One every 1.5 seconds. That's probably three or four by the time you finish reading this sentence. By the time you reach the end of the paragraph, the tally will be close to twenty. If you spend ten minutes reading this Close-Up Report, the count will total more than four hundred.

What are we counting? Brace yourself. We're counting deaths—for, in this country, a dog, or a cat, or a puppy, or a kitten, is put to death approximately every second and a half.

Close your eyes and count to five. Three more dead—victims of our raging pet-overpopulation crisis. Three more pets that could have made warm and loving companions.
"UNTIL THERE ARE NONE, ADOPT ONE"

For too long," said HSUS Senior Consultant Phyllis Wright, "the public has taken a one-way street to the animal shelter. Too many people en­ter the shelter with their arms full of unwanted dogs and cats. Too few come in to look for a lifelong companion.

That’s why The Humane Society of the United States has launched “Until There Are None, Adopt One” campaign. Our “Adopt One” cam­paign is designed to reverse that one-way sign, turn the tide in favor of previously un­wanted animals, and make homeless animals the next big consumer issue. Our aim: to persuade people to visit the animal shelter when they make the decision to get a companion animal.

In virtually every commu­nity across the United States, public and private animal shelters are filled with dogs and cats. Some are lost pets whose owners cannot be found. Others are pets whose owners can no longer keep them. Each is hoping for a permanent and loving home.

Unfortunately for most of these animals, there will be no new home because not enough people choose to adopt their animal compan­ions from a shelter. Mean­while, more animals are born to supply the demand, and more animals continue to flow into shelters when their owners decide not to keep them anymore.

HSUS Chief Executive John A. Hoyt said, when in­troducing the “Adopt One” campaign, “It is a travesty that any healthy dog or cat should have to be killed in a society that regards itself as civil­ized and humane. It is a disgrace that we continue to permit such killing when it is both possible and feasible that it no longer be done. And it is just short of criminal that some are obliged to see it through the executioners while others continue to fill the shelters of this country, which have been turned into depositories of our callousness and insensitivity toward animals.

Our campaign slogan is “Choose a Pal for Life.” When you decide to bring a pet into your life, give a shelter animal a home. Don’t go to a pet store. Don’t go to a breeder. Choose to save a life. Until there are no more healthy ani­mals dying in our shelters, adopt a shelter pet.

For over two million dogs and over one million cats. The numbers add up to a tragic disregard for life—but this is an equation that can be changed. It’s time to reverse the trend, to get healthy animals out of shelters and into homes, and to stem the ceaseless flow of more animals into shelters by reducing the flow at its source: at birth.

THE HEARTBREAK OF PET OVERPOPULATION

Getting healthy animals out of shelters and into homes is what The HSUS’s “Until There Are None, Adopt One” campaign is all about (see side­bar). Our first responsibility is to the animals already born, al­ready suffering because they don’t have loving homes. To anyone who has decided to add a companion animal to the family, we say, “Go to the shel­ter. Save a life.”

Shelters house the true heartbreak of pet overpopula­tion. So many animals, each with a story, wait for homes. While it is true that some of the animals euthanized at animal shelters are not suitable for adoption and would not make good pets, consider these facts:

Most of the dogs and cats put down at shelters are adoptable; the number of unacceptable pets, ill, or old ani­mals destroyed is often a minority. On average, eight out of ten adoptable animals are destroyed.

• An estimated 25 percent of all animals coming into shelters are purebreds. Hundreds of thousands of victims of the oversupply that are bred and born in response to consumers’ demands for purebreds end up in animal shelter cages across the country.

• Half of the animals de­stroyed at shelters are puppies and kittens, but half are adult animals. Thousands of adult ani­mals are turned in to shel­ters by owners who, tragically, for the animals, didn’t carefully think through their decision to get a pet in the first place. Casualties of ignorance and irresponsibility, dogs and cats from their families are turned in to animal shelters, wait­ing to return home. They can’t understand that “home” is gone forever, that their families regarded them as disposable objects to be kept only as long as it was convenient. A lucky few find new homes; all deserve a second chance.

