HSUS Rescues Abandoned Zoo Animals

For eight years two lions and two Himalayan bears lived in a cramped tractor trailer cage as part of the traveling “African Safari Zoo.” While passing through Harlingen, Texas, the owner decided to leave the trailer behind for repairs. The four animals were also left behind with only a small supply of food. The repair work amounted to over $2000 and the owner apparently decided to just abandon the truck and animals rather than pay the bill. For the next five months the truck sat idle. No one knew where to turn for help. Fortunately, the garage owner had enough compassion to feed and water the animals during that time.

As soon as the abandonment was brought to the attention of The HSUS Gulf States Office, good things began to happen. HSUS field investigator, Bernie Weller, traveled to the scene, organized the legal seizure of the four animals, and assisted in charges being placed against the owner.

At the court hearing, it was determined the owner was guilty of abandonment, and the animals were auctioned off as required by law. The HSUS placed a bid and was awarded the animals. Investigator Weller located a drive-thru zoo in Gentry, Arkansas, that could furnish the animals a good home. Proper cages and a large truck were obtained by The HSUS for the journey. After a long, two-day trip, the bears and lions arrived at their new natural-habitat zoo.

This trailer was converted to a cage for the lions and bears. The so-called zoo traveled around the country with the animals continually in their small prisons. After the trailer broke down, they were abandoned. HSUS opposes this type of traveling-animal exhibit.

After rescue and transport by The HSUS, the bears are unloaded at the drive-thru zoo in Gentry, Arkansas. The animals now have large outdoor compounds with trees and room to exercise. This zoo provides a more significant educational experience for the public.
Brutality Found in Livestock Auctions

"These animals are going to the slaughterhouse anyway, so it really doesn't matter how rough they are handled." This seems to be what many auction-barn operators around the Gulf States region are saying.

Citizens' complaints of torment and brutality at livestock auctions prompted your regional office to investigate these operations in recent months. Sale barns in Navasota, Edinburg, Rio Grande City, Hebbronville, Beeville, Alice, and Victoria (Texas) were visited by HSUS field investigator, Bernie Weller.

What was found at many of these auctions was more fitting for a torture movie than for an industry with a vested interest in animals. The usual animal-handling tools of the auction personnel were clubs, whips, and hot-shot, the intention seemed to be to move the animals from truck to pen to sales ring as fast as possible, regardless of how much whippings and bittings was involved.

Cattle and calves were relentlessly jabbed and shocked with the hot shot. In one case, a calf was trampled and killed by frightened cattle being unloaded. In this instance, we asked the county attorney to invoke the state anti-cruelty statute to prevent any re-occurrence. The auction barn owner has been put on notice by the county attorney that employees must not handle animals in a cruel manner.

This investigation shows the problem of animal mistreatment in auction barns is the rule rather than the exception. Significant improvement could come about if local citizens and humane societies would investigate auctions in their own area and expose any cruelty they found, using news media, and the courts if necessary.

The HSUS Gulf States Office is sending a formal letter of warning to every auction barn in our region urging self-policing. If this does not substantially alleviate the problem, legal action will be recommended to alleviate conditions for animals going through these establishments.
HSUS Recommends:
Giving “Tickets” to Stop Stray Dogs

One of the biggest problems of animal shelters and animal-control agencies is how to capture stray animals. Part of the answer is that not all strays need to be taken to the shelter.

The “ticket” or citation system permits animal-control officers to cite a pet owner for a violation instead of impounding the animal. The animal-control citation is similar to the traffic ticket system used by police departments.

With the citation system, an officer observing an animal running at large may pursue it toward its home and attempt to identify the owner by questioning area residents. If the owner can be identified, then he or she is issued a citation.

This system eliminates the need for an animal to be taken into the custody of the shelter. Thus, pets are spared the stress of impoundment and contact with other animals carrying infectious diseases.

Also, the system can account for a substantial reduction in the cost of animal-control operations. The number of impoundments is reduced which, in turn, eliminates the problems of overcrowding.

Although pet owners and the animal shelter benefit, the greatest value of the citation system is as a deterrent to irresponsible pet ownership. Often, the most negligent pet owners are too apathetic to retrieve an impounded animal, and they escape legal penalties they should suffer for failing to restrain their animals.

Phyllis Wright, HSUS Vice President, believes shelters may actually be subsidizing irresponsible pet ownership by eliminating the animal that has outgrown its cuteness. Wright feels many irresponsible pet owners replace impounded animals with cuddly puppies and kittens, thereby perpetuating the community’s animal control problems.

The citation system holds pet owners accountable for their conduct even in instances where the animal is unwanted and not reclaimed. It should be noted, however, that the system is workable only when there is a vigorous, ongoing licensing program.

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