THE HSUS CHALLENGES
ANIMAL SACRIFICE CULTS

The Southeast Regional Office of The Humane Society of the United States and the City of Hialeah have won a major battle to ensure that animal sacrifice does not become an accepted practice in Florida.

Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth has issued a formal opinion declaring the gruesome ritual of animal sacrifice, as practiced by the Santeria cult, illegal under the state’s animal cruelty statutes. The opinion was prepared at the request of the Hialeah City Council, which is seeking to block the ritual killing of animals at the first public Santeria church in the United States. With the law on our side, the HSUS/SERO is pushing for the prosecution of all persons or groups who use live animals for ceremonial sacrifice.

Santeria blends the spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Yoruba tribe with the saints and rites of Catholicism. The two divergent beliefs were merged when slave traders tried to force Christianity on blacks being transported to the Americas from Africa. African gods became identified with Christian saints of similar characteristics; for instance, Babalu-Aye, the Yoruba god of pestilence and disease, became identified in Santeria with the Catholic Saint Lazarus, who rose from the dead.

Santeria rituals, including the sacrifice of animals, have so far been held largely in secrecy. The results of the ceremonies, however, are much more visible. Beheaded and bloodless bodies of chickens, pigeons, sheep, and goats are found on a daily basis in neighborhoods, canals, alleys and graveyards throughout South Florida.

Santeria first came to the attention of The HSUS in the late 1970’s. Our investigators and legal staff collected enough information to persuade Miami State Attorney Janet Reno to request a legal opinion from then-Attorney General Jim Smith. Smith responded with an informal letter agreeing that animal sacrifice is prohibited in Florida. The Humane Society of Greater Miami thereafter joined with local police to investigate complaints and seize evidence involving ritual sacrifice. The cases were referred to Reno’s office. Regardless, the state attorney never pursued the cases by prosecuting Santeria followers for the alleged crimes.

The cult’s membership in the Miami area received a boost in 1980 when the

A sacrificial offering to Chango, the Santeria god of fire and thunder. The pigeons’ heads have been torn off and their blood splattered on the doll which represents Chango.

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with Santeria, and petitions with over Santeria ceremonies.

cult.

petitions with the city council. City attorneys expressed concern that such a local
law would conflict with state statutes.
Pahlus disagreed. He suggested that the council seek an updated legal inter-
pretation from the attorney general in order to involve the dispute.

The opinion issued by Attorney Gen-
eral Bob Butterworth eliminates any legal question the city might have had and
clears the way for our ordinance recommen-
dations to be adopted. Butterworth said that the recently emphatically stated law
prohibits the sacrificial killing of animals.

This effectively countered arguments by council members that their pets are
protected under the U.S. Constitution's promise of freedom of religion.

The HSUS has long felt, and Butter-
worth concurs, that constitutional gua-
ranentes of religious freedom cover one's beliefs, but not always the practice of
those beliefs if they are in conflict with prevailing public laws upholding im-
pelling public interest such as the sup-
pression of cruelty to animals. The courts have previously held illegal such prac-
tices as pornography and criminal drug use even though the groups taking part
in activities claimed they were essential parts of their religion.

Santeria leaders further claim they were given two rights to kill in actual ritual
sacrifice provisions in the Florida animal cruelty statutes. Butterworth has
refuted that argument, saying it applies only to livestock killed in licensed com-
cercial slaughterhouses for the primary purpose of food consumption.

The action by Butterworth is a major step in the battle against Santeria and all we believe they must must end and murder animals to appease their
gods. The war is not over, however.

Santeria's leader, Ernesto Pichardo, has vowed to continue the fight in the courts.

Hialeah city council members and The HSUS/SERO will stand firmly opposite
the cult.

The cult will not do bluntly, but it will remain a religion out of the main-
stream of society. Any tacit acceptance of the sacrificial killings will encourage a growth in the number of clandes-
tiners across the United States and, consequently, an increase in the tens of thousands of animals forced to die for no other reason other than to be tortured, murdered, and tossed away for their
meat.

Santeria has come a long way in its efforts to stop cruelty to animals. We can take a step backward to
modulate a bloody cult whose practices clash with our modern society and civ-
ized mores.