A NEW RESPONSIBILITY—A LIFETIME OF LOVE

The fate of such “recycled pets” clearly demonstrates the necessity of any element in the equation that will help reduce the suffering of our nation’s dogs and cats. Merely having a pet—even if one adopts a shelter animal—is not enough. The decision to keep a companion animal must be al­lied with commitment and re­sponsibility—for the life of the animal.

What’s responsibility? It’s carefully considering the decision to have a pet. It’s acknowledging that a pet may be with you for ten, fifteen, or even twenty years and accepting that lengthy commitment. It’s accepting financial responsi­bility for the animal and his or her health care throughout your pet’s life. It’s knowing that there will be times when keeping a pet is not conven­ient but pungently to struggle through them. It’s recognizing that the animal you choose to share your life with will love you and look to you for care and companionship, and you will be bound to give it not until it becomes tiresome, but for the life of the animal. Shelter personnel know that pets are too often considered dispos­able; it’s time for all pet owners to reject that attitude.

Finally, responsible pet owners do not contribute to the problem of surplus animals. This is the next element in our equation: reducing the numbers born. Uncontrolled breeding has flooded us with animals. We’re beyond saturation point, yet puppies and kittens contin­ue to be born. People breed ani­mals intentionally for profit or for hobby. Puppies and kittens are often disposed of in the millions in U.S. shelters every year (inset). Too many are destroyed.

Spayed and neutered dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives in loving homes. Spayed and neutered animals are less likely to get pregnant. Spayed and neutered pets let their unwanted pets outside, where they breed, and the problem persists. A love for a pet is not enough; you must responsibly choose and care for a pet.

Healthy animals are dying by the millions in U.S. shelters every year. Too many are too long, too often considered disposable, too few are adopted from shelters into loving homes.
to show aggressive and territorial behaviors, such as biting, spraying, and roaming. Since these undesirable behaviors are often the reason animals are turned in at shelters, spaying and neutering not only save lives, they produce longer, happier relationships.

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE: IT CAN SAVE LIVES

Many connections contribute to the tragedy of pet overpopulation. There’s a connection between every litter born and every animal languishing in a shelter. There’s a connection between the numbers of shelter animals that are adopted and the numbers of additional animals that will—or will not—be born to supply the market demand. The attitudes that pets are disposable objects, that purebreds are more desirable than mixed breeds, and that females should have “just one litter” before they’re spayed have dire consequences, resulting in yet more animals being born.

To change the existing equation that adds up to so much suffering and to so many needless deaths, all pet owners, current and prospective, must be aware of the connections between their attitudes and actions, and the numbers of animals dying every day—every minute. Then it becomes clear: Get the animals out of shelters, and stop the march into shelters. Adopt one . . . spay and neuter . . . and enjoy a rewarding relationship with a companion animal for life.

WHAT THE HSUS IS DOING

No issue has been more at the forefront of the work of The HSUS than the problem of homeless animals. Since 1954 The HSUS has conducted workshops, conferences, and major campaigns to bring this tragedy to the attention of the public and try to reduce the suffering. We have fought for legislation that would establish economic incentives for the spaying and neutering of animals, and we have supported the establishment of spay/neuter clinics, both public and private. Legislation that protects animals by requiring responsible pet ownership is now in place in many parts of the country.

1994 The HSUS has conducted educational efforts in this arena have been immense. We have produced millions of pieces of literature as well as numerous films and public-service announcements, engaging hundreds of persons in spreading the message about the tragedy of millions of unwanted animals. In the last five years, our “Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter” campaign has been implemented by thousands of individuals and groups across the country. Our efforts have seen encouraging success: HSUS estimates indicate that the number of animals being destroyed in shelters annually has been reduced nearly by half in the last decade. But we still have a long way to go. Although the numbers have been reduced by millions, millions are still dying.

Now with our powerful “Until There Are None, Adopt One” campaign, we’re calling upon the strength of the consumer to change the way society thinks about companion animals. Concerned and compassionate consumers have made a crucial difference in many battles on behalf of animals. Now we need your support for this vital issue: to help dogs and cats, the animals nearest to Americans’ hearts. As consumers open their homes to shelter animals instead of buying from other sources and encouraging the continued breeding of dogs and cats, the numbers will decline still farther. We want to count lives, not deaths.