Responding to Rover

Hurricane Rover made landfall in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, on October 20, 2003, and NERO was there to respond to the forced evacuation of the local animal shelter and several hundred pet owners. You could call Rover a category 0 storm, since it wasn’t a real hurricane. But the mock disaster simulation gave participants the chance to test their newly gained skills in animal disaster preparedness and response as part of the first national disaster animal response training presented in New England by The HSUS, in cooperation with the Cape Animal Care Project at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

More than 60 participants from throughout New England and beyond attended this intensive three-day course, which was designed to familiarize them with the information and experience needed to become effective disaster responders. Participants—including veterinarians, pet sitters, animal shelter personnel, and many others—faced the daunting task of setting up an emergency animal shelter for the storm’s animal “victims,” and responding to a variety of emergency scenarios presented to them.

“NERO was very excited about participating in coordinating this one-of-a-kind training conference,” said NERO Director continued on page 2

Simulation participants examine a canine “victim” of Hurricane Rover.

Bear Referendum Qualifies for Maine Ballot

Since the launch of the HSUS-supported ballot initiative to ban the baiting, hounding, and trapping of Maine’s black bears, the campaign has steadily gained momentum. Approximately 50,000 registered Maine voters needed to sign the initiative by late autumn to qualify this measure for the November 2004 ballot. In a stunning effort, the all-volunteer signature drive yielded more than 100,000 signatures, breaking all previous records in the state!

Supporters collected signatures throughout the fall, but the effect of the campaign’s wide-scale mobilization wasn’t fully evident until Election Day, when close to 500 volunteers turned out to gather signatures at polling locations throughout the state. NERO Program Coordinator Hillary Twining, who spent the day at the Falmouth and Freeport polls, describes the experience: “Voters from all walks of life, including hunters, were very willing to sign the petition. In fact, a number of people made a beeline for our table as they were exiting the polls in order to add their names to the list. It was exciting to be involved in this grassroots effort and to interact directly with the voters.”

At the press conference held in late January to present 10 boxes of signed petitions to the secretary of state, HSUS board member Anita Coupe spoke about the importance of banning the unethical and unsporting practices of bear baiting, hounding, and trapping, noting, “I am a Mainer and I am The HSUS.” Although The HSUS currently has 46,000 members and constituents in Maine, and early support for the campaign has been strong, our work is far from over. The Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine (SAM), which is leading the charge against the bear referendum, wasted no time in forming its own political action committee known as Maine’s Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council. SAM has pledged to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to fight this measure, and is receiving strong support from political heavyweights such as the National Rifle Association and the trophy hunting organization Safari Club International. We need the support of animal protection advocates in Maine and beyond to overcome the influence of powerful groups that have dominated the debate on this issue. If you would like to support the educational outreach efforts of Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting by making a contribution or volunteering your time, please contact the campaign headquarters at (207) 781-5155 or via e-mail at info@fairbearhunting.org.

Maine voters are urged to go to the polls this November 2 to vote for protection of the state’s bears against baiting, hounding, and trapping.
This past August, I got to do things few people ever experience. I’ve always had a special place in my heart for wild animals, and studied wildlife policy and human attitudes toward wildlife in graduate school. But that didn’t prepare me for the experiences I had while working side-by-side with my colleagues at the HSUS Cape Wildlife Center in West Barnstable, Massachusetts.

While I was there, I lent a hand in all sorts of fun, interesting, and sometimes messy duties. I fed delicate but insistent orphaned baby birds every 15 minutes, barely finishing before I had to start over again. I cared for cute but rowdy raccoons, binding them off with large buckets while cleaning their pens. I cleaned cages for exotics, guinea pigs, and a variety of bird species. Never in all the time I have spent cleaning up after dogs and cats had I seen anything to prepare me for the messes made by herring gulls! None of my past experiences prepared me for force feeding an underweight animal a peanut butter jar stuck on his head.

I don’t remember the last time I was so dirty or so tired at the end of a work day, but this hands-on experience, which concluded with rescuing a raccoon who had a peanut butter jar stuck on his head, gave me a better understanding of the daily events in our wildlife rehabilitation center. Many of the injured or orphaned animals find themselves so because of wholly avoidable circumstances—house cat attacks, vehicle accidents, or inhumane or ignorant nuisance wildlife control operators who kill parent animals. I gained a tremendous amount of respect for our staff there and some relevant real-life examples to use when teaching the public how to avoid conflicts with and injuries to wildlife. Sometimes there really is nothing like getting your hands—or your whole body—dirty to appreciate a job.

