Hurricanes are given human names and the damage they do is often ascribed to human emotions such as anger or fury. After spending a month representing The HSUS in the south Florida area devastated by Hurricane Andrew, I believe I understand why this is so. It is impossible to observe such massive, incomprehensible destruction without imagining that it was done in a fit of irrational rage.

In the early morning of August 24, Hurricane Andrew smashed into Florida’s coast south of Miami. Within a few hours, hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs, homes, and belongings. Thirty-eight people lost their lives. Hundreds of thousands of animals were killed, injured, or driven from their homes. They were the silent victims of Andrew, and their urgent, overwhelming needs consumed my life and the lives of many other animal lovers for almost two months.

A day earlier the word had gone out: A tropical storm named Andrew had gained power over the Atlantic and was heading inland with the force of a runaway freight train. Residents of south Florida mobilized for Andrew’s arrival. For pet owners seeking safe haven for their animals, the options available quickly became clear.

Evacuation shelters do not accept animals, no matter how cherished, of any size or type. To protect a pet, a person must flee with the pet along clogged highways, leave the animal home alone, or stay to ride out the storm. In this case no one was fully prepared for the extent of destruction, whatever choice he/she made.

One man had left his three cats in the bathroom of his mobile home, believing it was the safest place in the house. When he returned from a shelter he found nothing left—no home, no cats. A month later he was still searching for the cats, hoping they would miraculously appear. He was only one of many haunted by the question of their pets’ ultimate fate.

No one will ever know how many animals were lost, injured, or killed in the storm. Horses bled from stables and

A survivor of Andrew is provided food, water, shelter, and security in one of the small-animal MASH units established in the storm’s aftermath. Inset: cages are stacked snugly under tents in the MASH unit. Above a sign points the way to aid for animal victims.
STRUGGLE AND TRIUMPH IN
ANDREW'S WAKE
BY LAURA BEVAN
fields, dogs and cats fled their homes in terror. Thousands of exotic animals were released from zoos, import stations, and private collections. For days there was no news of the extent of the damage, especially concerning animals, and chaos reigned.

When information did start to flow out of the disaster area, it was stunning. Miami Metrozoo had almost been demolished, more than 2,000 primates were running loose from various facilities, and thousands of lost, injured, and hungry dogs and cats roamed neighborhoods. In rural areas hundreds of dead and injured horses lay in the fields.

I heard my first eyewitness account of the devastation from Joe Terragrosa, of the South Florida SPCA. He focused his rescue efforts on injured horses and other animals. He drove his truck or flew in helicopters over fields to find horses up to their necks in mud or in agony from the broken bones and deep gouges caused by storm-thrown, airborne objects. Some animals could be saved, but those beyond hope were humanely destroyed. It was grueling, heart-wrenching work.

Quickly, the networking among animal-protection and animal-control groups went into high gear. I spoke with representatives of the American Humane Association and the Florida Animal Control Association. A team of Hurricane Hugo veterans from South Carolina prepared to bring in animal crates, pet food and supplies, and water. Our phone rang constantly with offers of help from around the country. The Iams Company donated 44,000 pounds of pet food through The HSUS, and other large pet-food manufacturers responded to requests from other groups.

We then had to determine where the donations would be stored and how they would be distributed to those in the disaster area in need. Some pet food was put into the Red Cross food-distribution system. Other food was driven into the damaged areas by volunteers who gave it away from the backs of personal vehicles.

Portable generators were desperately needed to provide basic electricity. Joe Terragrosa carried a generator with him on his daily journeys into the disaster area to pump water for animals and humans alike. He was the first person some rural residents saw after the storm.

By the weekend two distribution sites had been set up for horse feed, and Tropical Park, a former racetrack, had become both haven and veterinary clinic for severely injured horses. The South Florida SPCA and the Horse Protection Association set up a compound for lost horses five miles north of Homestead, ground zero for the hurricane’s worst damage. The number of horses at both sites soon grew to almost 200.