To my knowledge, no animal in America has ever suffered in quite the same
heated public debate as has the type of dog known as the pit bull terrier. It is
scarcely possible to pick up the daily papers or watch the nightly news with-
out encountering a sensational tale of pit bull savagery or devotion. On the
basis of a single experience, a victim of a pit bull attack may describe all such
dogs as mindless killers. And, in an owner or the breeders of the dogs will likely portray all pit bulls as gentle, loyal and intelli-
gent family pets. The truth lies somewhere in between.

Any purebred or mongrel dog can bite, but some breeds have a greater
propensity than others. Chow chows, German shepherds, cocker spaniels and
American pit bull terriers are among the breeds known to bite more frequently
than the average dog. Where pit bulls clearly stand out, however, is in the bite
rates of categories greatest severity. So far in 1987, six of the seven reported human fatalities caused by dog bites involved pit bulls or pit bull crosses. It would be irresponsible to deny that a problem exists.

But wait. The pit bull is as much a victim as a threat. Bred over decades for the sport by his agency.

Roosters taken in raids by law en-
forcement are bloodied, bruised and
mutilated. A campaign to drive cockfighting out of the sport by his agency.

The Byron raid has stirred up a heated debate in middle Georgia be-
tween those who see the blood sport as family entertainment and those who view it as a cruel business. The HSUS/SERO believes those who use animals for their own barbaric amuse-
ments are dead.

The roosters used in cockfighting are too weak to stand the strain of running
and dying in the pit during a gory combat in which they batte their opponent with
1½ to 3 inch gaffs, or curved steel spikes, attached in place of the bird's natural
spurs. The roosters almost always die, either in the pit or soon after. When the
birds are too weak to put up a good fight they are transferred to a "drag pit" to
continue the battle until one or both are dead.

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cannot be adopted out because of their inbred aggressiveness. They present a problem when being held in custody because they have to be housed in separate cages to keep them from attacking one another. Those euthanized must be incinerated or buried deep in the ground because many cockfighters feed their birds strychnine, believing it will give them added stamina in the pit. The presence of poison in the birds makes them unsuitable for consumption by man or animal.

GBI agent White says the current difficulty in battling cockfighting is the lack of strict laws prohibiting it. White contends it can be hard to justify the time, manpower, and expense of a cockfighting investigation when only a misdemeanor crime is involved. He will support any legislative action to upgrade cockfighting to a felony in Georgia.

The SERO has worked with the GBI in the past and ranks the organization as the most professional state agency in this region, with the strongest commitment to eliminating illegal animal-fighting activities. Cockfighting is prevalent throughout the Southeast, but few law enforcement agencies in these states have made a concerted effort to root out this underground sport and prosecute cockfighters to the fullest extent of the law.

Hats off to the Georgia Bureau of Investigations!

These three-inch surgical steel gaffs are instruments of death in the cockfighting pit.
Sadly, bird quarantine stations are absolutely essential to safeguard the public health and safety. The imported birds must be observed and checked for diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease which can devastate poultry populations. From 1971 to 1973, one infected parrot caused outbreaks of Newcastle in California that required the destruction of 12 million chickens, at a cost to taxpayers of 56 million dollars. Wild birds can also transmit to humans such diseases as tuberculosis, psittacosis and salmonella.

All too frequently wild birds develop stress-related disorders from the unnatural conditions they are forced to live under after capture and sale. Some birds become so neurotic they begin to mutilate themselves by plucking their feathers, or in some cases, biting their own toes. Others destroy furniture, screech continuously, bite people or refuse to tame down, often leading to a succession of owners. Birds who normally have long life spans in the wild may only survive months or a few years in captivity. Many premature deaths are the result of nutritional disorders caused by an unchanging and inadequate seed diet.

The inherent abuse and cruelty of the wild bird trade has not gone unnoticed by the international community. Most countries, including the U.S., do not allow the capture and sale of their own native birds. More than half of the countries in Latin America now prohibit wildlife exports. Mexico stopped issuing export permits several years ago, though it continues to be a major source of smuggled birds. Australia considers some of its cockatoo species to be agricultural pests and allows limited killing of the birds, but the country refuses to allow them to be exported. It believes the pet trade is far more destructive and inhumane.

Only seven countries provide 65 percent of the bird exports to the United States, with Senegal accounting for 35 percent of the total number. Belgium and Argentina are the next largest exporters to this country, but their trade includes wild birds sometimes taken illegally from countries where they are protected. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) voted in 1976 to encourage all countries to ban the capture of wild animals for the commercial pet trade. Closer to home, New York State already bans the sale of all wild-caught birds as pets. Bird breeders are regulated and only captive-bred birds identified by leg bands may be sold.

