NRRO Rescues Boot Hill Prairie Dogs

Boot Hill in Billings, Montana, is a historic cemetery with graves dating from the late 1880s. Recently the cemetery became home to a small colony of black-tailed prairie dogs, and the City of Billings sought to humanely solve the problems the animals’ digging had created.

City officials ruled out allowing the colony to remain for fear that the dogs’ continual excavations might cause artifacts from the gravesites to be brought to the surface. You might remember that NRRO conducted a rescue operation a few years ago for a prairie dog colony that had been poisoned by a developer. We immediately offered our services to the City of Billings and contacted the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks permit office to get a temporary collection permit. Then we contacted the Northern Cheyenne Fish and Game Supervisor to determine if the Cheyenne had a site to release what we thought might be between five and 12 prairie dogs. The Northern Cheyenne welcomed the opportunity to accept more prairie dogs and told us of an abandoned colony about 125 miles from Billings near Birney, Montana, where they could be released.

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A humane trap waits for one of the 14 Boot Hill prairie dogs NRRO relocated to more suitable “digs.”

NRRO staff is often called to help other regions respond to a disaster such as a hurricane, flood, or wildfire that is impacting animals. But the spring rescue of Hokget (also known as Forgea) the forgotten dog far off the coast of Hawaii was unusual in terms of the resources required to bring an animal to safety.

The request for assistance came from the Hawaiian Humane Society (HHS). A ship, the Insiko, had been damaged by an engine fire and had been adrift for nearly two weeks with a crew of about 11 people and one dog (Hokget). The humans were rescued by a cruise ship, but because of a series of miscommunications, the dog was left aboard the listing ship for what turned out to be another three weeks of survival on the open seas.

Initial attempts to locate the ship and rescue Hokget using the services of a marine salvage company, American Marine Services, proved fruitless. Just when HSUS and HHS were about to give up hope and resign themselves to the fact that the Insiko—with Hokget aboard—had sunk, a Japanese fishing vessel radioed the U.S. Coast Guard that they thought they had passed the ship on their way into Hawaii.

This is when NRRO’s Dave Pauli was called for help. Pauli, at the request of the U.S. Coast Guard, submitted a written protocol for possible capture strategies (such as humane traps, nets, or chemical immobilization). Such measures might have been needed because a fishing boat crew who had boarded the disabled tanker had frightened the dog. Hokget ran below deck to avoid capture. Two days later, HHS assembled a capture and recovery team and invited Pauli to join.

The HSUS and HHS developed strategies for Hokget’s safe removal should the team be able to board the ship with the assistance of the U.S. Coast Guard, which was working to ensure that the Insiko’s thousands of gallons of diesel fuel would not end up causing an environmental catastrophe. Upon arrival in Hawaii, Pauli met with the other response team members, veterinarian and Kauai Humane Society (KHS) Executive Director Becky Rhoades and HHS Director of Operations Linda Haller. Pauli had been fortunate to work with both Rhoades and Haller on several other projects in Taiwan, Montana, and South Dakota, so the three already knew each others’ strengths and experiences and continued on page 2

Hokget at the Kauai Humane Society after her rescue from spending three weeks alone and adrift at sea.
Please Support the HSUS’s Remote Area Veterinary Services

For the past six years, NRRO has been fortunate to work with many dedicated veterinarians and veterinary volunteers to bring animal health services to both native nations and poor communities. But none of our relationships has been more productive or effective than the one we had with Remote Area Medical (RAM).

We are now extremely pleased to announce that the HSUS has hired former RAM Director Dr. Eric Davis and created the HSUS Remote Area Veterinary Services (RAYS), which will continue to provide excellent veterinary services to native nations and remote or economically stressed communities.

Dr. Davis and his team of skilled veterinarians, such as Dr. Susan Monger and Dr. Louis Lemmo, will immediately provide the experience and credibility to make this program a national leader in providing veterinary service to remote areas. This program will also help funnel talented vet students into service in the HSUS’s Cape Cod Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, and other needed areas such as disaster response and animal shelter medicine.

This program is dependent on your contributions. Our six NRRO states are home to many remote and economically depressed areas that could keep RAYS busy for several years to come.

If your employer, your civic group, or your family members agree that bringing animal health services to communities that have no options is important, please contact our office about how to make a donation to support this important work.

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formed an excellent team to rescue one scared dog from an abandoned ship. All that prevented an immediate rescue was formal Coast Guard approval that the ship was safe to be boarded and finding a way to get to Johnson Atoll, which is 500 miles off the Hawaiian coast and serviced irregularly by commercial flights.

Hokget is a Taiwanese dog whose name means “good fortune.” Her name turned out to be prophetic, for on the 21st day of her adventure, crew from American Marine Services boarded the Insiko to check on safety conditions. Hokget was ready to be rescued and made herself available for a quick and quiet capture by the tug boat crew.

The entire HSUS/HHS team was ecstatic that Hokget was finally in the care of humans and adopted.

Billings Animal Control Officer Daniel Reichert “rescues” instructor Kim Little in an exercise on a frozen river.

Getting “Technical”

It is five below and my rescue whistle is frozen,” was a common quip heard during the first day-long field class of the technical ice rescue course held March 2–4 in Bismarck, North Dakota.

The course consisted of one day of classroom instruction, in which instructor Kim Little of Rescue Tech International taught incident command, rope rescue techniques, and more. NRRO Program Coordinator Suzi Hansen presented animal handling rescue techniques. Two additional days of field training followed. Students participating included the Bismarck Airport Fire Department, Bismarck Pet Connection, Humane Society, and the City of Minot Animal Control.

A similar course held in Billings, Montana, included Billings and Lockwood Fire Departments; Deadwood, South Dakota, Animal Control; Billings Animal Control; and Great Falls, Montana, Animal Control.

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Promoting the Protection of All Animals

By Dave Pauli

The HSUS Website: www.hsus.org

HSUS Government Relations
Web Page: www.hsus.org/legislation

HSUS Government Affairs
Web Page: www.hsus.org/wildneighbors

HSUS Regional Programs
Web Page: www.hsus.org/nodogbites

HSUS Disaster Center
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Peacefully coexisting with wildlife:
Web Page: www.hsus.org/norotaries

Dog bite prevention:
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The HSUS Web site has a public search function. Please use these shortcuts.

Dave's Dialogue

So Much To Do, So Little Time...