Each day was fraught with unexpected problems. Some of the loose primates had escaped from the University of Miami research centers; panicky residents, terrified by rumors that the monkeys had AIDS, shot the animals on sight. Dade County Animal Services, although not in the disaster area, padlocked its gate for almost a week. Horses were being taken from the area, reportedly by “killer buyers” intending to sell them for slaughter. Each problem had to be resolved quickly at a time when state authorities were struggling with their own relief efforts.

Soon dead animals were being burned where they lay. With no fences to stop them, dog packs roamed desolate neighborhoods looking for food.

A week after Andrew struck, it became apparent that little more could be accomplished over the phone from our office in Tallahassee. Information came haphazardly and incompletely. Valuable time was being wasted as agencies and individuals jockeyed for positions of leadership. It was clear that HSUS strategy could be determined only by first-hand observations. With enough clothes for one week, Southeast Regional Investigator Ken Johnson and I headed south.

A command center had been set up first at the local humane society and then, when it reopened, at the local animal-control facility. The disaster area boasted two veterinary MASH units (mobile hospitals) providing emergency pet care. I first toured the devastated areas, command center, veterinary MASH units, and horse compounds. Sally Matluk of Citizens Against Pet Overpopulation of Fort Lauderdale was my guide. In one of the biggest trucks I ever saw, we traveled through the destruction, passing out pet food, water, and other supplies Sally had stocked in the back.

If I had a preconceived notion of what I would see, I don’t remember it. I know only that the reality was worse than anything I could have imagined. Newspaper photographs and a television screen did not do it justice: the images were too small and unrelated—the devastation stopped at their edges. In the real world, the destruction covered an area about twenty miles by fifty miles. The world soon was filled with destroyed buildings, downed power poles and lines, and uprooted or broken trees. Traffic was bumper to bumper as victims, sight-
seers, and rescue workers frantically tried to get somewhere all at the same time.

Ken assisted Joe Terragrosa with his rescue efforts and rode with wildlife officers as they attempted to capture the large number of escaped exotic animals. I coordinated my efforts from the Emergency Command Center in Homestead with Sue McLeod of the South Carolina team, with whom I had worked on disaster relief after Hurricane Hugo. She summed up the two "experiences by simply stating that compared to Andrew, "Hugo was a piece of cake."

On my first visit with Sally Matluk to the lost-horse compound on Krome Avenue, we looked at the horses grazing contentedly in the field and questioned whether something similar should or could be done for lost dogs and cats. As days passed the idea took hold. The closest animal-control facility and shelter were hours north. Most people in the disaster area had neither car nor money to make that drive to locate a lost pet or turn in one they had found.

Sally and her husband, John Boisseau, took action. In the late hours of September 4, the Western Small Animal MASH Unit was created. John raided his movie-production company, and suddenly a recreational vehicle, tents, generators, and other equipment appeared in the front pasture of the Krome Avenue horse compound. The MASH unit grew rapidly: we added crates from South Carolina to house lost dogs and cats, a Coachman travel trailer, and a forty-four-foot tractor-trailer for food storage (courtesy of the Orlando Humane Society).

The U.S. Army's 478th Civil Affairs Battalion lent us three massive army tents to protect the animals and our veterinary clinic from direct sunlight. Soldiers brought food, drinks, and other supplies daily. They watched over all the MASH veterinary clinics at night as volunteers slept in their cars. Many lost and injured animals found their way to our compound in army vehicles. One soldier, M-16 rifle thrown over his shoulder, regularly bottle-fed tiny kittens in his off-duty hours.

Within days Nick Gilman of The HSUS's Companion Animals section arrived to direct the care and housing of the compound's animals. As word of our efforts spread, volunteers from around the country joined us.

Our best find was Col. Thelton ("Mac") McCorkle, D.V.M., of the 478th Battalion. A reservist from Alabama, he lived on-site, providing around-the-clock emergency veterinary care and general good cheer.

HSUS Staff Veterinarian Steve Kritsick, D.V.M., joined Mac as the compound's primary veterinarians. They toiled in the heat and humidity to provide whatever care they could in less-than-sterile conditions with limited medical supplies. Some days the line of patients snaked through the compound. At night, almost like clockwork, soldiers and pet owners rushed to the compound with dogs injured by cars. In the pitch blackness of the disaster area, the dogs' treatment became part of the evening routine. Partially because aggressive dogs roamed the streets freely and other animals no longer had the protection that fencing had once provided, a large number of animals suffered from dog bites requiring veterinary care.