Smuggled birds await public auction in this Texas USDA quarantine station.

Despite the cruelties of the wild bird trade, a U.S. import ban faces heavy opposition. The pet industry, breeders and exporters all have a powerful economic interest in keeping the status quo. The total retail bird industry rang up gross sales of 229 million dollars in 1984. From exporter to final seller, those involved receive profits of 60 percent at every level. Though millions of birds die, overshipping and high prices guarantee a profit. Only a total bird importation ban would break this cycle of cruelty for profit.

There are enough breeders now to fill the need for all appropriate pet bird species. Birds bred in captivity are healthier, friendlier and more compatible as pets than their wild counterparts. Every purchase of a wild-caught bird contributes to the problem and ensures that the wild-bird trade and all its cruelties will continue and flourish. Every wild-caught bird confined now to a cage, should remind us that it once had the world under its wings and the sky as its only limit.
Around the Region

ALABAMA—Humane organizations lost their bid to strengthen Alabama’s animal cruelty laws but are making plans to reintroduce the legislation next year. The bill would increase the maximum sentence that could be imposed on persons convicted of cruelty to animals and give police officers broader discretion to seize an animal that has been neglected or abused.

FLORIDA—The HSUS/SERO was effective in strengthening current animal-protection and control laws this past legislative session, while effectively blocking an attempt to weaken “The Animal Fighting Act”. A seemingly harmless amendment to the law proposed by State Representative Arnhilda Gonzalez-Quevedo of Coral Gables would have made cockfighting legal once again in Florida. Fortunately, our opposition helped defeat the bill in committee.

State law will now give humane societies and animal-control agencies greater flexibility to investigate cruelty and neglect cases. Florida Statute 828.073, a civil law which authorizes the seizure of mistreated animals, was amended to permit investigating agencies to present additional testimony and evidence relating to a defendant’s fitness to own animals. The new law also provides for the courts to order payment by the owner for the costs of caring for any animals seized pending a hearing or trial.

GEORGIA—The first statewide organization of humane societies, animal-control agencies and animal-rights groups has been created. The Georgia Coalition for Animal Protection will provide training for shelter personnel and technical assistance to local groups and individuals on animal-related issues. Assistance will be available for those conducting animal cruelty investigations throughout the state. SERO is working with the Coalition and State Representative Chesley Morton to introduce a bill promoting sodium pentobarbital, or its derivatives, as the preferred method of euthanasia at animal shelter facilities. The proposal specifically outlaws such atrocities as death by poison, gunshot, or electrocution.

The city of Waycross is taking steps to improve its animal-control program. Waycross, once known for electrocuting its unwanted animals, has now agreed to turn over the operation of its shelter to a newly formed humane society. The group plans on remodeling the facility and expanding its programs to better serve the community.

SOUTH CAROLINA—Florence police have made the first arrests for dogfighting under the state’s new felony law. Law enforcement and local humane society officials raided a fight and confiscated five adult and six young pit bull dogs. Six people attending the fight have been charged with animal fighting and baiting, which carries a maximum penalty of a five thousand dollar fine and/or five years in jail.

The Florence animal shelter and persons involved in the raid are facing harassment from dogfighting supporters in the area. The shelter has been broken into and vandalized several times. These intimidation ploys have not shaken the resolve of police and shelter officials who are standing firm in their efforts to abolish the blood sport from South Carolina.

Welcome Aboard

We are pleased to introduce two new additions to our staff.

Andrea Mitchell has joined us in the position of Secretary/Receptionist. Her responsibilities include a multitude of office and membership service functions.

Laura Bevan has filled the position of Program Coordinator. Her assignments will include legislative activities, program implementation, publicity and public relations.

Director’s Comment (continued)

The HSUS has been working to put the issue in proper perspective. I have stressed to the national media, on programs such as ABC’s NIGHTLINE, and to state and local government entities that the solution is not to ban the ownership of pit bull terriers, but to wage all-out war on dogfighters and others who breed or harbor any dog that has shown dangerous or vicious propensities. Strong anti-dogfighting laws already exist in all southeastern states, but they have not been effectively enforced. Local animal-control agencies need better ordinances which enable dangerous animals to be identified and their owners made responsible for the actions of their pets.