We're There  Attacking Root Causes

Recognizing that legislation, regulations, and litigation are among the most effective tools for confronting cruelty, we work to broaden and strengthen animal protection policies while ensuring that they are enforced.

The Great Ape Escape

The chimpanzees greeted the newcomers in the sanctuary’s play yard with boisterous vocalizations and hair standing on end. Chimps faced off, charged, chased, fled. But eventually, every one calmed down and shared chimpanzee-style greetings: touching, smelling, and sizing each other up. One pair sat nose to nose, grooming. “It’s great to watch them express behaviors that are normal for chimpanzees,” says Kathleen Conlee, HSUS vice president of animal research issues.

It was the first day outside at Chimp Haven for 4 of the 111 federally owned chimps declared permanently ineligible for research in 2012. Under an agreement The HSUS and Chimp Haven helped bring about in December, the National Institutes of Health is moving the animals one small group at a time from Louisiana’s New Iberia Research Center to the national sanctuary. The HSUS, which provided $500,000 to help expand Chimp Haven for the new arrivals (thanks to one of our most generous supporters), has for years pushed the NIH to retire federally owned chimps. In 2009, an HSUS undercover investigation at New Iberia revealed chimpanzees kept in bare cages, some in isolation for months, and screaming in fear as they were forcibly sedated for experiments. Then in 2011, The HSUS successfully petitioned the federal government to stop illegal breeding of chimps at New Iberia.

Sored No More

Startling images shot during an undercover HSUS investigation helped spark a critically important year in the battle against soring. Under this cruel and illegal practice, trainers deliberately inflict pain to a Tennessee walking horse’s legs or hooves in an effort to exaggerate his high-stepping gait, all for the sake of winning prizes. In the HSUS video, horses were shocked with cattle prods and irritating chemicals were applied to their lower legs. One horse was smacked in the face with a wooden pole, while another, too injured to stand, was whipped in his stall.

The 49-day investigation dispelled the Tennessee walking horse industry’s contention that soring is a thing of the past, and the fallout came fast and furious. State and federal charges were filed against noted trainer Jackie McConnell and three of his associates, with McConnell pleading guilty to a felony. After ABC’s Nightline aired the footage, Pepsi and Ford withdrew their sponsorship of the annual Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. In an interview with The HSUS, former trainer Barney Davis shed more light on the scope of the problem: “You’re not going to win if you don’t sore.” And the U.S. Equestrian Federation—the nation’s largest horse show sanctioning body—banned the use of devices typically associated with soring.

Federal policymakers took action as well. Three biomedical research facilities recently ended their use of chimps, and several pharmaceutical companies have agreed to no longer use them. The recent retirements may be just the beginning. In January 2013, an NIH committee recommended the government retire all but 50 of the remaining 350 federally owned chimps, including many who were caught in the wild and have spent half a century in labs.

Finally Freed

Penny spent decades in a lab before retiring to sanctuary in 2011. An HSUS campaign to end invasive experiments on chimpanzees has seen significant strides.
In 2012, the USDA established minimum penalties for violations of the federal law against sor- ring, while a bill was introduced in Congress to strengthen those penalties and eliminate self-policing in the industry. It all adds up to what HSUS equine protection director Keith Dane calls “the most significant year we’ve ever had—I would call it a tipping point year.” Writes Roy Exum, columnist with The Chattanooga and The HSUS’s 2012 Humane Horsemanship of the Year: “The outcry is reaching a nationwide cre- scendo after years of abuse that has been hid- den, ignored, shunned, and mocked.”

Hounds Aground

Hunting mountain lions with dogs has been ille- gal in California since 1990. The practice causes suffering both for the mountain lions, who are chased into trees and shot or torn apart, and for the hounds, who can be killed or hurt and are often treated more like hunting equipment than family members.

Jerry Brown signed S.B. 1221 into law. Respond- ing to the news, Sinclair emailed: “After a few whoops, I broke down and just started crying … I am so, so happy right now.”

Legislative and Collaborate

In a basement corner where plywood boards helped cordon off a dogfighting pit, luminous- cent blue spray revealed splatters of blood everywhere, from a rolled-up carpet to the deep red walls.

It was one of two suspected Michigan dog- fighting operations where The HSUS’s mobile crime lab helped gather evidence last August. Kalamazoo County Animal Services and Enforce- ment officials had been cracking down dog fight- ing earlier in the year after attending a Humane Society University training. To set in motion the August raids, HSUS staff provided ac- cess to a database of suspected dogfighters; they later helped obtain search warrants and ran the temporary shelter for the 46 dogs rescued. “Probably, if we didn’t have [The HSUS’s] assis- tance, we would put down all of the dogs,” Ka- lamazoo animal services director Steven Law- rence told a local TV crew. “They know what they’re doing. They made this so much easier.”

The cases caught the attention of state law- makers, who in the ensuing months passed a package of HSUS-backed bills to create more av- enues for prosecuting and penalizing animal fighters. It was one of multiple victories against animal fighting in 2012: The HSUS’s litigation team also secured the first-ever private prosecu- tion of a dogfighter in Ohio and won a court rul- ing upholding the federal animal fighting law. HSUS staff have led a decade-long campaign to tighten loopholes in the law, most recently spur- ring introduction of a bill to crack down on spectators at animal fights. Says John Good- win, HSUS director of animal cruelty policy: “When the USDA has the power to go into a pit and charge every single person with a federal crime, you’re going to see this problem diminish in scope to a huge degree.”