

MARCH 1978

HSUS FIGHTS CRUELTY IN POUNDS

The first thing you'll notice when you walk into a badly run city dog pound is the smell. It is the indescribable odor of an accumulation of waste from fifty or more dogs.

Next, you'll notice sad brown eyes and wagging tails as the dogs crowd to the front of the cages, eager for contact with a human. Look a little closer and you may see something else. You may notice a dog with its eyes almost glued shut with yellow, runny matter — a symptom of distemper. You may see a dog with a torn and bleeding ear, a victim of the fights that inevitably erupt when only one bowl of food is put in a cage with a dozen dogs. Through the crowd of ears and tails you may see a little dog, shivering and pressed into the furthest corner of the pen. Is it sick? Or has it been bullied and terrified by the bigger dogs until it has just given up trying?

If the cage floor is clean, it may be wet. The dogs may be wet, too. What easier way to clean the pen than to hose it down with the animals still in it, even when it is cold enough in the unheated building to see your breath?

Look around for cats. You may not find any, since many pounds won't handle animals that don't have to be licensed. If you do find them, look at what they're being fed. If it's dog kibble, those cats are being starved. They can't handle those big chunks.

Perhaps it's just as well if they don't eat too much, since there is no kitty litter for them to use. Cats are so meticulous in their habits that they may manage to look sleek and clean in the worst of conditions. But if they are crowded five or six to a cage, without proper food, without a litter pan, without medical care for the sick or injured, you may be sure they are suffering.

The Humane Society of the United States is constantly working to end cruelties such as these. The following report will tell you of some of the conditions HSUS investigators have found in dog pounds across the country, how HSUS is working to improve them, and how you can help.



This dog is suffering with mange and a swollen leg. Instead of placing it in a cage directly from the animal control truck, a determination of its medical condition should have been made followed by rapid treatment or euthanasia to end its misery. Lack of veterinary care at a pound that handles many animals is an open invitation to suffering.

The Pound Problem

Unlike privately owned animal shelters, the pound was not instituted for the benefit of the animals. "Pound" stands for impoundment. Animals are impounded when they are in violation of a law or city ordinance, or when they constitute a threat to the health and welfare of the community. Of course, dogs and cats don't violate laws — people do. If all owners were responsible with their pets, there would hardly be a need for a pound. As long as owners allow their pets to roam free and breed indiscriminately, there will be pounds, and the animals will take the rap.

Pounds may be called Animal Control Centers, Shelters, or Rabies Control Centers. They are often confused with privately run humane societies or SPCA shelters. Some municipalities have a contract with a private shelter to handle the area's animal control problems, but most cities have their own pound. The pound may be run by the police department, the health department or a separate animal control department. It is usually built in an out-of-the-way location, often near the garbage dump. And it is usually a low priority item at budget time.

Although the pound's purpose is to protect the people in the community, that is no excuse for cruel and



Taken in a midwestern city, this photo depicts a common pound problem — cramped quarters. Obviously, this cage was designed for an animal much smaller than this Airedale. Note the broken wires and gaping hole. Just imagine what might happen to a dog that pokes its nose through the opening.

inhumane handling of the animals. As HSUS Animal Control Specialist Phyllis Wright puts it, "We're dealing with living, feeling creatures that are in jail for no fault of their own, and don't deserve to be subjected to disease, dogfights, freezing cold, or near-starvation."

There are excellent pounds, such as the Fairfax County, Virginia, Department of Animal Control, which was recently accredited by The HSUS. There are good pounds, that make no effort to educate the public in the principles of responsible pet ownership, but at least provide clean, decent quarters for the animals they handle. Then there are pounds that only excel at cruelty. HSUS personnel have investigated such pounds all over the country. Here are some of the observations taken from reports on several of the pounds:

"We observed a filthy, fly infested cesspool. We observed feces not removed, making the dogs live in their own waste."

"Cages used to house cats were so small that a confined mother cat could not stand, lie or sit in a natural position."

"There were two mixed shepherd type puppies in the same cage. Upon closer examination, one puppy was determined to be dead. It had been dead for an

extended period of time, because a state of rigor mortis had set in. The other puppy had liquid matter discharging from its eyes and nose."

"Even though my visit was expected, I found three containers with wet, moldy dog food and numerous maggots wiggling in the moldy food."

