WCRO Fall 2001

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Project Joey Highlights Abandoned Animals

Earlier this year, while preparing testimony for California Sen. Vincent's S.B. 237, which would require the posting of signs at all roadways entering the state and other strategic locations warning that the abandonment of an animal is a criminal offense, WCRO Program Coordinator Bob Reder met the Rodriguez family of Roseville, California. Mike and Karen Rodriguez were driving on a rural road on their way to a Sacramento Kings game at Arco Arena when they spotted what appeared to be an injured dog along the side of the road. Upon closer inspection they found an abandoned 16-week-old male, mixed-breed puppy. The poor dog was emaciated, dehydrated, and covered with so many ticks that he was suffering from a semi-paralytic condition. Whoever was responsible for dumping him along the roadway had left a bowl of untouched food.

Joey is one of the few lucky animals who survive being abandoned.

WCRO Part of Huge Cockfighting Raid

On Saturday, May 26, law enforcement officers from the San Diego Humane Society (SDHS) and a multi-agency team made up of about 70 people from a half-dozen other agencies across California and the nation executed a search warrant on what has been described as one of the largest illegal cockfighting operations ever uncovered: a 20-acre ranch in the rural San Ysidro area of San Diego near the Mexican border, where more than 2,500 fighting birds were kept. SDHS, the San Diego Police Department, the San Diego County Department of Animal Regulation, the Los Angeles SPCA, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the Galt Police Department, and WCRO were involved.

The raid culminated a two-year investigation in response to a series of tips. SDHS investigators had received a letter in April that mentioned a ranch in the Tijuana River Valley where cockfights were conducted on a weekly basis. "The information contained in that letter complemented information contained in an earlier letter we had received from another source who wrote about cockfights being staged at the ranch on weekends, with bets ranging from $500 to $3,000 per fight," said SDHS Captain Ken Beauregard. "We knew something was going on, but we wanted to make sure we had enough evidence to legally do something," he said. Beauregard contacted WCRO for assistance and Regional Director Eric Sakach flew to San Diego to meet with his agents to review the situation and offer suggestions. After agents gathered additional evidence through surveillance and undercover visits to the ranch, they obtained a search warrant.

Investigators believe one or more cockfights were in progress when officers entered the property. Fleeing men, women, and children attempted to escape or hide as officers moved through the labyrinth-like arrangement of coops, pens, and cages that covered the huge fenced compound. Searchers discovered several blood-stained, makeshift cockpits at various locations in the maze, along with bleeding and dead birds, and numerous boxes containing slashers (three-inch-long razor-sharp steel implements that are attached to the legs of fighting birds). They also found training aids, sparring muffs, injectable drugs, syringes, and suture kits. When the search was finally completed late the following day, 18 people had been arrested and enough cockfighting paraphernalia had been seized.
**California Teacher's Association Consensus**

The memorandum states that all California agriculture education shall conform to the appropriate state food and agriculture codes, especially as they pertain to the care, management, handling, transportation, and slaughter of livestock. It states that the parties share a common value and belief that humane, ethical animal husbandry practices should be an integral part of the curriculum and instructional program of agricultural education. It further pledges that both organizations will work cooperatively to ensure that high standards of animal care are maintained within these programs.

The memorandum came about thanks to a WCRO investigation into the slaughter of animals in public school agriculture training programs (see Spring 2001 WCRO Regional News), the introduction of California A.B. 166 by Assemblyman Joe Barr, and months of negotiations between WCRO Program Coordinator Bob Reder and Jim Aschwanden, CATA executive director.

Although not a binding agreement, the memorandum creates a baseline for dialog within these programs.

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**Puppy Mill Busted: WCRO Assists in Massive Rescue**

WCRO Director Eric Sakach recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the California Agriculture Teachers’ Association (CATA). The memorandum states that all California agriculture education shall conform to the appropriate state food and agriculture codes, especially as they pertain to the care, management, handling, transportation, and slaughter of livestock. It states that the parties share a common value and belief that humane, ethical animal husbandry practices should be an integral part of the curriculum and instructional program of agricultural education. It further pledges that both organizations will work cooperatively to ensure that high standards of animal care are maintained within these programs.

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**Tragic Animal Shelter Fires**

On Saturday evening, January 20, a fire destroyed the Escondido Humane Society (EHS) building in California killing 110 animals. About 84 animals were saved. WCRO was among the many organizations that immediately responded to assist EHS with on-site support and emergency fund raising. WCRO Special Projects Coordinator John Dommers met with EHS Executive Director Phil Morgan and members of the organization’s board on several occasions to review EHS needs.

