

Cruelty to Animals In the Film Industry



"Actor" is a misnomer for this wolf, which displayed authentic anger during an audition witnessed by HSUS's Sue Pressman near Hollywood.

Early reports from HSUS's undercover investigators and informants indicate that cruelty to animal actors is rampant in the movie and television industry.

HSUS launched a major campaign to identify cruelty to animals in the film industry last winter after industry officials said they were powerless to require humane treatment to animals. Under the direction of HSUS wildlife expert Sue Pressman, HSUS recruited actors, actresses, producers, cameramen, scriptwriters, and animal trainers to look for inhumane treatment to animals and report it to HSUS.

Working under cover, Mrs. Pressman spent several weeks in California personally inspecting the living quarters of film animals, checking the condition of the animals themselves, observing methods used to get the animals to perform, and questioning trainers. She was shocked by the conditions and practices she found.

"Things are much worse than I had anticipated," she exclaimed. "The majority of the animals I visited were being cared for at a level far below acceptable standards."

She reported observing inhumane training methods, including the withholding of food and the use of force, a total lack of preventative veterinary medical care, animals being fed diets that fail to meet their nutritional requirements, quarters too small for necessary exercise, and filthy, unsanitary cages.

"There is an incredible lack of professionalism among these trainers," Mrs. Pressman said. "Anyone can get into the business, and most of them have little or no knowledge about the animals or their needs. A few trainers

even displayed an ignorance about the food and care requirements for cats and dogs."

Some of the worst conditions she found were on the premises of a winner of 40 Patsy Awards, the Oscar for animal acting given annually by the American Humane Assn. (AHA). During an initial visit to this major animal training facility, Mrs. Pressman saw cage after cage of cats kept for use in the Purina TV commercials. They were separated by color and markings, with 30 or 40 white cats to a cage, 30 to 40 black cats to another, tiger-striped in another, and so forth. There was no cat litter in any of the cages, and it was apparent that the cages hadn't been cleaned for several days.

On a return visit to the premises a month later, Mrs. Pressman found only a few cats in the same cages and was told by one of the staff trainers that the other cats had died from "some kind of disease." "Cats are born with these diseases," the trainer told Mrs. Pressman, who was astounded at such ignorance. She learned that the cats had been obtained from area animal shelters and surmised that the owner of the training facility doesn't consider it necessary to spend money for preventative veterinary measures, such as inoculations, when he has a source of free animals.

"These animals may be TV stars one day, but they're just another disposable commodity the next," she exclaimed.

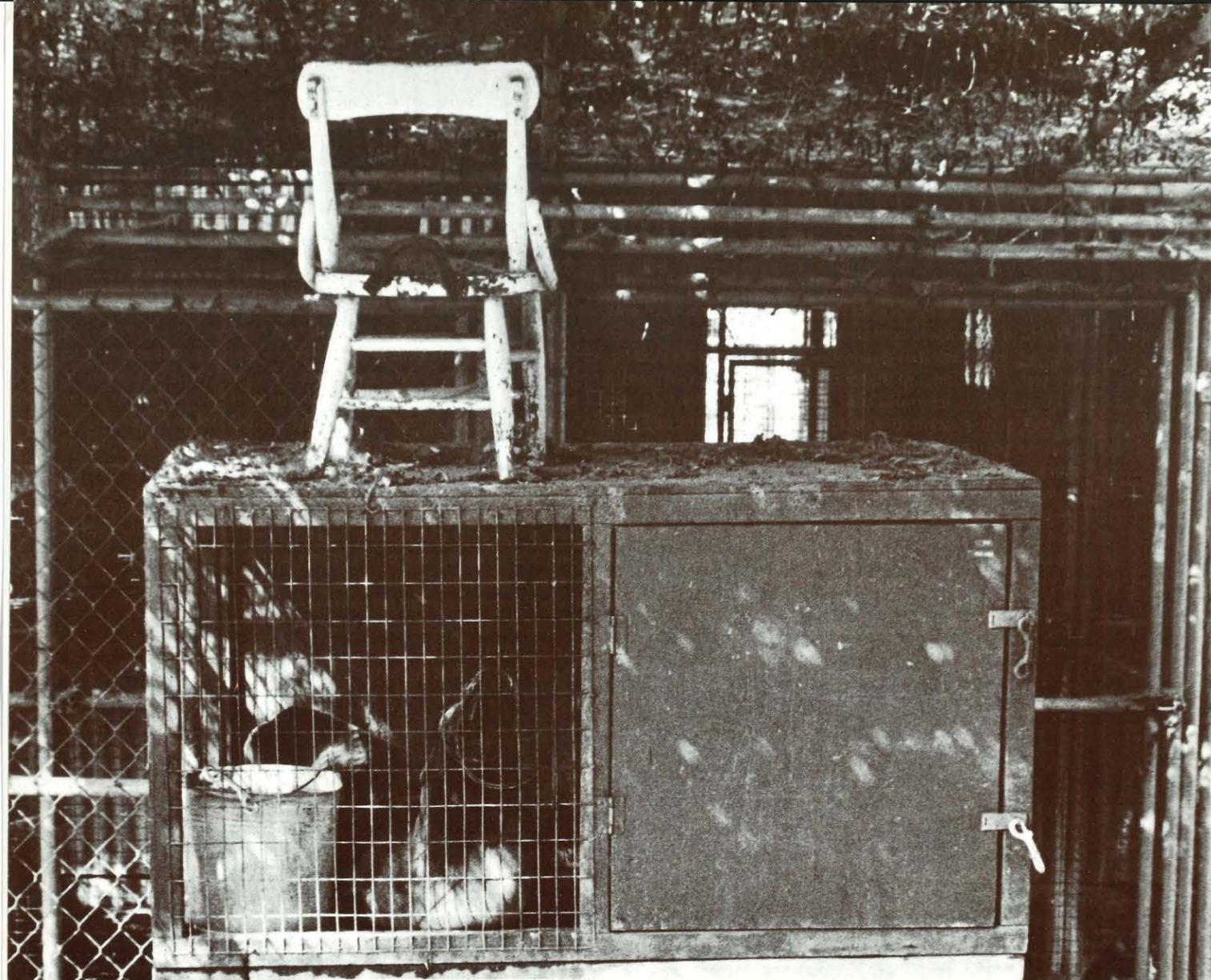
At the same facility she found the bear that had starred in the "Beverly Hillbillies" TV series living in a cramped cage, with no evidence of reward for the thousands of dollars it must have earned for its owner. She found the fox used in the Audi Fox auto commercials in an-