"There were 37 dogs in a pen measuring 10' by 10', ranging in size from 15 to 80 pounds. Numerous dogfights took place with various degrees of injury."

"One pound of dog food was put in a cage with 23 dogs, causing horrendous dogfights. In 3½ minutes, by my watch, there wasn't a scrap of food left. There had been 5 fights. One Great Dane had taken five dogs and just slammed them up against the wall and stood over the feeding trough."

"The method of herding animals through a maze of hallways by using brooms, shovels and wire gates to force them into a euthanasia chamber ten feet by eight feet by four feet high is totally unconscionable. Forty-two animals were forced to run through this maze with brooms and shovels banging behind them, and those that fell down or tried to

turn back were run over by the larger dogs. The animals ranged in size from 15 to 80 pounds. The feeling of panic from being crowded on top of each other in a chamber that humanely could handle 15 large dogs is impossible to convey without actually watching this procedure."

"Four employees were at the pound, but only one appeared to be doing any work. The others stood near the front gate or in the office talking to the office clerk."

HSUS is working in these situations and many others to alleviate the suffering of impounded animals. After investigation and recommendations were made, later reports on some of these pounds showed considerable improvement. Here is an excerpt from a report on a follow-up visit at a pound where HSUS personnel held a four day training session for the staff:

"As I went into Kennel #1, I noticed there was no offensive odor. The runs were dry and clean, and the dogs were dry. There was no overcrowding in the runs. There was fresh, clean water in clean containers. I could not locate any sick animals, and observed no animals showing signs of injury or lameness."

"The cat room has been improved. Cats are removed from the cages while they are being cleaned. Litter pans have been provided. The water and food receptacles were clean, the cleanest I have ever seen at this facility."

"There is still room for improvement, but at least they are doing better in the handling of animals."

HSUS is on the Job

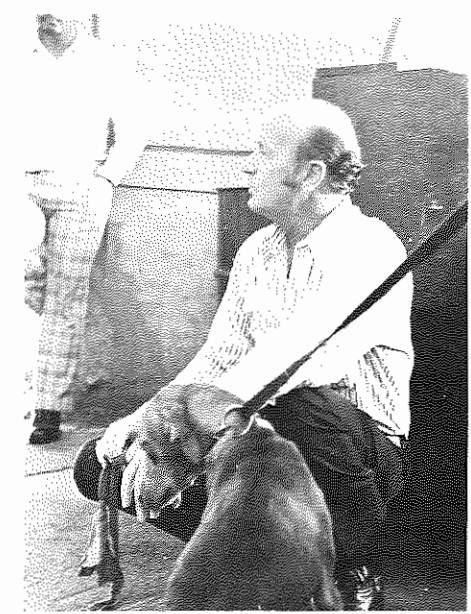
The fight to upgrade the pounds has been long and hard. Phyllis Wright remembers the battle of San Antonio. "It took almost a year of inspections, reports, meetings with reporters and government officials, and finally, a legal suit against the city to get even the most basic changes at the San Antonio pound. I made many trips to San Antonio, but the brunt of the attack was carried, as it always must be, by a local group of citizens determined to end the cruelties at that pound."

Phil Steward, HSUS Investigator, has been working for two years with citizen's groups in Baltimore, Maryland, and Gary, Indiana, to help the hundreds of animals these city's pounds handle each month. Bernard Weller, Field Representative in the Gulf States Regional Office, recently confronted local officials in Denton and Kingsville, Texas, with the terrible conditions at their dog pounds. Both cities have agreed to take action on Weller's recommendations. Weller will continue to monitor the results.

Similarly, pounds in Detroit, Michigan; Durham, North Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; Shelbyville, Indiana; Washington, D.C.; Mena, Arkansas; Solano County, California and many other places have come under HSUS' scrutiny. Typically, it is letters of complaint from local citizens that alert HSUS investigators to conditions in a city pound. Concerned citizens may band together to fight for change, and contact HSUS for help. There must be considerable local involvement if there is to be long term success. As Phyllis Wright explained to one citizen's group, "You are the force in this city. We can come from the outside and reinforce and help you, but you citizens are the taxpayers who really own this pound. Only you have the power to change the way it's run."

