Dogfighting Linked to Drug Trafficking

Thirty-seven pit bull dogs were found at a remote location in northern California in November 1990 during the execution of a search warrant by Tuolumne County animal-control officers, assisted by HSUS investigators. The warrant was obtained for the home of Steve Hendrick, 39, after a narcotics investigation turned up evidence of a large-scale dogfighting operation. Hendrick and seven others were first arrested on November 17 at the Stockton airport shortly after their chartered aircraft returned from Memphis, Tenn., where they allegedly had taken two dogs for dogfights. Agents from the Amador-Calaveras-Tuolumne Narcotics Enforcement Team subsequently served search warrants at the suspects' homes. Another warrant was served by animal control officers and HSUS investigators after agents discovered numerous dogs on Hendrick's property.

During the search, investigators found 37 pit bull dogs, a bloodstained dogfighting pit, and a large assortment of underground dogfighting publications.

Hendrick pleaded guilty to felony dogfighting and narcotics charges in San Joaquin County in December. He is expected to be sentenced to a five-year term in the state prison. Each of the other defendants has also pleaded out and may be sentenced to terms of up to five years. Hendrick still must stand charges in Tuolumne County, and the WCRG is awaiting word on whether federal indictments on the interstate aspects of the case will ensue.

"To Till a Common Ground"

John A. Hoyt, president of The HSUS, spoke at the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) Conference in December in Sacramento, Calif. His enlightening speech was titled "HSUS and Farmers Can Till a Common Ground."

His objective was to help raise the CFBF's awareness of animal-welfare issues affecting farm animals. "Misunderstanding is the biggest obstacle to the path of meaningful dialogue between farmers and the animal-protection community," said Hoyt. He emphasized that distorted pictures painted by both farmers and animal protectionists have shifted the focus away from legitimate concerns with which both sides must deal. He pointed out that farmers and protectionists, who share many of the same goals, must work together on the important issues.

"The fact is that many farmers and ranchers also find certain industry practices offensive. They often are frustrated by the unwillingness of some industry practices offensive. They often are frustrated by the unwillingness of some industry practice..." continued on page 2
Tribal Official Arrested in California

In December, Clive "Sonny" Miller, a member of the Morongo Indian Tribal Council for the Morongo Indian Reservation in Banning, Calif., was arrested for possession of a controlled substance by Riverside County sheriff's deputies and was subsequently charged with felony dogfighting counts. The investigation came about after detectives assigned to the Special Investigations Bureau received a tip from a confidential informant who had witnessed a dogfight on Miller's property. The detectives then contacted the WCRO, which was able to provide them with additional information about Miller, who is known as "Indian Sonny" in dogfighting circles. A search warrant was obtained by the detectives and served with assistance from the WCRO and Riverside County Animal Control. According to HSUS investigator Eric Sakach, the agents seized 37 pit bulls and dogs, "This bust has resulted in tremendous gains in information. We commend the Riverside County Sheriff's Department." The case is pending.

Sacramento Bans the Steel-Jaw Leghold Trap

Recently, the Sacramento, Calif., city council unanimously voted to ban steel-jaw leghold traps within city limits. The ordinance was the result of WCRO Investigator Kurt Lapham’s efforts on behalf of his daughter’s cat, Cicero, a victim of a steel-jaw leghold trap set in a neighbor’s yard.

In September 1990, Cicero escaped from the family’s home and Lapham went searching for him. The search was unsuccessful until plaintive cries led Lapham to a grapevine trellis in an adjacent yard. There, six feet above the ground, Cicero struggled to escape from a steel-jaw trap clamped tightly on his hind leg. The cat was fortunate to have been found quickly and to have received immediate veterinary care. When Lapham decided to follow up on the incident, he was informed by the city police department that, because it could not prove intent to harm the cat, it would not file criminal charges against his neighbor. The State Department of Fish and Game, although sympathetic, also was unable to help; it admitted that it had no jurisdiction because the property owner had stated that he was using the trap to catch rats. Not satisfied, Lapham went to his city council representative, Heather Fargo, and asked her to sponsor a bill to pass a citywide ban on steel-jaw leghold traps.

In response to the city attorney’s concerns about the propriety of passing a city ordinance more powerful than state law, Lapham pointed out that in 1986 the state attorney general’s office had handed down an opinion allowing just that to be done, provided that the ordinance was enacted in the interest of public health and that it only incidentally affected hunting. Concerns that a trap ban would render coyote-control programs ineffective were dismissed by city animal-control officials, who said that they doubted that such a ban would interfere with the performance of their duties. (Actual coyote problems in the past two decades had numbered fewer than five.)

