Illegal, Secret Dogfights and Cockfights Rampant in the U.S.
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Enforcement is Difficult & Dangerous!

“...It shall be unlawful for any person to knowingly sponsor or exhibit an animal in any animal fighting venture to which any animal was moved in interstate or foreign commerce.”

—Section 26
Animal Welfare Act
U.S.C., §§2131–2156

During the Casper, Wyoming raid, HSUS investigators found this dead gamecock tossed aside with the crowd’s litter.

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The Michigan Humane Society seized this Pit Bull Terrier along with 65 others during raids last fall.

HSUS Leads Cockfight Raid

Casper, Wyoming — Early in July, a team of more than 30 local, state, and federal law enforcement officers led by HSUS investigators made a raid on a secret cockfight arena on the outskirts of town. More than 100 people were caught inside the building. All were violating Wyoming state law and possibly federal law.

(Continued)

HSUS Dogging Dogfighters

Unlike cockfighting, dogfighting is expressly prohibited in all 50 states. It, too, is a violation of the animal fighting ventures section of the Animal Welfare Act.

HSUS investigators are continually following up leads and providing information on illegal dogfights to local animal welfare groups and law enforcement agencies. One such investigation cur-
Cockfighting... continued from page one

More than 52 live game birds, eight dead fowl, a large array of cockfighting hardware, cash, trophies, and carrying cages were confiscated in the Casper raid. It was the largest cockfight raid in HSUS history. And, it may be the first national enforcement action under the provisions of the U.S. Animal Welfare Act. (See inset box on page 1.)

Coordinated by chief HSUS cruelty investigator, Frantz Dantzler, the raid resulted in the arrest, mugging, and booking of eleven persons, including some from out of state. All eleven were observed by a HSUS undercover agent and a USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) enforcement officer directly handling the fighting cocks, referring bets, making heavy bets, or actively participating in the illegal fighting in some manner. The HSUS investigator and the USDA officer had entered the secret arena posing as cash-paying spectators and observed the alleged illegal acts.

The rest of the men, women, and children caught inside the building were made to formally identify themselves prior to their release. The eleven may be charged under provisions of the federal Animal Welfare Act while the rest of the crowd may be prosecuted under Wyoming law.

According to one HSUS undercover investigator, “Cockfighting is a major illegal sport. It is a multi-million dollar industry which results in the death of thousands of game fowl annually.”

Cockfighting is a federal crime only in states where it would be a violation of state law. This exception in the federal law was built in as a result of the lobbying efforts of cockfighters when the Animal Welfare Act was expanded to cover animal fighting ventures in 1976. The exception allows the shipment of fighting birds across state lines for cockfighting as well as persons attending the fights. States where cockfighting has been permitted by the courts include Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Florida, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In addition, in several other states including Louisiana and Maryland, the only prohibition is against the gambling - not the cockfighting itself.

The exception to the law does not apply in Wyoming since it is not one of the states where this ghastly sport is allowed. Using a telephoto lens, HSUS chief investigator Dantzler photographed many out-of-state license plates on autos and pickups entering the arena grounds. During a search of one such vehicle, the glove compartment was found to contain a supply of the pointed steel gaffs which cock handlers attach to the fowls’ legs.

The Casper raid turned up a traveling trophy which had been used for several years in various cockfights. One of the winners from a previous year whose name was prominently displayed on a brass plaque was in attendance at the Casper cockfight. It will be very difficult for him to deny any role in the illegal fights.

Also confiscated were many gaffs and spurs. These are sharp metal devices attached to the cocks’ legs. The purpose of these weapons of the fighting pit. On the call of “Pit your Dogs,” the handler lets go of the dog. The dogs are expected to make an aggressive charge toward each other and go for “the kill.”

Normally, the dogs gain a bite on an ear, leg, or the throat and hang on until the opposing dog cannot or will not compete. The sides and the floor of the pit get covered with blood. When a dog fails to “scratch” he automatically loses. The term “scratch” originated with the scratch in the dirt a referee used to make across the middle of the pit. Dogs were expected to cross the scratch line to begin the fight. Today, the term simply means aggressive behavior. A winning dog always scratches!

“A gentleman by the name of F.L. Dantzler reportedly is traveling the country impersonating an interested (fighter/handler) or curious spectator. He is an undercover investigator whom all should beware! He is not on the up and up; rather, shall we say — a sneak!”

—Grit and Steel Underground magazine of cockfighters

Dogfighting... continued from page one

Dogfighting is on the increase in the U.S. Texas appears to be the state with the distinction of having more illegal dogfighting than any other state. But dogfighting is not a regional thing. Nor is it clearly identified with any one segment of society. Dogfighting takes place in all parts of the U.S., and its proponents come from every level of society.