Although the fire was believed to have started in a laundry room, no definite origin has been determined despite exhaustive investigation. Because of the older shelter construction, there is no fire suppression system in place, nor was there a local ordinance for such. Since the fire, animal shelters throughout the country have been updating their fire prevention plans and have been adding sprinkler systems. WCRO will continue to assist EHS with its fund-raising and shelter reconstruction efforts in the months ahead.

On June 29, 2001, a group of 3 million in damage to the new San Diego County Animal Control Department shelter, which was under construction. It had been scheduled to open in August. No animals were injured in the blaze. The HSUS contributed to a reward fund totaling $25,000 to apprehend and prosecute the arsonist(s).

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**Successful California Conference**

Collaboration, Cooperation, and Partnerships was the theme of the First Animal Care Conference held April 29-May 1, in Sacramento, WCRO. Sponsored in part by WCRO, the event marked the first time the California Animal Control Director's Association, the California Veterinary Medical Association, and the State Humane Association of California have combined to create an educational conference designed for everyone who works for the protection and health of animals. With more than 400 attenders and a full house of exhibitors, the conference was a definite success. WCRO staff manned an exhibit booth and presented part of the training program.
THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

WCRO Introduces New Humane Education Program on Native Nations

In May, WCRO staffers, including Cynthia Cutler (shown at right), introduced a new humane education component to the existing native nations spay/neuter program. While the veterinary services team from Remote Area Medical performed spay/neuter surgeries, the HSUS staff concentrated on presentations for adults and children from the reservations that covered the humane treatment of animals, dog bite prevention, and animal behavior problems. Using specially created videos, games, coloring books, banners, and posters, attendees learned that animals are sentient beings, and that pets are part of the family too. Stuffed toy dogs simulated real-life situations and taught children and adults how to act when approached by an unfamiliar dog or a pack of dogs.

This year, the clinic returned to Washington State to serve the Quinault reservation and visited the Makah reservation for the first time. “We were made to feel welcome at both locations,” said Cutler. “In addition to the educational component, veterinarians saw 412 animals during the week-long trip. Of those animals, approximately 260 were spayed or neutered and vaccinated. Comments from pet owners and tribal officials were overwhelmingly positive.”

The HSUS would like to thank Pfizer Animal Health for donating the vaccines; Vicki Bryson, Angie Kratting-Wilburn, Arnie Julich (in Quinault) and Vince Cooke (of the Makah tribe); and the volunteers who helped to make the clinics a success.

Save These Dates!

When: May 29–June 1, 2002
Where: Radisson Plaza Hotel, Fort Worth, Texas

Why: The HSUS National Conference on Animals in Disasters. You’ll meet hundreds of people involved with caring for animals in disasters; emergency management personnel; animal shelter staff, community volunteers, and more. You’ll gain valuable information about disaster planning, preparedness, and response as well as important hands-on training and much, much more. For more information, call 301-258-3063.

When: April 3 to April 6, 2002
Where: Fontainebleau Hilton Resort in Miami Beach, Florida

Why: Animal Care Expo. Animal protection professionals from around the globe will gather at Expo. Don’t miss this opportunity to get some surf, sand, sun, and shelter education. Watch for more details about the next Expo in the coming months; we’ll be keeping you up to date in Animal Sheltering magazine and online at www.AnimalSheltering.org.

Legislative Update

Following is an update on recently enacted legislation and a listing of bills that may need your support. HSUS staff are constantly in contact with state legislative offices and local activists to assist in the passage of humane legislation and to stop bills considered harmful. We cannot guarantee that the HSUS position on the bills will remain as reported here, as bills may be amended. For up-to-the-minute information and to become a member of the Humane Activist Network, contact WCRO.

California

Official California legislative information can be obtained from the state Web site at www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html. To contact the governor’s office or legislators call 916-322-9800.

- Abandoned Animals S.B. 237, by Sen. Edward Vincent, requires that road signs be posted at designated locations advising that animal abandonment is a crime. WCRO testified in support at a Senate hearing, where the bill was amended to mention animal abandonment in the state driver’s manual and to be included in the testing procedure. These are important steps forward, and this bill should be supported by all (see “Project Joey” on page 1).
- Animal Blood Banks S.B. 338, by Sen. Edward Vincent, requires that any animal shelter that supplies live or dead animals to biological research, educational institutions, veterinarians, or animal blood banks post a sign to advise the public. This bill was initiated by Nancy Gerbert of Grassroots Animal Welfare Committee based on her knowledge of sub-standard conditions at a California animal blood bank. The bill has passed the Senate and is awaiting a hearing date in the Assembly. Veterinarians performing certain types of surgery need whole blood, and many animals get a chance at life because of its availability. This bill seeks to alert the public about where animals from certain shelters are actually going, and it has brought the subject and conditions of animal blood banks to the forefront. We would like to see follow-up legislation and/or Department of Food and Agriculture Institute regulations addressing donor care, donor frequency, handling, socialization, and placement of any animal used in a commercial animal blood bank. In the meantime, we urge all to support this bill.
- Status: Awaiting the governor’s signature.

