



LOCATION: Tarpon Springs, Florida

ANIMALS SAVED: 18 gopher tortoises

It was an unusual rescue for The HSUS's Dave Pauli: using a backhoe to dig up animals from their underground homes. But the imminent construction of a west central Florida subdivision meant the colony of gopher tortoises would have to go.

With their scaly, shovel-like forefeet, these slow but powerful earth-movers can engineer burrows 25 feet deep and 40 feet long. The burrows also provide refuge for frogs, snakes, mice, insects, and others, making the gopher tortoise a keystone species in the southeastern U.S.

But given their preference for sandy soil, the tortoises often find themselves in the path of developers. And for nearly two decades, Florida's "incidental take" policy meant the deaths of an estimated 100,000 imperiled gopher tortoises, many of them buried alive. That policy changed in 2007 after a campaign by The HSUS and others—but with a glitch. While relocation is required for new permits,

preexisting ones are grandfathered under the old law.

Fortunately, funds from supporters and grants from The Folke H. Peterson foundation have allowed The HSUS to rescue more than 2,200 tortoises since 2006. In this case, after Deeb Family Homes contacted The HSUS for help on its Tarpon Springs property, two HSUS state council members provided funding for the delicate operation.

Each time the rescue team located a tortoise's half-moon-shaped burrow, they inserted a long PVC pipe to determine its direction. A backhoe operator carefully followed the pipe, scooping soil inch-by-inch to prevent the burrow from collapsing. When the team heard the hollow sound of pipe tapping against shell, they knew the tortoise was close.

After all the tortoises were extracted, Pauli drove them seven hours north to the Nokuse Plantation in Florida's panhandle, where a special fence surrounding the 35-acre release site prevents tortoises from wandering. The first animal released dove into a nearby hole but quickly emerged before disappearing down a different one. "I guess he was shopping for a better apartment," says Pauli with a chuckle.

THIS PAGE: JULIE BUSCHBRANAMAN/FOR THE HSUS. OPPOSITE PAGE: FROM TOP: FRANK LOFTUS/THE HSUS; KATHY MILAN/THE HSUS

TEXT BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

To the Rescue

Animal Rescue Updates

Even before Tropical Storm Isaac

churned into a full-fledged hurricane, torrential rains and flooding in Haiti left animals homeless and scrounging for food. Humane Society International veterinarians at the Haiti Animal Welfare Clinic treated animals after the storm hit.

As Hurricane Isaac bore down on the Gulf Coast, The HSUS's social media team tweeted animal evacuation tips and pet-friendly shelter sites. To ensure shelter space for more rescued pets, the HSUS Animal Rescue Team transported nearly 200 cats and dogs from inundated shelters in Louisiana and Mississippi to emergency placement partners outside affected areas. In Mississippi, state director Lydia Sattler helped local authorities rescue 23 horses from floodwaters up to their chests, and the team also aided PetSmart Charities in delivering pet food and supplies to hurricane-devastated locations.

The HSUS helped more than 500 dogs find fresh starts this summer as the rescue team assisted with the raids of five puppy mills during July and August. Nearly 200 of those dogs came from three operations in North Carolina, highlighting the state's dire need for stronger animal protection laws.

Luminescent blue spray revealed blood-smeared floors and walls in Kalamazoo, Mich., where The HSUS helped authorities raid two suspected dogfighting operations. Two men were arrested and 46 dogs seized. Evidence collected in The HSUS's mobile crime lab—like “teasers” with chewed animal hide dangling from the end of a stick—will help authorities build their case.

SEE THE LATEST animal rescue videos at humanesociety.org/videos.



A kitten is prepared for transport in Jefferson Parish, La.

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“She was a sweetheart and just begging for attention,” says The HSUS’s Rowdy Shaw of a dog rescued in Michigan. “She jumped on my lap like she had the feeling she was about to be helped.”