Unanimous approval was offered on January 15, 1991, making Sacramento one of the few California cities to have enacted such a progressive ordinance. "It really is an affirmation of what we tell people every day: that one person can make a difference and that you yourself can actually make things better for animals," said Lapham afterward.

HSUS Animal Care Expo ’92 Scheduled

Plan now to travel to Las Vegas, Nev., next February 2–5 to attend a one-of-a-kind expo involving sheltering, care, and control professionals. Sponsored by The HSUS, Animal Care Expo ’92 will feature seminars, demonstrations, and the latest in practical, contemporary, and humane equipment and services. Special emphasis will be given to environmentally friendly and energy-efficient products and supplies. Contact the WCRO for more details.

Cockfight Promoter Found Guilty

Charlie Blake Pearce, an Okeechobee, Fla., cockfighter, was fined more than $1,000 but will not receive jail time unless he violates the terms of his probation. "While that may not sound significant," said WCRO Investigator Eric Sakach, "Pearce also has just settled out of court for a whopping $62,500 on a racketeering lawsuit brought by the Oregon Department of Justice."

The cases stemmed from a May 1989 raid on a major cockfighting derby held on Pearce’s property. The raid resulted from information provided by Sakach to the Oregon State Police (see the Fall 1989 West Coast Regional Office Report). That raid culminated in the arrest of more than 300 people, including Pearce, for illegal animal fighting and in the seizure of approximately $90,000 in cash at the scene.

Trials for the remaining defendants are expected to continue throughout the spring.
LEGISLATIVE LINEUP

Many of the bills that we expect to work on this year have not yet been introduced or do not yet have bill numbers.

The WCRO will be assisting the Nevada Humane Society with a puppy-mill/pet-shop bill, the introduction of which was prompted by a recent tragic raid on an Elko, Nev., puppy mill. Nevada State Senator Dana Titus plans to introduce a bill that prohibits eating dogs and cats and is similar to the one passed in California in 1989.

California Assemblyman Jack O’Connell has again introduced a bill to ban the use of the Draize Skin and Eye-Irritancy tests in testing certain products (AB 110). Assemblyman Sam Farr introduced AB 500, a bill designed to ensure that horses are transported safely. The WCRO is working with the sponsor of the bill, Horse Power, which is based in Monterey.

After two horrible and unnecessary accidents involving elephants in California (the first involving Myra, an elephant at the San Diego Zoo that fell into a moat and had to be euthanized, and the second involving a keeper at the Oakland Zoo who was killed while working alone with a bull elephant), WCRO Director Charlene Drennon contacted State Senator Dan McCorquodale to review The HSUS’s concerns about elephant-handling practices in zoos and circuses. At the senator’s request, Drennon offered suggestions on legislation to protect elephants and their keepers. Sen. McCorquodale agreed to several suggestions and introduced SB 318.

AROUND THE REGION

CALIFORNIA—In September, the Los Angeles City Council voted ten to one to prohibit the sacrifice of animals for ritual purposes. Ed Fimbres, Los Angeles city attorney, had contacted WCRO Director Charlene Drennon during the summer for help on an ordinance dealing with the problem. According to city officials, more than 300 animals had been killed ritually in the city during the previous year. The city developed an ordinance based on the HSUS model ordinance. WCRO Investigator Eric Sakach testified in support of the ordinance before the city council’s Public Safety Committee in August. Violators will face up to six months in jail and/or a fine of up to $1,000. Similar ordinances are now in effect in Chicago, New York, and Hialeah, Fla.

In February, Sakach undertook an evaluation of the Napa County Division of Animal Control and its sheltering facility at the request of the county’s Department of Environmental Management. A report of findings with recommendations will be forwarded to requesting officials.

At the request of Plumas County officials, California State Humane Association Vice President Tom Little and Sakach conducted an inspection and review of euthanasia procedures at the Plumas County Department of Animal Control in November. A report has since been sent to the county.

Draize tests, performed on rabbits like this one, could be banned in the testing of certain products in California.

Remember that the legislative session in California lasts for two years. If you would like to receive updates on bills and their hearings, please make sure you are on our activist list.

Reflect for a moment . . .

HOW CAN I HELP ANIMALS EVEN WHEN I NO LONGER SHARE THEIR WORLD?

By your request for animal protection to The Humane Society of the United States, your will can provide for animals after you’re gone. Naming The HSUS demonstrates your lasting commitment to animal welfare and strengthens the society for this task. We will be happy to send information about our animal programs and materials that will assist you in planning a will.

Please send will information to:

Name
Address
City State
Zip code

Mail in confidence to Murdough S. Madison, Vice President/Senior Counsel, The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.