- Calpability of Mischievous Animals A.B. 1390, by Assemblywoman Carole Migden, as amended in June, would expand existing law, which makes it a felony if a “mischievous animal” kills a person, to also include “great bodily injury.” This bill also expands the existing law from covering the owner only, to include any person owning or having control of the animal. The bill has passed the Assembly and is now awaiting approval of the Senate Appropriations Committee. This bill is in response to the unfortunate death of Diane Whipple of San Francisco earlier this year.

- Status: Awaiting approval by the Assembly Business and Professional Committee.

- Stiffen penalties for cockfighting S.B. 62, by Sen. O’Connell, would increase penalties for offenses related to cockfighting and would require psychiatric evaluation and counseling for those convicted of gross misdemeanor and felony violations of all animal cruelty laws. Status: Awaiting the governor’s signature.

- Status: Passed the Senate. Awaiting approval by the Assembly Business and Professional Committee.

- Nevada

- Federal bill S.B. 173, by Sen. Washington, would have made it a crime for a person to commit an act of bestiality. This bill has struggled in the Legislature since its introduction in February of this year and now appears to have failed. It is difficult to understand why this deviant behavior can remain undefined, difficult to prosecute under current law, and not recognized as serious animal abuse that requires incarceration or mandatory psychological counseling.

- Felony Penalties for Cockfighting S.B. 62, by Sen. O’Connell, would increase penalties for offenses related to cockfighting and would require psychiatric evaluation and counseling for those convicted of gross misdemeanor and felony violations of all animal cruelty laws. Status: Awaiting the governor’s signature.

- This bill, confiscated during a huge raid in California (see article on page 1), clearly shows the physical effects of this blood sport. Nevada’s S.B. 62 would stiffen penalties for cockfighting.

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- Status: Awaiting approval by the Assembly Business and Professional Committee.

- Regulating of Commercial Senty Dog Businesses A.B. 769, by Sen. Liz Figureux, would require permits for owners of commercial sentry dog companies. In light of recent events, it would be prudent for the state to have the capability to regulate these persons who rent or sell dogs who have been trained to attack or protect property. Status: Passed the Senate. Awaiting approval by the Assembly Business and Professional Committee.

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injured or killed, that alone is not enough to prevent such a tragic act from happening again. Recently, legislation was introduced in California by Assemblywoman Carole Migden that would amend the current law regarding the owner of a mischievous animal who kills a person to include any person owning or having control of an animal who kills a person or causes injury.

San Francisco Animal Care and Control and other law enforcement officials are to be commended for their work on this case. The San Francisco District Attorney has been able to build a strong case. Prosecutors in the San Francisco District Attorney's Office deserve thanks for their tireless effort in pursuing charges in this matter along with the grand jury for sending a clear message that dog owners are responsible and will be held accountable for the actions of their dogs. In March, the grand jury indicted Marjorie Knoller and her husband, Robert Noel, on charges of involuntary manslaughter and allowing a mischievous animal to go at large. The grand jury also indicted Knoller on charges of second-degree murder. Both pleaded not guilty to the charges on May 29, 2001, and were returned to jail. Knoller is being held on $2 million bail and Noel on $1 million.

Riverside Recall Effort Fails

In my last column I reported that opponents of Riverside County’s new ordinance placing restrictions on the keeping of crowing fowl had mounted a recall effort against Riverside County Supervisor John Tavaglione. Tavaglione had introduced the ordinance in response to complaints about increased cockfighting activity in his district. I am happy to report that the recall effort failed.

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Promoting the protection of all animals

The HSUS has added $5,000 to an existing reward being offered for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the recent shootings of wild horses near the Utah/Nevada border. Six horses were found shot to death in mid-March and four more horses were found shot on April 9. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials advised WCRO's Eric Sakach that the latest shootings appeared to have been done with the intent of causing prolonged suffering to the animals. The inclusion of the HSUS reward brings the total reward offer to $11,000. “Hopefully, the offer will entice someone who knows something to come forward,” said Sakach. “The person or persons responsible for these sick acts needs to be brought to justice.”

Wild horses and burros roaming on public lands are protected under the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. Anyone who has information concerning the wild horse shootings in southeastern Nevada is encouraged to contact BLM law enforcement at 800-521-6501 or 775-289-1820. Callers can remain anonymous.

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