1988 LEGISLATIVE YEAR IN REVIEW

It was a moderately good year for animals, as far as federal legislation was concerned; the One-hundredth Congress considered and passed more legislation for animals in 1988 than in other recent years. The year's achievements include passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) re-authorizations, the Elephant Conservation Act, and special protection for wild chimpanzees. Unfortunately, the Pet Protection Act, which would have banned pound seizure, failed to pass.

The MMPA, the world's most progressive law protecting marine mammals, was re-authorized and signed into law by the president after a year-long battle by animal protectionists. Several improvements were made over the previous re-authorization in 1984, including increased protections for dolphins drowned in the process of yellowfin tuna fishing, for other marine mammals threatened by fishing operations, and for captive marine mammals. Although The HSUS worked hard for a dramatic reduction in the numbers of dolphins killed in tuna fishing, Congress failed to lower the annual U.S. dolphin-kill quota of 20,500. However, we won several increased safeguards for dolphins, including a ban on setting nets at sundown, 100 percent government-observer coverage of all U.S. and foreign purse seine tuna boats, and a requirement that foreign fisheries cut their dolphin mortality rate in half by the end of the next fishing season (see the Fall 1988 HSUS News).

In October, the president signed into law the ESA, which makes it a federal offense to possess, buy, sell, import, or export any species listed as endangered or threatened, or any product made from such a species. The HSUS and other groups worked hard for four years to ensure that this law was not weakened by amendments, only way to stop the elephant slaughter is to eliminate the ivory trade and is now working through consumer and other channels to reduce that trade.

Working with HSUS board member Jane Goodall, we were successful in achieving legislation that prohibits the use of federal funds for any project, by anyone, for any reason, that entails the capture or procurement of chimpanzees taken from the wild (see the Fall 1988 HSUS News).

The disappointment of the year was the failure of the Pet Protection Act, which would have banned pound seizure, the practice of seizing and shelter animals for use in research. The bill collapsed in the Senate, where a famous surgeon, representing the biomedical-research community, convinced key legislators that medical research would suffer a serious setback if a pound-seizure ban were enacted.

Two other bills received significant attention this year. House hearings were held on the Consumer Products Safe Testing Act, which would have greatly limited the use of animals in toxicity testing of consumer products (see the Summer 1988 HSUS News). The bill will be reintroduced in 1989. Finally, a controversial bill to impose a two-year moratorium on the patenting of genetically altered animals failed to materialize this year, although an altered version of the bill, prohibiting the patenting of human beings and exempting farmers from patent liability, passed the House. A coalition of groups, including The HSUS, will be supporting the moratorium bill again in 1989.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act should reduce the dolphin mortality rate.

The Elephant Conservation Act started out as a bill called the African Elephant Protection Act, which would have banned the importation of all ivory from African elephants into the United States (see the Summer 1988 HSUS News). African elephants are considered likely to become extinct within ten to twenty years as a direct result of the world's desire for ivory. However, after strong opposition from certain conservation organizations, the bill was considerably weakened. The resulting, compromise Elephant Conservation Act bans U.S. ivory imports only from countries that, in the opinion of the U.S. Department of the Interior, have inadequate conservation and management programs and are not members of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. All others may continue to export ivory to the United States.

The HSUS believes that the Congressional battle for the Endangered Species Act re-authorizations would suffer a serious setback if the bill was weakened by amendments.