By Randall Lockwood, Ph.D.

Those of us who work for the protection of animals have long realized that people who are cruel and abusive toward animals are often entangled in other illegal, often violent, activities against people and society (see the Summer 1986 HSUS News). Although it has often been difficult for animal-protection groups to get police and other law-enforcement authorities to respond to concerns about animal cruelty, a growing number of such agencies see the investigation and prosecution of animal abusers as an appropriate use of limited crime-fighting resources. Although The HSUS has assisted law-enforcement agencies periodically throughout its history, such cooperation has become increasingly regular.

ON January 20, 1993, HSUS Mid-Atlantic Regional Investigator Bob Reder assisted New York State Police in raiding three locations believed to be involved in the breeding of dogs for dogfighting. Twenty pit bulls were seized, along with steroids and dogfighting paraphernalia. At one location several dogs, including a litter of puppies, were found without food or water, shivering in subzero temperatures. This raid followed several months of consultation between New York State Police and The HSUS, which helped draft the necessary search warrants.

ON January 30, 1993, HSUS West Coast Regional Investigator Eric Sakach joined a team of law-enforcement officers in dogfight raids on four Colorado locations. The raids were the culmination of nearly a year of collaboration with the Colorado state attorney general’s office, the Colorado state veterinarian, the Colorado bureau of investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the sheriff’s offices of the communities involved. This action resulted in 22 arrests for felony animal-cruelty charges in Florida. Sixty-four people were arrested, seven of them for felonies, including cruelty to animals and carrying a concealed firearm. (A conviction on a juvi- nile firearm charge in Florida can result in up to five years in jail.) Guns, cocaine, and marijuana were found at the scene, dropped by participants and spectators who had attempted to flee.

ON November 7, 1992, HSUS Senior Investigator Bob Baker, Great Lakes Regional Program Coordinator Robin Wein- auh, and Great Lakes Administrative Assistant Barbara Matthews participated in the nation’s largest-ever dogfight raid, as officers from several municipalities in and around Saginaw, Michigan, including the Bay Area Narcotics Enforcement Team, raided the “Roadblock Invitational Champion Showdown.” This raid resulted in 126 arrests, the seizure of 21 fighting dogs, and the confiscation of money, drugs, and weapons.

The Saginaw raid was the direct result of two years of HSUS efforts in tracking dogfighting activity in Michigan. In meetings with HSUS staff, federal and state drug authorities were impressed to discover that The HSUS’s tracking of known and suspected dogfighters generated addresses and aliases of individuals under investigation for trading in illegal drugs.

ON November 1990 Mr. Sakach participated in a raid on a remote area of northern California after a narcotics investigation turned up evidence of a large-scale dogfighting operation. Investigators found 37 pit bulls, a bloodstained dogfighting pit, and a large assortment of dogfighting publications. The principal suspect in that investigation pleaded guilty to felony dogfighting and narcotics charges. County officials had become aware of HSUS expertise in investigating dogfighting as a result of workshops we had conducted at a community college in the area.

ON June 6, 1988, HSUS staff worked with officers from the sheriff’s departments of two counties, as well as the FBI, to raid two Ohio locations involved in breeding dogs for fighting. In addition to four felony dogfighting arrests, the raid yielded steroids, concert tickets, and weapons, including a large assortment of dogfighting paraphernalia. This represented the first time that the FBI was involved in the investigation and prosecution of animal fighting. The HSUS had been asked by state and federal officials to help identify and document dogfighting suspects in the region and to brief the participating agencies on the collection of dogfighting evidence and the handling of dogfighting evidence.

The HSUS has no police powers or authority, but years of efforts to end animal cruelty, including the especially violent blood sports dogfighting and cockfighting, have produced a special level of expertise and professional credibility that frequently leads law-enforcement agencies to seek our assistance.