other cage, with a diet card calling for nothing but two chicken necks a day, an extremely meager diet. Most appalling of all was a sea lion living in a cage so small it could hardly move. The bottom of the cage was filled with water, and a small shelf offered the only out-of-water resting area for the animal.

On one trip to Hollywood, Mrs. Pressman accompanied someone who was auditioning animals for an actual production that called for the use of several wild animals. With temperatures registering as high as 110 degrees, she watched one trainer after another demonstrate their methods of getting animals to perform in front of a prospective employer. The owner of a wolf brought along a trainer whose only function was to make the animal angry. When the man threatened the wolf with a stick, the animal became vicious, displaying the emotion called for in the script. But the wolf wasn't acting. The trainer had to be hidden from the animal's sight after the audition to prevent it from lunging at him.

The owner of another wolf kept a chain around the animal's neck and yanked at it so roughly to get the wolf to perform that Mrs. Pressman had to ask him to stop. The owner of a bear promised Mrs. Pressman that his animal would do anything she wanted because he would withhold food from the animal for 34 days prior to filming. Such action might not be cruel to a bear during hibernation season, but in 110-degree heat it would be blatantly cruel. Another trainer responded to Mrs. Pressman's request for a grizzly bear by suggesting that he could spray paint on a brown bear to make it look like a grizzly.

"The competition for work among animal trainers is so cut-throat that



From the looks of their personal trailer truck, the Lancelot Link Chimpanzees appear to be stars. But Sue Pressman found one of them living in this barren, filthy cage as though it were imprisoned in a roadside zoo.

many of them would do anything to get a job," Mrs. Pressman concluded. "Nine different trainers told me they owned Gentle Ben, the bear from the TV series of the same name, and almost as many people told me they owned the Mercury cougar."

Meanwhile, the number of HSUS informants within the movie industry is growing, as word spreads about HSUS's determination to prevent cruelty to acting animals. In the past, HSUS has received information only after a film has been completed, when it was too late to prevent the cruelty. After reading a press report about the savage cockfighting scene in John Schlesinger's "The Day of the Locust," HSUS learned that the scene had been filmed in Los Angeles, where cockfighting is illegal. The HSUS Legal Department is now attempting to convince the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office to file charges of cruelty to animals against persons involved in the cockfight. HSUS is also checking out a report that another cockfighting scene was filmed recently for a

A sea lion actor lives in this tiny cage. The bottom of the cage is filled with water, and only a small shelf offers him out-of-water relief.

new Kris Kristofferson film, "Vigilante Force," produced by Gene Corman. The informant told HSUS that this scene had also been filmed in Los Angeles. Although HSUS didn't learn of the more recent cockfight scene in time to stop it, the tip was received immediately after it took place.

"Our sources are getting better and better," Mrs. Pressman commented. "We're now getting tipped off to cruelties as soon as they happen. It won't be long until we learn about them before they take place. Cruelty to animals is illegal in all 50 states, and we intend to see that those laws are enforced."