Although dogfighting is clearly illegal under the Animal Welfare Act, the USDA has had little experience with dogfight enforcement. HSUS investigators have found the USDA to be willing to help on information gathering from other sources, but have not uncovered substantial information on its own. In addition, U.S. Attorneys sometimes lack the will to follow through with prosecutions.

Historically, it has been up to local law enforcement officials and animal welfare groups to investigate and seek prosecutions in dogfight cases. The USDA simply does not have the resources to deal with the problem.
Cockfighting...  
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devices is to kill. “Cockers” like to say that the use of the spurs is “more humane” than allowing the game birds to fight and kill with their natural spurs. One cockfighter recently quoted in the Sacramento Union (CA) said, “It is far more humane to put the blade on them. Much quicker. It speed­sup the inevitable.”  
Not so! Because of the heavy gambling, wounded cocks are often forced to thrash around until one of them dies so that a winner can be declared. There’s usually a small pit set to one side just for this purpose.

The Casper raid was the result of a four-month investigation that began when Natrona County Sheriff Bill Estes and The Casper Humane Society contacted HSUS investigators seeking help. HSUS then informed USDA officials. Sheriff Estes asked HSUS to investigate and coordinate all activities.

Sheriff Estes sought our help because his informant explained that out-of-state people would be attending and participating. This is the main reason why HSUS became involved. Once it was determined that the Animal Welfare Act would be violated, HSUS investigators knew that any enforcement actions would help set a precedent for future cases.

Cockfighting usually results in the death of the loser. “Cockers” usually justify their bloody pastime by pointing out that Thomas Jefferson and other men of his time engaged in this “gentlemanly” sport.

A lot of things were different 200 years ago. But, that doesn’t justify their continuance today! Tradition is no excuse for cruelty and death.

Dogfighting...  
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not have the manpower, the budget, or the expertise to investigate every report of dogfighting.

Because of the heavy betting, the high value of the dogs (sometimes as high as four figures), and the violent nature of some dogfight enthusiasts, it is extremely dangerous to place undercover investigators within the ranks of the “good old boys.” In the past, HSUS animal-fighting investigators have had their lives threatened. One HSUS animal-fighting investigator even had to be relocated because of the threats to his family.

Most HSUS information comes from informants who have been intimate with dogfighting. They may have even owned and fought dogs. Typically, they call The HSUS to report an upcoming fight. When our investigating meet with them, they discover that the informants have become “sickened” by the continual bloodletting. Often, an informant has lost a favorite dog in the ring. One recent informant sold a fighting dog with the proviso that the dog be used strictly for breeding purposes. He later learned that the dog was being fought. This led him to call The HSUS.

Like cockfighting, dogfighting is an old “sport.” Its beginnings can be traced back to the days when Romans pitted dogs against bears and other animals in the coliseums. It found its way to this country when the Staffordshire Bull Terrier began to be imported in the early 1800s.

It’s high time we scratched this so-called sport. It’s just another excuse for gambling. It has no place in a civilized society. It began with a culture that died out because of decadent behavior. It should end with a culture that respects life — ours!!

YOU CAN DO SOMETHING About Animal Fighting

- SUPPORT HSUS investigations, assistance to law enforcement agencies, and legislative efforts to stop cock and dogfighting through your charitable contributions and membership in The HSUS.

- CONTACT your local animal welfare organization if you learn about any upcoming cock or dogfights.

- WRITE your state representatives if you live where cockfighting is not specifically prohibited. Ask your representative to sponsor legislation to make this blood sport clearly illegal.

- CALL the police if you learn about any cock or dogfights. Give the police any leads you may have. Remember, gambling is a fact of life at dog and cockfights. Illegal gambling and illegal animal fights are things the police want to know about.

- EXPLAIN to friends and children that animal fighting is not a victimless crime like jaywalking. It’s a reprehensible pastime that contributes to the desensitization of people and leads to the moral bankruptcy of our society.

YOU CAN HELP!
The Pit Bull Terrier is the preferred dog of dogfighters. The dogs’ natural aggressive tendencies make them easy to train for fighting.

HSUS NEEDS YOUR CONTINUING HELP!
The HSUS will continue its leadership role working to end inhumane animal fighting. Without your generous support, The HSUS would not have been able to spearhead the attack on dog and cockfighting over the years.

It was your financial support that allowed HSUS to be in the forefront during the development of the Animal Welfare Act in the sixties and the amendments to the Act in the seventies. We have testified on Capitol Hill, investigated and aided in prosecutions all across the U.S.A., and educated the public.

Much remains to be done if we are, once and for all, to end this sadistic pastime. Use the enclosed contribution envelope today. Your check will help close another cruel chapter in American history.