NERO Staffer Gets Down and Dirty at Wildlife Center
By NERO Program Coordinator Linda Huebner

These raccoons called the HSUS Cape Wildlife Center home until they were ready to be released back to the wild. Here they watch with curiosity while NERO’s Linda Huebner cleans their quarters.

A trainer explains how to assess the body condition of a horse.

Continued from “Animals Detectives” page 2

Joanne Bourbeau. "Since we were still in hurricane season, and Cape Cod is definitely a high-risk area, the location and timing could not have been better. This practice drill will ensure that animal welfare professionals are prepared for future disasters here in New England." While Rover responders had the luxury of being flown afterwards, the training came on the heels of real-life Hurricane Isabel, which crippled parts of North Carolina and neighboring states in late September with flooding, high winds, and downed trees and power lines. Bourbeau was activated as part of The HSUS’s National Disaster Animal Response Team. Luckily, the animal concerns following the storm were minimal, thanks in large part to the disaster planning animal advocates have been involved with since 1999s Hurricane Floyd left thousands of North Carolina residents and their pets stranded in their homes.

NERO Diretor Joanne Bourbeau (second from right) prepares for the day’s assignment during Hurricane Isabel.
Director's Report

By Joanne Bourbeau
Director of the New England Regional Office

Milestones and Memories

Milestones are always good opportunities for reflection. This year The HSUS celebrates 50 years of protecting animals, and I can think of a better opportunity to reflect upon the history and accomplishments of the New England Regional Office.

The HSUS's roots here in New England are deep and strong. A program to organize and open a self-supporting branch in every state was started in October 1957. Branches would help local humane societies with their problems and spread HSUS influence. One of the first branches was incorporated in Connecticut. In the early 1970s, then-president John Hoyt conceived the idea of creating regional offices to cover several states. The New England Regional Office was among the first seven regional offices, which together covered 36 states. Today, our 10 regional offices and headquarters cover animal protection issues in all 50 states.

Rear Adm. James Shaw, executive director of the HSUS Connecticut branch, became New England's first regional director. One of his first orders of business was to build our headquarters on a property in East Haddam, Connecticut, donated by actress and philanthropist Norma Terris. The Humane Education and Nature Center included a research library, museum, and meeting hall. During this period, The HSUS began to explore with the University of Tulsa the development of humane education materials. The Society entered into a contract with the University, and the National Association for the Advancement of Humane Education (now the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education or NAHEE) was born. NERO and NAHEE shared space in the center until the regional office was relocated to Jacksonville, Vermont, in October 1993, when Rev. George and Mrs. June Butler presented a gift of land.

The promotion of humane education was a fundamental focus of HSUS programming from the founding of the organization. Regional office staff actively promoted and conducted education programs with the hope of stemming the growing estrangement between humans and animals in our increasingly urbanized society. For nearly 40 years, our office has been awarding the Shaw-Worth Memorial Scholarship to a high school student who demonstrates strong animal advocacy and a deep respect for people, animals, and the environment. Other regional programs focused on many of the same issues we tackle today—ending cruel hunting practices, helping the animal victims of abuse and neglect, and engineering legislative reform.

On our 25th anniversary, John Hoyt shared his vision for the future with our membership at the 1979 annual conference. “The future for organizations such as The HSUS appears to be hopeful. Success lies with those whose understanding of animal welfare does not begin or end with their own pet, nor in the rescuing or preserving of any one particular creature or species, but who embrace the whole of animal creation as deserving of an advocate for their ultimate well-being and care. It lies with those who understand that no crusade for right and justice comes easily, but requires a commitment to do battle in the political and social arenas of life where those decisions that sustain or destroy life are finally resolved.”

Amazingly, our New England constituency is close to 500,000 today, and our national constituency tops 8 million. The HSUS is not just an organization. It is a collection of like-minded individuals who share our vision of a world in which people satisfy the needs of domestic animals, protect wild animals and their environment, and change their relationships with other animals from exploitation and harm to respect and compassion. The anniversary of our continuing journey to achieve this goal together is truly a cause for celebration.