Steps to End the Suffering

The first step is detailed documentation of the situation as it exists. It isn't



HSUS Field Representative Bernard Weller demonstrates humane animal handling methods to pound workers and animal control officers.

enough to say, "These animals are suffering." There must be witnesses to say, for example, "On March 15 at 11:00 A.M., I was at the pound and saw 27 dogs in a pen measuring 10' by 10'." Each item of cruelty must be witnessed. Many animal lovers are squeamish about going to the pound. They hate to see animals in pain or discomfort, especially when they have no authority to relieve the suffering on the spot. But this heartbreaking chore is a necessity if conditions are ever to change.



Even though the unwanted cat problem is just as immense as the dog problem, some pounds don't even take them in. Of those that do, too many treat cats as second class citizens. This is one pound's idea of cat cages.



Crowding is cruel. Dogs should be separated by size, sex, and temperament. Pound workers must pay special attention to this seemingly obvious detail, otherwise fights are inevitable.

When an HSUS investigator inspects a pound, the documentation of conditions is generally released to the local press. HSUS believes the citizens who pay for the pound with their taxes have a right and responsibility to know what is being done with their money and in their name.

When it is clear that conditions at a pound are indefensibly cruel, HSUS, along with local citizens, will approach the city government with an offer and a promise. The offer is to help the city improve the pound, through training of personnel, recommendations on upgrading of the facilities, and information on proper handling procedures. The promise is to take legal action if nothing is done to end the cruelty. All states have laws to prevent cruelty to animals, and municipal dog pounds are not exempt from these laws.

Murdaugh Madden, General Counsel for HSUS, explains, "We consider legal action a last resort in these cases. We much prefer to work in cooperation with city officials and the personnel at the pound to improve conditions. But when it is clear that conditions are grossly and needlessly cruel, and when we have tried every other approach with no positive results, and when concerned members of the local

community are willing to join with us, we will not hesitate to take legal action. We do not use this lightly, but HSUS exists to prevent cruelty to animals, and many times in the past, we have proven our determination to do this with legal action when it is our only recourse."

Perseverance is an important quality in these investigations. Sometimes a case must be worked on for two or three years before conditions at the pound are acceptable. According to Investigator Steward, "People often write wondering why it takes us so long to turn things around at a pound. There are several reasons. Most important, we want the changes to be permanent. Often, if a city's newspaper publishes our report on the horrible conditions at the pound, the mayor or a city official will schedule an inspection to 'see for himself' what the situation is. The day before he arrives, the pound is scrubbed from top to bottom. The sick dogs are euthanized, food and water are provided in generous quantities, and personnel are briefed on how to act. The mayor arrives, takes the tour, and walks out to tell the waiting reporters that we have grossly exaggerated conditions, that the pound seems to be in good shape, the animals well cared for, and the staff busy and on the ball. Two days later, things are back to normal — feces all over the place, sick dogs mixed in with well ones, too little food, filthy water, and the staff playing pinochle in the front office. That's not our idea of improved conditions. Real training and attitude change takes time, and we are not impressed by 'instant cures' that turn into 'instant relapses.'"

You Can Help

For all the progress, much remains to be done. You can help in many ways. Visit your local pound. If you don't like what you see there, write your mayor or city councilman. Write the local newspaper and alert them to these conditions. If there is already a group in your city working to improve your pound, support them with your efforts.

The Humane Society of the United States is ready to help. HSUS has available many printed materials on



Courtesy of Bonnie Smith

Phyllis Wright was instrumental in the development of HSUS' Accreditation Program. Pounds and shelters are accredited only when high standards of humane care are met.

proper shelter management, sample plans for a model animal facility, information on euthanasia methods with evaluation of the humaneness of each, model animal control ordinances, and other material to help you make your case at City Hall. When possible, an HSUS investigator will come to your town and lend support in the fight.

HSUS President John Hoyt has said, "I wish we had the resources to assign a full-time investigator to every case of cruelty we find. Our investigations and animal control staff manage to cover a lot of ground. Their dedication to this cause is tremendous. But there is always so much more to do than our time and money allows."

Your contributions to HSUS continue to help. With your dollars, HSUS can expand its effort to bring relief to the dogs and cats suffering in America's pounds. Use the enclosed envelope to send your tax-deductible contribution today. The animals will benefit because you care.

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Chief Investigator Frantz Dantzler is a frequent speaker at HSUS' workshops on community animal problems.



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