily. In nearly every instance, many animals are euthanized, and those who can be saved often face lifelong debilitating injuries or chronic illnesses as a result of their poor care. The HSUS has staff who are experienced in handling these situations with compassion and respect, not only toward the animal victims, but also toward the human sufferers of a condition that is receiving wider acceptance in the medical profession as a true mental illness.

Coyotes May Be Targeted for Eradication

Here in the Southwest, one of our most recognizable icons may soon be under attack by well-meaning, but uninformed local governments. As we build new neighborhoods in our cities, we come into closer contact with all types of wildlife. As wild habitats shrink, more and more people are seeing wild animals near their homes.

Responding to uninformed complaints, fearing rabies outbreaks, and worrying about attacks, some municipalities are instituting coyote eradication plans. But this strategy almost never works.

Coyotes rebound against our attacks and return to their former numbers despite the most intensive eradication efforts. This perpetual cycle of violence occurs because no one realizes how easily humans and coyotes can live together.

Coyotes are attracted by food, mainly garbage and pet food that is left outside. Good housekeeping, such as regularly raking areas around bird feeders and keeping trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids, will discourage coyote activity near residences. For good measure, don’t place garbage at the curb until the morning of collection.

Coyotes can be serious predators of cats and small dogs. Owners can protect their pets by not letting them outdoors unattended, especially at night, as coyotes are primarily nocturnal. Cats in particular should never be permitted to roam freely and ideally should live indoors.

SWRO has been working to intervene in these eradication plans, and has sent out information to cities that are considering them. We have offered information about alternate methods of dealing with the problems, mainly through education. We ask you to take part in this endeavor. If your community is considering coyote eradication, we can get you information to take to local officials.

The HSUS offers all sorts of information online about living in harmony with our wild neighbors at www.wildneighbors.org. If you or members of your community would like a downloadable, full-color coyote fact sheet, please go to www.hsus.org.

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 in honor of the life of a pet, friend, or relative
[ ] Providing for my pets in my will and in case of emergency
[ ] Planning my estate and will to help animals and The HSUS

[ ] Using charitable gift annuities and trusts to support The HSUS
[ ] Giving The HSUS a gift of stock.

Promoting the protection of all animals

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with the “business” of animal welfare. It turns out that animal hair and sweaty clothing make for priceless therapy, allowing me a fresh, clear perspective.

In the animal protection field we share the saying: “You can take the girl out of the shelter, but you can’t take the shelter out of the girl.” This holds especially true for me. I began my advocacy work for animals as a volunteer for an animal shelter in the mid 1980s. As I launched my career with two of the largest animal shelters in Texas, I eventually found myself privileged enough to continue helping animals with The HSUS, the world’s largest animal protection organization.

Since that time, my “job” working on behalf of animals and people has become the definition of who I am. Because of this, I have found myself sidestepping more and more into the areas of animal rescue and rehabilitation, working alongside other animal advocates on behalf of numerous species from Guinea pigs to dogs and cats, chickens, parrots, goats, and horses. Just recently, my family brought home our first “rescue” calf, Norma Jean Christmas Carol the Cow. Feeding a “ba ba” full of replacement milk to a tiny calf twice a day is a delight, and a gentle reminder of what our work is all about.

Even though I spend my days working for animals and my home moments caring for them, I take it a step further. I had forgotten that properly cleaning kennel runs is an aerobic exercise! Climbing what I have dubbed “Laundry Mountain” in the shelter actually provides me more comfort and satisfaction than climbing the same mountain at home. Yes, that is my relaxation, and that is what sends me back to my “real” job every morning with a renewed sense of purpose and determination.

The next time someone asks what he or she can do to help animals, there is one simple answer. Volunteer. Whether you choose to volunteer as a board member, contributor, legislative advocate, foster home provider, or dog walker, every minute you spend on behalf of animals saves lives. We can’t conquer the injustices of animal cruelty, exploitation, and overpopulation without your participation. Call me, and I’ll happily share ideas about how you and your family and friends can become more engaged in animal protection and volunteer. And as always, thank you for caring about the animals.

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