Earlier this year, while preparing testimony for California Sen. Vincent's S.B. 237, which would require the posting of signs at all roadways entering the state and other strategic locations warning that the abandonment of an animal is a criminal offense, WCRO Program Coordinator Bob Reder met the Rodriguez family of Roseville, California. Mike and Karen Rodriguez were driving on a rural road on their way to a Sacramento Kings game at Arco Arena when they spotted what appeared to be an injured dog along the side of the road. Upon closer inspection they found an abandoned 16-week-old male, mixed-breed puppy. The poor dog was emaciated, dehydrated, and covered with so many ticks that he was suffering from a semi-paralytic condition. Whoever was responsible for dumping him along the roadway had left a bowl of untouched food for him to eat.

The raid culminated a two-year investigation in response to a series of tips. SDHS investigators had received a letter in April that mentioned a ranch in the Tijuana River Valley where cockfights were conducted on a weekly basis. “The information contained in that letter complemented information contained in an earlier letter we had received from another source who wrote about cockfights being staged at the ranch on weekends, with bets ranging from $500 to $3,000 per fight,” said SDHS Captain Ken Beauregard. “We knew something was going on, but we wanted to make sure we had enough evidence to legally do something,” he said. Beauregard contacted WCRO for assistance and Regional Director Eric Sakach flew to San Diego to meet with his agents to review the situation and offer suggestions. After agents gathered additional evidence through surveillance and undercover visits to the ranch, they obtained a search warrant.

WCRO Part of Huge Cockfighting Raid

On Saturday, May 26, law enforcement officers from the San Diego Humane Society (SDHS) and a multi-agency team made up of about 70 people from a half-dozen other agencies across California and the nation executed a search warrant on what has been described as one of the largest illegal cockfighting operations ever uncovered: a 20-acre ranch in the rural San Ysidro area of San Diego near the Mexican border, where more than 2,500 fighting birds were kept. SDHS, the San Diego Police Department, the San Diego County Department of Animal Regulation, the Los Angeles SPCA, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, the Galt Police Department, and WCRO were involved.

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Investigators believe one or more cockfights were in progress when officers entered the property. Fleeing men, women, and children attempted to escape or hide as officers moved through the labyrinth-like arrangement of coops, pens, and cages that covered the huge fenced compound. Searchers discovered several blood-stained, makeshift cockpits at various locations in the maze, along with bleeding and dead birds, and numerous boxes containing slashers (three-inch-long razor-sharp steel implements that are attached to the legs of fighting birds). They also found training aids, sparring muffs, injectable drugs, syringes, and suture kits. When the search was finally completed late the following day, 18 people had been arrested and enough cockfighting paraphernalia had been collected to fill several large boxes.
Puppy Mill Busted: WCRO Assists in Massive Rescue

WCRO Director Eric Sakach recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the California Agriculture Teachers' Association (CATA). The memorandum states that all California agriculture education shall conform to the appropriate state food and agriculture codes, especially as they pertain to the care, management, handling, transportation, and slaughter of livestock. It states that the parties share a common value and belief that humane, ethical animal husbandry practices should be an integral part of the curriculum and instructional program of agricultural education. It further pledges that both organizations work cooperatively to ensure that high standards of animal care are maintained within these programs.

The memorandum came about thanks to a WCRO investigation into the slaughter of animals in public school agriculture training programs (see Spring 2001 WCRO Regional News), the introduction of California A.B. 108 by Assemblyman Joe Sakach, and months of negotiations between WCRO Program Coordinator Bob Reder and Jim Aschwanden, CATA executive director.

Although not a binding agreement, the memorandum creates a baseline for dialog about many farm animal issues that concern The HSUS and its membership and has already successfully changed the policies and curriculum in a Northern California school district.

CATA's Jim Aschwanden (left) joins Linda Barr from Assemblyman Joe Sakach's office and WCRO's Eric Sakach.

From left: ASPCA Senior Vice President Dr. Stephen Zawistowski, ASPCAS Sam Marstaller, WCRO's John Donners, and Joan Miller of Cat Fanciers Association.

Successful California Conference

Collaboration, cooperation, and partnerships were the theme of the First Animal Care Conference held April 29-May 1, in Sacramento. Sponsored in part by WCRO, the event marked the first time the California Animal Care Director's Association, the California Veterinary Medical Association, and the State Humane Association of California have combined to create an educational conference designed for everyone who works for the protection and health of animals. With more than 400 attendees and a full house of exhibitors, the conference was a definite success. WCRO will continue to assist EHS with its fund-raising and shelter reconstruction efforts in the months ahead.

On June 29, 2001, a grass fire destroyed the Escondido Humane Society's shelter, killing 110 animals. About 84 animals were saved. WCRO was among the many organizations that immediately responded to assist EHS with on-site support and emergency funding. WCRO Special Projects Coordinator John Donners met with EHS Executive Director Phil Morgan and members of the organization's board on several occasions to review EHS's needs. Although the fire was believed to have started in a laundry room, no definite origin has been determined despite exhaustive investigation. Because of the older shelter construction, there was no sprinkler system in place, nor was there a local ordinance for such. Since the fire, animal shelters throughout the country have been updating their fire prevention plans and have been adding sprinkler systems.

WCRO will continue to assist EHS with its fire prevention plans and have been updating their fire prevention plans and have been adding sprinkler systems.

Reflect for a moment...

How can I help animals and receive income and tax savings at the same time?

By making a planned giving gift to The Humane Society of the United States, you can assure that animals will receive the protection they need while providing significant tax savings and income to yourself. Naming The HSUS as a beneficiary of your estate or trust demonstrates your lasting commitment to animal welfare and strengthens the society for future tasks. We will be happy to send our latest information on planned giving and our programs to help animals.