Why has this relationship grown so strong in the last several years? Law-enforcement agencies are discovering first-hand that the people involved in violent crimes against animals are often involved in many other violent activities. Says Mr. Sakach, “The police are learning that your local dogfighter or cockfighter is a likely site to meet up with lots of people with warrants outstanding for their arrest, as well as a likely site for drug dealing, gambling, illegal weapons, and other crimes.”

This point is frequently underscored.

LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS TURN TO THE HSUS

Ken Johnson (in HSUS cap) and Hillsborough County Sheriff Cat Henderson restrain a fighting dog during a raid being videotaped by a local television crew.

INTANGLING THE WEB
by the histories of dogfighters and cockfighters.

- In 1992 a young District of Columbia man known to The HSUS and Washington Humane Society cruelty investigators for his frequent involvement in animal cruelty and dogfighting was killed in what police considered to be a drug-related murder.

- In July 1991 Tony Davis, well known to The HSUS and in dogfighting circles as “Snakeman,” was sentenced to thirty years in prison for soliciting a North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation undercover agent to kill an eighteen-year-old woman who had accused him of rape.

- In November 1991, following coverage on television’s “America’s Most Wanted,” Dennis Gene Reese, identified as “an avid cockfighting fan,” was tracked to Tennessee. He had escaped from a Kentucky jail where he had been imprisoned on charges of raping and bludgeoning a woman, and strangling her to death. He was recaptured in January 1992.

- What kinds of HSUS efforts have helped build the relationship between The HSUS and law enforcement?

Research and Intelligence. We have accumulated enormous amounts of background information on the numerous ways in which people abuse, neglect, and exploit animals, as well as ways to combat such actions. In recent years we have attempted to assemble this information in systematic ways to assist appropriate law-enforcement authorities in identifying leads about illegal activities in their region. Because so many violent abusers of animals have long histories of crimes against people, law-enforcement officials are finding that cooperative efforts with animal-protection groups, especially The HSUS, can help locate or identify suspects in other crimes.

PREPARATION. The dramatic raids that highlight some of our cooperative efforts with police and other agencies are only the most visible part of a long, detailed process. The HSUS may be called upon to help decide what will be searched for and how it will be handled. Often HSUS testimony is presented to give weight to evidence submitted by local authorities as justification for a search warrant. Such “evidence” in often live animals who must be appropriately handled and cared for. Whenever possible, advanced preparations must be made for the safe and secure housing of any animals involved, including those who are sick or injured. Through our contacts with local humane groups and animal shelters, we are often able to make such arrangements before the actual event.

Training. We are increasingly reaching out to local law-enforcement authorities through our workshops on cruelty investigation, in regional conferences, and through participation in training programs conducted by law-enforcement agencies. HSUS staff members have written articles for Police magazine and other law-enforcement publications. The HSUS has also prepared professional training materials on animal cruelty for the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Such efforts are paying off: agencies once inclined to consider any animal-cruelty case as minor are now more willing to provide the necessary resources to investigate and prosecute such cases.

REWARDS. The HSUS offers the following rewards:

- Up to $2,500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person who illegally organizes cockfights, fights cocks, promotes cockfighting, or officiates at dogfights.
- Up to $2,500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person who cruelly treats any animal who participates in animal fighting.
- Up to $2,500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person who who cruelly treats any animal who participates in a dogfight.
- Up to $1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone who cruelly treats any animal who participates in animal fighting.

One person uniquely qualified to provide a view of animal-protection/police collaboration is Sue McDonough, president of the New York State Humane Association and an investigator for the New York State Police. She has been assisted by HSUS staff on a variety of animal-cruelty investigations. She says, “The people who are abusing animals are hurting wives and children, dealing drugs, holding illegal weapons, and committing all manner of other crimes. But the police often don’t know what to look for in dealing with animal cruelty. They need the help of humane groups, and we welcome your help.”

The continuing cooperation between animal-protection groups and law-enforcement agencies is paying off. Mr. Sakach notes, “I’m delighted that we are seeing a succession of people heavily involved in violence against animals starting to take the fall they should have taken years ago. This is a promising sign that our society views violence against animals as a serious issue that deserves our full attention.”

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