Teaching an Old Swan New Tricks

Capsized canoes, frightened boaters, and injured Canada geese are all on Genghis Swan’s rap sheet. Named by residents for his aggressive nature, Genghis was about to be deported when the town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, agreed to let The HSUS try to teach him some manners.

On a rainy spring afternoon, NERO Program Coordinator Linda Huebner accompanied Jessica Almy, wildlife advocate for HSUS’s Cape Wildlife Center, on a mission to teach the overly aggressive swan not to attack boats. The two canoed down the Eel River, avoiding his mate’s nest. When Genghis approached too close to the boat, Huebner sprayed him with methyl anthranilate, a chemical used in grape-flavored soft drinks. It seems birds don’t like fake grape, and will typically learn to avoid the stuff.

Almy has continued his training sessions, and so far, so good. The last few trips elicited no reaction from Genghis. He fathered six cygnets this season, which may have calmed him down. Hopefully he’ll continue to behave himself, and the community can continue to enjoy the river risk-free.

Genghis (bottom) enjoys a quiet moment with his mate on Plymouth’s Eel River.

Protecting Maine’s Black Bears at the Ballot Box

In November 2004, voters in Maine will have the opportunity to ban several cruel hunting methods, including the hunting of bears with bait, dogs, and leghold traps. Not familiar with these practices? It takes only a brief description to see why animal advocates and ethical hunters decry these techniques as unfair and unsporting.

Bear baiting involves setting up stations stocked with donuts and greasy foods before the hunting season. Bears who become regular visitors at these bait sites make easy targets for hunters who shoot the animals at close range as they feed. Many of these hunters come from other states and pay handsomely for local guides and outfitters to make their trophy hunting experience a successful one. An average of 3,000 bears are killed at bait stations in Maine each year. Of the 27 states that still allow bear hunting, two-thirds prohibit baiting.

Another popular method of pursuing bears involves the use of dogs fitted with radio transmitter collars. Packs of dogs chase and corner their quarry, allowing the hunter to follow their signal, then drive in and shoot the exhausted bear out of his tree. In addition, Maine is the only state that allows the use of leghold traps to kill bears.

Opponents often claim that such ballot initiatives represent the end of state wildlife management and longtime hunting traditions. In fact, the bear baiting initiative allows exceptions for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to manage problem animals using bait, hounds, and traps when necessary. And contrary to alarmist cries that the state’s black bear population will spiral out of control, similar initiatives passed in other states have demonstrated quite the opposite. Importantly, it stands to reason that bait stations habituate bears to human foods, prompting an increase in human-wildlife conflicts as these animals lose their wariness of people and search out such edibles in campgrounds, cabins, and trash cans.

Polling shows that a strong majority of Maine citizens favor ending bear baiting, hounding, and trapping. In response, a diverse coalition known as Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting, with support from The HSUS and other animal protection continued on page 2
Rescue home children enjoy an HSUS humane education presentation.

areas of flat prairie and rolling hills. The human-animal bond is as strong here as it is anywhere else, but because there are no vet- ernary clinics or animal shelters the reserva­ tion can be a difficult place to own a pet.

erinary clinics or animal shelters the reserva­ tion can be a difficult place to own a pet. New Hampshire doesn’t have the same pet overpopulation issues that are common on the Rosebud Reservation. However, our region does include a number of poor, rural, and underserved areas that could benefit greatly from the RAYS program. We look forward to making these opportunities available in the future.

continued from “Bears,” page 1 organizations, plans to take this issue directly to the voters. Grassroots ballot initiatives require a great deal of energy from committed volunteers. Approximately 75,000 signatures from registered Maine citizens must be collected by November 15, 2003, in order to qualify the bear baiting referendum for the 2004 ballot. During the fall, NERO staff will be joining educators of signatures gathered fanned out across the state, frequenting fairs, festivals, businesses, and other public venues. But many additional signatures are still needed! If you would like to help with this important effort, contact Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting at 207-781-5155 or info@fairbearhunting.org.

Bailout initiatives also require a great deal of funding in order to secure critical newspaper, radio, and television advertising spots during the public education phase of the campaign. To make a donation, please send your check (payable to MCBH) to Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting, 190 U.S. Route One, Falmouth, ME 04105.

This is a unique opportunity for citizens to shape public policy, and NERO strongly encourages its Maine readers to provide their full support to the bear baiting initiative.
Animal Hoarding: When is Enough Really Enough?

Headlines such as “Impurrfect Tenant: Cat Woman Creates Stink” and “More than 100 Dogs Seized From Home” capture our attention. They’re stories about the “accumulation” of animals that result from animal hoarders or animal collectors. But what exactly does “animal hoarding” mean? For most of us, the “accumulation” of animals is a result of our kind-hearted nature and sincere love for these creatures. But does that make every pet owner with more than two animals an animal hoarder? Hardly.

Dr. Gary Patronek, a former professor at Tufts Veterinary School and a leading expert on this phenomenon, defines animal hoarders as “people who accumulate large numbers of animals; fail to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, and veterinary care; and fail to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals or the environment or the negative impact of the collection on their own health and well-being.” The worry is not so much the number of animals involved, but the pet owner’s inability to recognize the squalor, disease, and sometimes even death surrounding them. Despite their own responsibility for the conditions they live in, help for the people involved must go hand in hand with help for the animals.

I was recently asked to assist with a hoarding case in Bridgewater, Vermont, involving more than 65 cats living under one roof. The cats’ owners had refused spay/neuter assistance from the local humane society three years prior, and when dead kittens were found in plastic bags in their dumpster, neighbors finally called authorities to intervene. The overwhelming smell of ammonia and trash forced rescuers to wear face masks when the cats were removed. All of the cats—many of them already pregnant—were neutered at a local spay/neuter clinic. I assisted with the transfer of many of them to local shelters in both Vermont and New Hampshire. At press time, more than 56 of the cats had already found new homes.

While this case may have had a happy ending for these cats, it put a serious financial strain on the lead shelter, although The HSUS subsequently granted the organization $2,000 to cover its expenses. More importantly, the danger still exists that these people will start to accumulate animals again in a different location. The recidivism rate for animal hoarding is nearly 100 percent.

So what can we do as concerned citizens to fight this phenomenon? We can be alert. If you have concerns that someone you know may be accumulating animals beyond his or her means to care for them, contact your local animal shelter or law enforcement agency. For more information on animal hoarding, you can contact our office or go on-line at www.hsus.org/sheltering/library/animal_hoarders.html.

The HSUS has recently formed a National Hoarder Response Task Force to address solutions for this phenomenon. We may never fully understand the psychological dynamics that occur in an animal hoarder’s brain (although more research is forthcoming), but it is clear that we must take a multi-faceted approach to solving the problem—for the sake of both animals and people alike.