

# To the Rescue

Savannah cats like this one are the product of cross-breeding between a domestic cat and an African wild cat known as a serval. In December, HSUS responders rescued 43 animals from neglectful conditions at a savannah cat breeding operation in North Carolina.



 **LOCATION:** Mocksville, North Carolina

**ANIMALS SAVED:** 35 domestic, exotic, and hybrid cats, six dogs, one rabbit, one goat

**The serval**, a 30–40 pound wild cat with cheetah-like markings, is characterized by large ears and a long neck and legs—the better for hunting along African savannahs. They can hear critters moving underground, they can leap 9 feet into the air, and they can reach speeds of 50 miles an hour.

But the serval whom HSUS responders found in a wooded North Carolina backyard wasn't doing any running. He wasn't doing any hunting either. He was merely pacing—round and round a muddied enclosure. "It was just awful," says Ashley Mauceri, deputy manager of animal cruelty investigations. "It was clear he was going crazy in there."

In December, The HSUS assisted the Davie County Sheriff's Office in removing 43 animals from neglectful conditions on the property, where the owner was breeding domestic cats with the serval to sell a cross-breed known as the savannah cat.

"It's dangerous," Mauceri says of purchasing such hybrid cats. "Not all of the savannah cats there were overtly aggressive, but you can't predict their behavior—just by virtue of purposely breeding a wild animal. I certainly wouldn't want to put a kid around one."

Responders found kittens with goopy eyes and runny noses,

shut into an unventilated patio where the stinging stench of ammonia and feces hung in the air.

Below a backyard deck, five cats were trapped amid mud and cobwebs and feces. When responders crawled underneath to retrieve them, one cat scattered to a back corner in fear. Another, intentionally bred to have short legs, struggled to even walk.

A skinny shepherd dog suffered from untreated cherry eye. An elderly Chihuahua with three legs was confined to a small outdoor pen, dirt matted into her fur. "She was terrified when we tried to approach her," Mauceri says. "None of the animals, it seemed, were getting adequate socialization or vet care."

The property owner surrendered the animals, and the domestic cats and dogs went to a local shelter, where they were examined and then readied for adoption. The savannah cats, distinguished by their big ears and longer legs, went to a rescue specializing in the breed, and the serval went to a local wild animal rescue.

"It was really impressive to see how outraged law enforcement and the community were that this beautiful wild creature was living in this small muddy space, just to be bred over and over again," says Mauceri.

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**LOCATION:** Macon, Mississippi

**ANIMALS HELPED:** 108 dogs

**At the overrun home** near Macon, Miss., the little beagle mix was known as Hobo.

She didn't live there—rather, she would simply wander in off the street twice a week for a meal. And that early December day, when HSUS responders rescued more than 100 dogs from the property, just happened to mark one of those visits.

Covered in dirt and oil, Hobo snapped at rescuers who tried to pick her up. But eventually, as The HSUS's Adam Parascandola held her, she began to relax, even cling to him. "She just was in pure fear," he remembers. "Just her whole life was fear."

The majority of the dogs were running loose, while others were confined to filthy pens or affixed to chains. They suffered from medical issues such as severe skin conditions, parasites, and injuries from fighting among themselves.

The owner, who'd agreed to surrender the animals, had started out running a shelter of sorts for the rural community but became overwhelmed. The dogs were sent to rescue groups in various states; Hobo will get her second chance at the Virginia Beach SPCA.

"She just really moved me," Parascandola says of the little dog. "And I'm really excited she has this chance, and I just really look forward to the day when they send me a picture of her looking happy, smiling, wagging her tail."

Beyond the rescue, there is more hope for change: Mississippi State University's veterinary program had previously conducted a spay/neuter event at the property. Another clinic was scheduled for January, but with the animals removed, MSU held the event in the community instead—and it was a hit. Another 50-plus owners are already on the waiting list for the next one.

HSUS staffers also asked city and county officials to explore other options for housing homeless animals. Says Parascandola: "I think it really opened up a door to improve the future for animals and people in that community."



**LOCATION:** Roseland, Virginia

**ANIMALS HELPED:** 110, including game fowl, hunting dogs, horses, and pigs

**As an HSUS contractor,** Julie Castaneda is typically charged with setting up emergency shelters to support Animal Rescue Team deployments. She approaches each assignment like a puzzle—and in late November, she got handed a giant jigsaw.

It was a Sunday morning. A PetSmart Charities semi and two HSUS trucks were on their way, bearing more than 100 animals rescued from a Roseland, Va., cruelty case. Not the best time to learn that the space designated for the shelter was entirely too small.

As she scrambled for a solution, Castaneda eventually came in contact with Dean Monroe, who was vacationing four states away in Florida. Thanks to his generosity, the rescue rolled on; Monroe gave The HSUS permission to use the old textile plant he had recently purchased, calling in a crew to remove heavy equipment. Volunteers and HSUS staffers then went to work setting up space for 59 birds and 49 hounds—including little swimming pools for the ducks, kennels for the dogs, and large enclosures for the chickens.

"They were just the best people in the world," Castaneda says of the Monroe family, who—four days later—delivered Thanksgiving dinner to the team.

Responders removed more than 100 dogs from a rural Mississippi property in December; some required traps and a few days of patience to catch in the grasslands behind the home.

