Cracking down on animal cruelty

The conversation, captured on video at a store in Hawaii by our undercover investigators, is chillingly casual. “When I sell, I’m not supposed to say ivory. I say ‘bone.’ But you don’t look like you’re a detective,” one vendor says, laughing.

HSUS investigators often fire the first salvo against cruelty, whether it’s the blatant viciousness of illegal dogfighting, the suffering of farm animals who cannot stand up or turn around in their cages, or the callous disregard of ivory sellers who don’t realize or won’t admit that undocumented sales drive the brutality of elephant poaching.

To combat animal cruelty in all its forms, The HSUS investigates abuses, uses the law to hold people accountable, enacts animal protection legislation and trains law enforcement officers. The evidence gathered by investigators informs our education and awareness campaigns, corporate outreach, public policy advocacy and lifesaving rescues.

The reaction to our Hawaiian exposé helped enact a state law banning sales of ivory along with parts and products taken from more than a dozen species. A similar investigation in Oregon contributed to a sweeping win for a ballot measure to stop trafficking of endangered species. And our undercover investigation of Safari Club International’s annual convention showed vendors explaining how they guarantee kills for trophy hunters, making the “sport” sound only slightly more challenging than grabbing a snack from a vending machine.

Our documentation of horrific conditions at a New England egg facility bolstered a Massachusetts ballot measure banning extreme confinement of farm animals and the sale of products from them. Previous investigations...
contributed to the 2016 closing of a loophole in a federal rule, preventing the slaughter of “downer” calves too sick or injured to walk.

The Animal Protection Litigation team secured numerous victories for animals in 2016. We overturned a Michigan wolf hunting and trapping law, won a ruling declaring unlawful military sonar activities that harm marine mammals and forced a Chicago-based pet store chain to stop sourcing puppies from disreputable breeders.

In response to HSUS legal petitions, federal agencies banned the slaughter of downed veal calves, prohibited public contact with infant exotic cats, blocked import of captive-bred lion hunting trophies and eliminated a loophole exempting captive tigers from oversight.

The legal team also drafted dozens of successful animal protection bills, including the Massachusetts ballot measure. And we successfully defended animal protection laws from industry legal attacks, including California laws banning the sale of endangered elephant ivory and the sale of eggs from cruelly confined chickens.

Your support has allowed us to train others to protect animals, too—spreading expertise that saves lives. In 2016, The HSUS trained 4,770 law enforcement officers, animal control and shelter personnel to pursue cruelty cases and handle rescued animals.

In Mississippi, a sheriff’s deputy who had attended an HSUS training discovered eight pit bulls at the site of a drug bust and called us for help. The guidance our trainer provided that morning and the next few weeks helped the deputy conduct a search and seizure of a second property, rescuing a total of 10 dogs. Officers in Bibb County, Georgia, charged a man with dogfighting and 11 counts of felony cruelty after discovering injured and malnourished dogs living in deplorable conditions. They credit our training with teaching them what to look for and how to pursue these crimes.

We also enact policies to help authorities crack down on cruelty: Animal torture is now a first-offense felony in Idaho and Ohio. Georgia, Alaska and Washington passed laws requiring that owners charged with cruelty pay for care of their animals while the criminal case proceeds. President Obama closed a loophole in the Uniform Code of Military Justice so personnel who harm animals on U.S. military bases overseas can be charged with cruelty. Our global arm, HSI, launched an anti-dogfighting campaign in Mexico and helped enact cruelty legislation in El Salvador and Honduras.

Pixie was one of 46 sick, starving and scared dogs we saved from a hoarding situation in Arkansas after receiving an anonymous tip. After rescuing her, we placed Pixie with one of our Emergency Placement Partners, the Humane Society of Naples, Florida. She was scared of everything, underweight and heartworm positive with a serious skin condition—and then she was adopted. Now Pixie loves to be with her family.