Making a Difference for Even Just a Few

By MWRO Director Diane Webber

Our office receives calls every day from concerned and caring people in rural areas of our five-state region. They often don't know where else to turn because their community doesn't have an animal shelter or doesn't provide animal control services. There may be no ordinances to protect animals. Local law enforcement has its hands full with human issues, and even if they wanted to help, they often don't have the time or the resources to. So people call us. Without any jurisdictional authority it's often difficult to find resolutions. But sometimes we do, and those little rescues coordinated with the help of caring people are the most rewarding and gratifying.

In December, I got a number of calls from a group of women about five dogs in a small community in southeast Nebraska. The dogs were chained out constantly without shelter, very little...continued on page 3

Iowa: Animal Fighting Haven No More

Iowa had been one of only three states without felony penalties for animal fighting. That all changed last April when Gov. Vilsack signed S.F. 2249 into law, prohibiting the possession, ownership, purchase, or sale of a dog or bird for fighting, as well as the possession, ownership, manufacture, or transfer of certain animal fighting implements. This was just the beginning of our fight against these inhumane activities in Iowa.

In July 2004, MWRO hosted an Illegal Animal Fighting workshop for law enforcement and animal care and control professionals. The workshop was held at the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in conjunction with a meeting of the National Illegal Animal Fighting Task Force. Among the law enforcement departments in attendance were representatives from the Marshalltown Police Department. Little did they suspect that they would soon have an opportunity to put the training they were receiving into action.

On February 4, 2005, the Marshalltown Police Department and Marshall County Sheriff's Office served a search warrant on an address in the town. Once inside the house, they not only found the drugs they had been looking for, but they also found six gamecocks along with implements used in the bloody “sport” of cockfighting. Recognizing the evidence for what it was, Det. James Ulin contacted Tina Salisbury of the Iowa Department of Public Safety. Salisbury immediately put him in touch with MWRO Director Diane Webber, who assigned Program Coordinator Scott Wilson to the case. Within the hour, Wilson was on his way to assist.

On his arrival, Wilson met with Det. Ulin and proceeded to impound the six gamecocks found on the property. All of the birds had their wattles and combs removed and their natural spurs cut off to allow attachment of the razor-sharp artificial spurs used in a cockfight. Wilson also examined the paraphernalia found, including artificial spurs, medications, and betting sheets. Det. Ulin then told Wilson that the suspect had named another person in Marshalltown who was also raising and selling gamecocks. Wilson waited while Ulin obtained a second search warrant for the other address. By mid-afternoon, Ulin, Wilson, and several other officers descended on the second address to locate more cockfighting evidence. After a search of that property, a total of 35 gamecocks and hens were confiscated, along with 33 chicks, a cockfighting magazine, and an artificial spur. As a result of these searches, two Marshalltown residents...continued on page 2
Animals in Crisis Task Force

Our region has experienced floods in Iowa and tornadoes in Kansas and Missouri. During such disasters, animal companions and livestock suffer just as much as their human guardians, and local animal shelters are often overwhelmed in the aftermath of a disaster. So what do the animals turn for help?

No farther than the Animals in Crisis Task Force (ACTF), recently formed by MWRO. Our office has joined with the Iowa/Nebraska Animal Care and Control Association (INACCA) to provide professionally trained volunteers and equipment to respond when animals fall victim to cruelty or disaster.

One branch of ACTF is the animals in disasters team. The goal of the team is to quickly respond when a disaster strikes and to evaluate the impact on animals. The team then helps provide support to the community, working with local emergency responders, humane associations and veterinarians, and Baxter County Animal Control.

With an always-ready, supply-filled trailer provided through donations to ACTF, the team can respond immediately to the most critical animal needs. ACTF comprises a network of trained and equipped staff and volunteers who are prepared to respond whenever and wherever called.

MWRO's goal is to grow ACTF to include all five states in our region. If you are interested in volunteering, making a donation, or helping countless farm animals every day, contact our office.

