



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Those Mighty Birdbrains

Thank you for the great coverage on farm animal protection in the May/June issue. I particularly loved reading about chicken intelligence (“Who You Calling a Birdbrain?”). The more I learn about these smart, sensitive animals, the happier I am that I leave them off my plate. I hope more people wanting to prevent cruelty to animals will also opt for vegetarian fare and give these avian Einsteins the compassion they deserve.

—MILENA ESHERICK, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

I enjoyed Ruthanne Johnson’s recent article, “Who You Calling a Birdbrain?” For over 50 years I have raised small chicken flocks in my yard. I appreciate them as providers of food, garden helpers and constant sources of interest. As Ms. Johnson states, they are intelligent animals and excellent communicators. Interest in keeping small flocks of backyard hens is exploding in the United States. For the past five years I have taught basic backyard chicken care at the Indian Creek Nature Center and have had over 300 people take the class. When I ask why they are interested in keeping chickens their responses are consistent and include: I want to produce healthy, high-quality food in my yard; I am concerned about the way chickens are kept in massive commercial farms; I want my children to learn where food really comes from and learn responsibility by caring for chickens.

—RICH PATTERSON, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

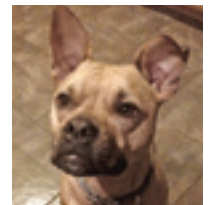
For the Bees, Please

I was thrilled to read Nancy Lawson’s article, “Planting the Seeds,” in the January/February issue of All Animals. As an avid gardener myself, I am so grateful that this very important issue of neonicotinoid pesticide use is exposed to The HSUS’s large audience. I’m also hoping that you can bring your political clout to getting the EPA to fast-track a ban on neonics before it is too late and we lose all of our bees and other precious pollinators. It is tragic yet vitally important for all gardeners to realize that the fate of many species may hinge on the protection of the environment in our own backyards!

—ROSE OBETZ, CAMARILLO, CALIFORNIA

SUNNY DAYS AHEAD

Happily, Jonathan Mazzetta won’t have to choose between keeping his beloved pit bull mix Sunny and continuing to rent a home in Maryland. Two years ago, the state’s highest court declared pit bulls “inherently dangerous” and ruled that landlords could be held automatically liable for the dogs’ behavior. As detailed in our March/April 2013 story “Can’t Judge a Bull by the Cover,” Mazzetta’s landlord gave him a week to get rid of Sunny—an edict that had him mulling a move to Pennsylvania. The HSUS and other animal advocates called the breed-specific ruling misguided, asserting it wouldn’t prevent dog bites and could prompt unnecessary surrenders to shelters. In April, the state legislature passed a compromise bill that holds all owners equally liable for their dogs’ actions, regardless of breed—and, critically, removes the strict liability the court had imposed on landlords. Mazzetta, who owns a small technology firm, is grateful that Sunny will continue to accompany him as he works from home at his computer. “She’s there with me all the time, and I’d lose my mind if I lost her.”



THIS ISSUE’S MUSE

Little Nika climbed into Heather Sullivan’s lap and promptly fell asleep there on the floor of a veterinarian’s waiting room. The HSUS director of media relations was in New York City that day as the skinny girl and four other street dogs arrived from Sochi (see p. 8). Sullivan hadn’t planned on coming home with a new addition, but—“she realized I was a sucker.” Once home, she and her husband, Brad, spoiled Nika, bringing her to work, relaxing their rules about sleeping on couches, feeding her four to five times a day to help her put on weight. Nika loved her new big sister, Kit—and chasing leaves on their walks. But it was tough to fully outrun her past. She had been hit by a car in Russia, and a broken back leg had never really healed. Neurological issues then began causing

seizures and the onset of paralysis. Thirty-two days after arriving in the U.S., Nika died. Since then, constantly, she remains on Sullivan’s mind: “You would think a dog would come from that kind of a background and be afraid or be nervous, but no, the only thing she wanted was love—to give love and to receive love.”



f WE ASKED, YOU ANSWERED

Mountain lions, macaques, manatees and more: Our Facebook fans told us about their most memorable encounters with wild animals.

KYLIE HURD When I was around 13 years old, I was riding bikes with my older brother in the middle of the woods when he flew past me yelling what I quickly came to realize was "mountain lion." As soon as I noticed the big cat, I slammed on my bike brakes. I have to say I was absolutely terrified and shaking mad at my brother for leaving me—until the mountain lion made eye contact with me. It wasn't a ferocious look but there was also no fear in its eyes. What I saw was a look of mutual understanding that said "You don't hurt me; I don't hurt you." After a few moments, we broke eye contact and he or she walked off the path and into the meadow. Most amazing moment of my life right there.



LESLIE WEST My daughter and I with my two grandchildren were walking through a nature park when this beautiful owl swooped in right over our heads and perched in the tree. We stayed there for quite a while just watching it; it was the first time I had seen one this close up and for this long. It was a beautiful experience that I hope my grandchildren will remember.

BONNIE MCCALL Driving down a street, I saw a little lump of what seemed like fur in the middle of the road. I slowed down the car and realized the little bunch of fur was a prairie dog. I didn't know if he had been hit by a car, but I thought he might be hurt. As I stopped the car, another little prairie dog ran into the street, saw my car and ran to the little one. He grabbed the one lying in the street from under his little arms and pulled him off the street and took him away. I was so touched by his willingness to put himself into potential danger to save his friend.

COREY WHITE I was swimming in the Gulf when everybody started running out of the water and yelling "Shark!" I looked out and saw the shadow. But it wasn't a shark; it was a manatee. The gentle giant came straight to me and rubbed against me and nibbled my hand. I was not aware of them at that time—how endangered they were and how beautiful. I'd never seen one. And to see my first one the way nature intended was amazing. It swam away shortly after, and I've loved the creatures ever since.



JEN KOCA Since I lived in Japan for a few years, many of my recent wild animal stories involve the macaques that live all over the countryside. Last winter I went to a park that's famous for a large tribe living there, and when I sat down to relax, my boyfriend noticed that a monkey beside me was mimicking my movements. We spent the next few moments exchanging looks.

TAMMY BARNES My parents had a bed in their garage for their dog. One very rainy day, I went to visit my parents. I peeked first in the open door to the garage to see if my dad was there. He wasn't. There was, however, a very dry and comfy red fox, curled up and snoozing in the dog's bed. I looked at him. He looked at me, then the door, then me again. With a shot, he ran past me, out the door, through the rain and into the woods.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK: Gardeners can use pie plates and tennis ball containers to make budget-conscious DIY items such as butterfly pools and bird feeders (see p. 36). What's one fun item you've made for your backyard wildlife? Tell us at humansociety.org/aafacebook.

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