Mail this coupon in the envelope redossed or send it directly to The Humane Society of the United States, WCRO, P.O. Box 41720, Sacramento, CA 95841-7220.

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continued from "Joey," page 1

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The story of Joey, a puppy who was dumped off a trailer and retrieved by The HSUS, is an example of how we can help stop animal abandonment. Joey has started puppy kindergarten classes, where we hear that he is learning to become a model of good behavior. You can help stop animal abandonment. If you witness anyone abandoning an animal, please call your local animal control officer, the location, and a description of the animal, person, and vehicle to a humane officer or any other law enforcement agency.

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from one poufle and 12 bottles of shampoo to bring the once white coat of a Great Pyrenees to a dull gray appearance. By the second day, all efforts focused on capturing the feral dogs running at large over the vast acreage. The total number of dogs eventually taken into protective custody reached 161. All of the dogs went to eight shelters operated by the City of Hollister, the Marin Humane Society, the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley, Monterey Animal Control, “can Animal Control, Palo Alto Animal Control, and the Peninsula Humane Society. Hershey, who has used a number of aliases and has a long history of animal-related problems in other states, disappeared and abandoned ownership of his animals on his ranch gate. While Hollister Animal Control was awarded custody, which allowed them to make the dogs available for adoption, Hershey filed for bankruptcy before the end of the 10-day period and declared some of the dogs as assets, putting a halt to everything and leaving the fate of the animals in the hands of the court. On May 3, Hershey was arrested in Hollister on a warrant for 47 counts of felony animal cruelty, and he is currently being held on $100,000 bail in the county jail. On May 30, in a U.S. District Court hearing that lasted less than a minute, Judge James R. Gruhe granted a motion turning ownership of all 161 dogs over to Hollister Animal Control so that they can begin asopting the animals. The criminal trial is pending.

I n May, WCR0 staff members, including Cynthia Cutler (shown at right), introduced a new humane education component to the existing native nations symp/theater program. While the veterinary services team from Remote Area Medical performed spay/neuter surgeries, the HSUS staff concentrated on presentations for adults and children from the reservations that covered the humane treatment of animals, dog bite prevention, and animal behavior problems. Using specially created videos, games, coloring books, banners, and posters, attendees learned that animals are sentient beings, and that pets are part of the family too. Stuffed toy dogs simulated real-life situations and taught children and adults how to act when approached by an unfamiliar dog or a pack of dogs.

This year, the clinic returned to Washington State to serve the Quinault reservation and visited the Makah reservation for the first time. “We were made to feel welcome at both locations,” said Cutler. “In addition to the educational component, veterinarians saw 412 animals during the week-long trip. Of those animals, approximately 260 were spayed or neutered and vaccinated.” Comments from pet owners and tribal officials were overwhelmingly positive. The HSUS would like to thank Pfizer Animal Health for donating the vaccines; Vicki Bryan, Angie Kreigh-Washburn, Arnie Jolich (Quinault) and Vince Cooke (of the Makah tribe); and the volunteers who helped to make the clinics a success.

WCRO Introduces New Humane Education Program on Native Nations

Save These Dates!

When: May 29–June 1, 2002
Where: Radisson Plaza Hotel, Fort Worth, Texas
Why: The HSUS National Conference on Animals in Disasters. You’ll meet hundreds of people involved with caring for animals in disasters: emergency management personnel, animal shelter staff, community volunteers, and more. You’ll gain valuable information about disaster planning, preparedness, and response as well as important hands-on training and much, much more. For more information, call 301-258-3063.

When: April 3 to April 6, 2002
Where: Fontainebleau Hilton Resort in Miami Beach, Florida
Why: Animal Care Expo. Animal protection professionals from around the globe will gather at Expo. Don’t miss this opportunity to get some surf, sand, sun, and shelter education. Watch for more details about the next Expo in the coming months; we’ll be keeping you up to date in Animal Sheltering magazine and online at www.AnimalSheltering.org.

Michael Rodriguez holds Joey, a dog he rescued from abandonment. A new California law seeks to stem this illegal practice.

California

Following is an update on recently enacted legislation and a listing of bills that may need your support. HSUS staff are constantly in contact with state legislative offices and local activists to assist in the passage of humane legislation and to stop bills considered Inhumane. We cannot guarantee that the HSUS position on the bills will remain as reported here, as bills may be amended. For up-to-the-minute information and to become a member of the Humane Activist Network, contact WCR0.

Legislative Update

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injured or killed, that alone is not enough to prevent such a tragic act from happening again. Recently, legislation was introduced in California by Assemblywoman Carole Migden that would amend the current law regarding the owner of a mischievous animal who kills a person to include any person owning or having control of an animal who kills a person or causes injury.

San Francisco Animal Care and Control and other law enforcement officials are to be commended for their work on this case. The San Francisco District Attorney has been able to build a strong case. Prosecutors in the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office deserve thanks for their tireless effort in pursuing charges in this matter along with the grand jury for sending a clear message that dog owners are responsible and will be held accountable for the actions of their dogs. In March, the grand jury indicted Marjorie Knoller and her husband, Robert Noel, on charges of involuntary manslaughter and allowing a mischievous animal to go at large. The grand jury also indicted Knoller on charges of second-degree murder. Both pleaded not guilty to the charges on May 29, 2001, and were returned to jail. Knoller is being held on $2 million bail and Noel on $1 million.

Riverside Recall Effort Fails

In my last column I reported that opponents of Riverside County’s new ordinance placing restrictions on the keeping of crowing fowl had mounted a recall effort against Riverside County Supervisor John Tavaglione. Tavaglione had introduced the ordinance in response to complaints about increased cockfighting activity in his district. I am happy to report that the recall effort failed.