Don't Chain Dogs

The HSUS opposes the tethering or chaining of dogs as a method of continuous confinement. This practice is inhumane and is dangerous to the confined dog, people, and other animals. Several communities have banned the tethering of dogs altogether, while others restrict the length of time an animal may be continuously chained. Still other cities have passed ordinances that require those who keep chained or tethered dogs to keep the life of a pet, friend, or relative.

face multiple felony charges relating to animal fighting. It had been a long day handling Marshalltown authorities, but Wilson wasn't finished. With help from the Animal Rescue League of Iowa, all the confiscated birds were transported to the group's shelter in Des Moines to be examined by a veterinarian and held pending a court determination of the birds' fate.

With the success of this operation, we hope for continued cooperation between MWRO and local authorities. Working together, we know animal fighting can be stopped in Iowa and throughout the Midwest region.

Humane, Homegrown Options in the Corn Belt

Y ou can help countless farm animals every time you shop for groceries. How? By considering the ethics of eating and how your purchases affect farm animal welfare and environmental stewardship.

Rather than a weekly chore, think of grocery shopping as a scavenger hunt in search of produce and animal products raised humanely, organically, and locally (which requires less fuel and pollution to get the items to you). The grocery store is but one place to find such products. Also look to local farmers' markets, food cooperatives, or community supported agriculture enterprises.

Here are some tips to help you choose humanely. Look for “free-range,” “cage-free,” “hormone-free,” or “grass-fed” if you choose to buy beef, poultry, or eggs. Wholesome Harvest is a well-known Midwest brand that adheres to a high animal welfare standard. When buying dairy products, look for only those organic items where cows are allowed to pasture. They'll be labeled as organic and will also say “produced without antibiotics, synthetic hormones, or pesticides.” Also look for a pledge rejecting the use of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH). This genetically engineered hormone is injected into dairy cows to increase milk production, but it causes several adverse health problems for cows and poses potential health risks to humans. Organic Valley and Stoneyfield Farms are two notable Midwest brands that fervently stand behind the humane treatment of animals. If you shop at a farmers market, ask about the treatment of the animals and whether hormones were used in their rearing. Ask whether chemicals were sprayed on the produce.

Purchasing organic and humanely produced products sends a direct message that you support humane, sustainable agriculture. These purchases may cost more, but you're also getting better, healthier foods. And independent farmers get rewarded for their extra effort to produce the foods organically and humanely.

Here are some resources for healthy, humane, and homegrown options:

- Eat Wild at www.eatwild.com/products/index.html
- Local Harvest at www.localharvest.org
- EatWellGuide at www.eatwellguide.org
- The New Farm at www.newfarm.org
- Iowa Network for Community Agriculture at www.growinca.org/food.html
- Certified Humane at www.certifiedhumane.org
- At your local library you can also find state department of agriculture directories listing area producers, family farmers, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture enterprises, and organic producers.

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food, and frozen water. The women had been reporting the situation to local law enforcement and city officials for weeks to no avail. No one seemed to care.

But I cared. I went to bed thinking about those poor dogs. I don't know why I fixated on these particular dogs, but I did. Maybe it was because the ladies that called me were willing to do just about anything to rectify the situation but were hitting road blocks. One very determined angel named Margaret wasn't going to give up, and we decided to partner up. One way or another, those dogs were going to have a warm Christmas. So I began knocking down the roadblocks, one at a time.

It wasn't easy, but I was finally able to get the attention of the mayor, city administrator, the prosecutor, and the chief of police. Rather than criticism, I offered help. By Christmas Eve, Margaret delivered five igloo doghouses with straw bedding, 80 pounds of dog food, and free wormer medication to the dogs' owners with the help of the police chief. She called me late that night to give me the news that the dogs had full bellies and warm beds for Christmas. They had even taken the medication with no trouble. What made the news even more special was the fact that the dogs' owners were very receptive to Margaret's instructions about how to properly take care of the animals.