Our free emergency veterinary service caused the greatest controversy. While many veterinarians offered us their support and services, others fought us at every turn. They saw every injured or sick animal we treated as money out of their own pockets.

We stood firm in our belief that free veterinary care was an absolute necessity. The people who sought our services often had little left but their pets. Our veterinarians did everything within their power to help, but serious injuries were always referred to local practitioners with X-ray machines and better operating conditions.

After three weeks of fifteen- to eighteen-hour workdays, I headed back to Tallahassee, exhausted and a little guilt-ridden over abandoning my compatriots. As the miles rolled away, the trees along the interstate appeared massive and somewhat surreal. It was strange not to have army helicopters constantly overhead, soldiers stationed on street corners, and army vehicles zipping along everywhere. My mind eerily superimposed images of destruction on the peaceful landscapes I traveled through. It was a strange journey home.

My return to the office the next day was shocking. Somehow I had forgotten that all the other animal problems of the world did not go away in my absence!

After a week in Tallahassee, I headed back to Homestead. The situation was vastly improved. The compound had begun
A dog waiting next to a destroyed house in Louisiana was fed by animal-rescue staff every day for a week until the owners returned.

DEALING WITH DISASTERS NATIONWIDE

Although Hurricane Andrew caused the greatest damage in Florida, its effects were felt as far west as Louisiana. Two other devastating storms struck parts of the United States within weeks of Andrew’s landfall. The HSUS responded within hours to all three emergencies.

As Andrew headed toward the Gulf of Mexico coast, Gulf States Regional Director James Noe began calling animal shelters throughout the region to suggest emergency preparations and offer The HSUS’s assistance if it was needed. Later the HSUS helped coordinate shipment of pet food donated by The Iams Company and Nature’s Choice.

In Andrew’s wake Mr. Noe and Guy Hodge, HSUS director of data and information services, traveled to the hardest-hit areas of Louisiana and helped the Louisiana SPCA deliver pet food to animal shelters and pet owners. Fortunately, area shelters reported that they had suffered little damage.

Outside the disaster area, HSUS regional offices worked closely with local humane societies to collect and channel emergency supplies to devastated areas of Florida. The Great Lakes office worked with the Kent County Humane Society of Grand Rapids, Michigan, to truck donated food and supplies into Florida. The New England office arranged for a group of volunteer animal-control officers to travel to the disaster scene to help provide emergency animal-care services.

In the midst of coordinating our response to Hurricane Andrew, we received an early-morning call from a member in Hawaii warning that Hurricane Iniki was approaching the islands. West Coast Regional Office staff immediately called the Hawaii Humane Society, letting that staff know we were standing by to assist in any way possible. We also contacted emergency relief organizations in the area, offering our help. We identified and publicized evacuation shelters willing to take in people with their pets.

When Iniki hit the island of Kauai, communications there were completely cut off. Working with the Hawaii Humane Society, Charlene Drennon, West Coast regional director, purchased portable cages and shipped them to the Kauai Humane Society. The cages are still being used by the humane society and pet owners who cannot confine their animals due to hurricane damage.

The destructiveness of Hurricanes Andrew and Iniki overshadowed stories of yet another severe storm that struck the U.S. territory of Guam. An urgent call from Guam Animals in Need reported that its animal shelter, the only one on the island, had lost its dog and cat runs during Typhoon Omar, which had struck a week before Iniki hit Kauai. The HSUS donated funds to the Guam shelter to assist it in rebuilding the dog kennels and building a typhoon-proof cat room.

The HSUS will continue to collaborate with other organizations and agencies to ensure that communities are better prepared to meet the needs of animals and their owners in future disasters. We have scheduled a special session on disaster preparedness for Animal Care Expo ’93 and will be providing additional resources in the months ahead.

Laura Bevan is the HSUS Southeast regional director.