HSUS initiated action that prevented an on-camera cruelty last summer when it was tipped off about a movie company's plans to blow up some of the 250 horses to be used in the filming of a cavalry charge on an Indian reservation in Arizona. HSUS officials contacted Arizona Gov. Raul Castro, a former HSUS director, and asked for his help in thwarting the slaughter. Castro ordered the state police to the Indian reservation, where Indian police agreed to cooperate. The dynamite was reported unearthed,

and the script was changed to exclude the use of dynamite.

HSUS undertook its movie industry campaign only recently because the American Humane Assn. has been observing the use of animals in films for many years. But in recent years it has become increasingly apparent that AHA has not been successful in preventing acts of cruelty. The head of the AHA Hollywood office has admitted that he is sometimes sent on wild goose chases to get him off the set during the filming of an animal cruelty.

"Our aim is to prevent cruelty to animals, not to report on it after the fact," said HSUS President John A. Hoyt. "I am convinced that inhumane animal trainers and movie producers will stop short of such cruelties only when they know they will be penalized for committing them. We intend to work with law enforcement officials and local prosecutors until we convince animal trainers and movie producers alike that we mean business."

HSUS investigators have no doubt that much of the animal cruelty they have uncovered so far could be pun-

ished by state and local anti-cruelty statutes. Frantz Dantzer, who has just been named chief investigator for HSUS, accompanied Mrs. Pressman on some of her undercover visits to animal trainers in the Los Angeles area. "I've sent people to jail for less than I've seen at some of these places," he said.

Many of the violations are covered by the federal Animal Welfare Act, as well. Dr. Oscar Clabaugh, chief staff veterinarian for exhibition animals in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, said any animals being kept for exhibition, whether on film or in person, are covered by the act. HSUS officials intend to notify Dr. Clabaugh of all conditions they uncover that appear to be in violation of federal law.

Mrs. Pressman returned from her lengthy visits to California convinced that it is the animal trainers, as well as the movie industry as a whole, that are responsible for most of the cruelties. "The industry is being victimized by many of these trainers," she said. "When a producer needs an animal for a film, he is totally dependent on these people to produce the animal and to make it perform as called for in the script. It is the rare producer who knows enough about animals to know whether the animal is being cared for and treated properly.

Unlike almost every other talent involved in the movie industry, animal trainers have no organization to set standards or to accredit them. Consequently, the methods used for animal training and care vary from one extreme to the other. HSUS investigators visited one trainer who lived with a tiger in a house trailer. The animal reacted to visitors like an untrained puppy. "That woman had absolutely no control over the animal," Mrs. Pressman said. "I know the animal is going to kill her one of these days."

Several trainers told Mrs. Pressman that one of their colleagues had killed a well-known television lion by hitting it over the head with a 2 x 4. One of the HSUS informants told Mrs. Pressman that another trainer had put a trained cougar's eye out.

"We have learned how the industry works, and we have let sympathetic people within the industry know that we will be around until the entire business is cleaned up," Mrs. Pressman said. "But our work has only begun. From now on we have one priority and that is to get to the scene of the crime before it is committed and stop it." □



Sue Pressman discovered the famous Purina cats, used in some of the most appealing commercials on television, living 30 or 40 per cage. A month later she found the same cages almost empty and was informed that the other animals had died from disease.

The Uphill Fight for Prosecution

On June 8, 1975, the New York Times reported that the cockfight in "The Day of the Locust" was genuine, complete with blood, spurs, and a dying bird.

On June 9 HSUS's Sue Pressman conferred in Washington with Kenneth Clark, assistant to Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America (MPA) in an attempt to verify the date and location of the cockfight. Although MPA officials are and have been very cordial, they either refused or have been unable to verify even those simple facts. We wanted verification because it seemed incredible that any producer would have actually conducted and filmed a cockfight in California, where it is clearly prohibited by criminal statutes.

On June 12 the city attorney of Los Angeles was informed that HSUS was prepared to lodge a formal complaint, and we asked that the matter be investigated and, if appropriate, prosecuted.

On July 1, I requested that the chief assistant city attorney for Los Angeles initiate a criminal prosecution, alleging that the facts as we understood them showed clearly that criminal acts had been committed in the State of California in the course of the filming of "The Day of the Locust." That request cited five sections of the California Penal Code, ranging from the general anti-cruelty statute to the specific prohibition against cockfighting, possessing or training fighting birds, and possessing cockfighting implements.

My office has continued to correspond with Los Angeles city and county prosecutors in an attempt to pin down the date and location of the cockfight. We have learned that someone involved in the filming is trying to convince the authorities that the entire scene was a fake. We are now trying to verify the facts as we have gathered them and proceed with prosecution.

Murdaugh Stuart Madden
HSUS General Counsel