Margaret continues to check on the dogs, and I found the owners to be very friendly. The dogs are scheduled to be spayed and neutered for free as soon as they attain an ideal weight, and the police chief now calls our office for advice with other animal concerns in his area.

Not every case of animal cruelty or neglect is large-scale or horrific enough to be meshed with the media, but that's not the case here. For me, the ability to effect change for even a few animals is what makes my work for HSUS so satisfying. With the help of Margaret, I made a difference for five hungry dogs who will now receive better care, and we established a relationship with a small town in southeast Nebraska that probably had never heard of The HSUS before. Now that's something!
Director’s Report

By Diane Webber
Director of the Midwest Regional Office

Wildlife Wonders

Growing up on the south side of Chicago, I wasn’t afforded many opportunities to enjoy or learn about nature. Camping to me was a sleep-over on my friend’s screened-in porch. I did get a week at a summer camp when I was 11, though, and I remember that my favorite activities were hikes through the woods and horseback riding. After that it was back to city life until I took up horseback riding in my early twenties. Oh, how I loved the serenity and beauty of the bridal paths through the forest preserves.

A few years later, my husband and I moved to Colorado. What an eye-opener that was! There were mountains, canyons, rivers, hiking trails, eagles, deer, elk, coyotes, buffalo—it was the real outdoors. I fell in love with God’s country and all His little creatures. I discovered too that I loved gardening, but it wasn’t until we moved to Washington State that my gardening pleasures switched gears from rose bushes and petunias to flowers and shrubs that would attract the wildlife I so loved watching.

In our backyard, my husband and I created a rambling garden with pathways through the greenbelt and birdhouses and feeders scattered here and there in the trees. We cultivated a natural habitat that we hoped would invite birds and other small wildlife, and we succeeded. It didn’t take long for the squirrels to come snooping around, then the raccoons, opossums, and even a mountain beaver! Next came the birds—dozens of them. I never realized how enjoyable it could be to sit with a pair of binoculars and watch birds. I identified species I had never seen before, such as the pileated woodpecker and Steller’s and Canada jays. We also had plenty of chickadees, juncos, flickers, towhees, sapsuckers, Western tanagers, wrens, waxwings, and finches. Soaring the skies above us, the majestic bald eagle and several species of owls graced us with their presence.

Now that I’ve moved to Iowa, I’ve had to start a new nature garden. It’s going to take some time to achieve what we had in Washington, but already our garden is filled with cardinals, bluebirds, chickadees, woodpeckers, juncos, and nuthatches. It seems each time we put out a new feeder we’re pleasantly surprised with a visit from another species.

You can create your own little wildlife wonderland too. In this ever-more-urbanized world of ours where wild habitat is disappearing daily, it’s imperative that we landscape naturally with trees, shrubs, and flowers that provide vital shelter, nesting habitat, and nutrition for our urban wildlife. Even if you have a deck or patio, you can hang feeders that will help supplement the natural food supply and bring you hours of enjoyment.

The HSUS quarterly publication “Wild Neighbors News” can help you. This award-winning, full-color publication offers seasonal suggestions for enhancing wildlife habitat on your property, practical advice about resolving human-wildlife conflicts, and feature articles on urban wildlife species. For more information about how you can receive a free, one-year subscription to “Wild Neighbors News,” visit www.hsus.org/wildneighbors, or contact our office.

And Welcome to Scott!

Jay Scott Wilson (Scott) joined MWRO as program coordinator in January, and he’s already helping extend services to our five-state region.

Scott has been active in the animal welfare field since 1991. He was an animal control officer for the Nebraska Humane Society and became their first full-time investigator in 1998. Scott served as the disaster coordinator for the Nebraska Humane Society and became an HSUS Disaster Animal Response Team member several years ago.

MWRO is delighted to have Scott as part of our team. We know his investigative expertise and disaster response skills will be put to good use.