LOVED—OR LOST?
Dogs and cats play an important role in our lives; they give us love, companionship, and the rewarding experience of a unique bond. Yet, while millions of dogs and cats enjoy loving homes, life for millions of others is far from bright. They are the victims of this country’s pet-overpopulation crisis; they are homeless, abused, neglected, starved, abandoned. No issue has figured more prominently in the work of The Humane Society of the United States than the plight of homeless dogs and cats.

Pet overpopulation—to many dogs and cats, too few homes—can be thought of as a deadly disease, one that is responsible for the deaths of up to 10 million dogs and cats every year. For years The HSUS, along with countless other organizations, has worked to educate the public about this crisis and has encouraged spaying and neutering, responsible pet ownership, and adoptions from shelters. Nevertheless, each year our nation’s shelters continue to euthanize millions of dogs and cats. While we have seen encouraging change—according to HSUS estimates, the number of animals annually being destroyed in shelters has, in the past decade, been reduced by nearly a third—we can’t accept that 8 to 10 million unadopted dogs and cats are still dying each year.

For more than fifteen years, our Legislation, Education, and Sterilization campaign spread the message that work in all three of those areas is necessary to effectively curb pet overpopulation. Over the last six years, thousands of individuals and groups across the country have implemented our “Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter” campaign. In 1994 we launched our “Until There Are None, Adopt One” campaign, calling for increased public awareness of dog and cat overpopulation and urging people to adopt dogs and cats from shelters instead of going to breeders or pet stores. In March of this year, we took that approach one step further. We called for a voluntary national moratorium on all breeding of dogs and cats.

The HSUS announcement received unprecedented coverage from both national and local media (see sidebar, “Moratorium Sparks Media Blaze”).

Sparks Media Blaze

The HSUS call for a temporary voluntary moratorium on dog and cat breeding garnered an enormous response across the country. Featuring the moratorium on its front page, USA Today commented in an editorial, “Because education and neutering programs haven’t stemmed the tide, the moratorium deserves consideration.” CNN, the Associated Press, National Public Radio, NBC’s “Today” show, and scores of local and national media featured stories and interviews about the moratorium. On the CBS overnight news program “Up to the Minute,” actress Loretta Swift expressed her support. The moratorium even sparked some good-natured humor on “The Tonight Show” and “Late Night with David Letterman.” Newspapers across the country gave the moratorium favorable coverage in editorials and articles. The HSUS was flooded with requests for more information and for speakers to appear on radio call-in shows. During the shows, listeners, many listeners who phoned in expressed support for the moratorium. While pet overpopulation is a problem that needs immediate attention.

The moratorium has already succeeded in focusing national attention on a problem too long ignored, and in prompting discussion and action. Solutions, just as for the moratorium, but an array of complementary approaches—are not far behind.
cent of all dogs entering shelters are purebreds. Yet in 1992 the American Kennel Club (AKC) registered a record-high number of new dogs: 1.5 million. Cats are pouring into shelters in record numbers. Homeless animals abound.

The HSUS moratorium keeps pace with an important attitude shift already observed in several areas. In San Mateo County, California, for example, a standard pet license is now for a sterilized animal; the county requires a permit for an intact dog or cat. For years Ft Wayne, Indiana, has required that residents purchase a permit before breeding a dog or cat. In April of this year, Denver, Colorado, passed a mandatory sterilization ordinance that requires owners of intact dogs or cats to sterilize before breeding a dog or cat. In California, breeders who sell registered dogs and cats are required to post a sign with a disclaimer: breed registration guarantees when a dog and his/her parentage; papers mean only that the registration papers are required to be effective. But while we build on the success of earlier efforts, our goal remains the same: to ensure that every dog and cat leads a happy, healthy life without suffering—whether they have a loving home.

Sixteen states now require the sterilization of dogs and cats within the last three years. Controversy has flared around the moratorium. The AKC opposes it, claiming that people want purebred dogs because they know what a dog of a specific breed will be like when grown. In reality, however, there are no guarantees when purchasing a registered dog. In California, breeders who sell dogs with registration papers are required to post a sign with a disclaimer. Breed registration papers mean only that the registry maintains records on the dog and his/her parentage; papers do not guarantee health, temperament, or any specific breed qualities.

Each birth of a dog or cat contributes to overpopulation. It's that simple. The HSUS has taken the crucial step that goes to the problem's source. Halting breeding for even a short time would save millions of animals from homelessness—those who need homes now, and those who would otherwise be born only to find themselves homeless.

Animal shelters across the country use HSUS materials to help them spread the word about the plight of homeless dogs and cats. There are many ways you can help too.

Since 1954 our programs to help homeless animals have been unflagging. In the process of helping, we have learned. Our programs have evolved to meet society's changing needs, respond to crisis, and build on what we know to be effective. But while we build on the success of earlier efforts, our goal remains the same: to ensure that every dog and cat is appreciated as an individual—with something unique and wonderful to offer humans—and that each one has a loving home.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

• Join the HSUS temporary breeding moratorium; urge others to join, too. Show your love for dogs and cats by helping to solve the problem that causes them more suffering than any other—excessive breeding.
• Get involved in some of the many ways to help dogs and cats, the companions we cherish. The HSUS softcover book 52 Simple Things You Can Do to Help End Pet Overpopulation is filled with practical ideas and tips to get you started. For a donation to the HSUS of $30.00 or more, we'll gladly send you a complimentary copy.
• Enjoy companion animals—they give us so much! You can volunteer at your local shelter to help groom, train, or exercise the animals. If you've decided to bring a new pet into your life, adopt one. Give a shelter animal a home.
• Whether you're a new owner or an experienced one, be responsible. Spay/neuter your dogs and cats, keep I.D. tags on them, and obey community licensing and leash laws. If you have a behavior problem with a pet, take advantage of the many professionals who can help: trainers, your veterinarian, the staff at your local shelter.
• Finally, help The HSUS continue to develop and carry out its dynamic programs that help millions of companion animals. There's an exciting future ahead, but we can't get nearer to our goal of ensuring that every dog and cat leads a happy, healthy life without your help and support. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope to send your contribution to The HSUS today. And remember, if you make a donation of at least $30.00, we'll send you a free copy of our forty-page softcover book 52 Simple Things You Can Do to Help End Pet Overpopulation. Please don't delay. The animals urgently need help.