

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

When the results of Sue Pressman's random look at zoos were made public, the emphasis was upon those conditions most in need of reform. Although such an exposé-approach was offensive to a number of people in the zoo world--and not merely those whose zoos were sub-standard (Wagner, Personal Communication)--a less dramatic approach would probably not have gotten the attention necessary to make the needed changes.

From the time that Sue Pressman's findings about class 3 zoos were reported in Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-Go-Round column under the heading "Some Zoos Called Dens of Horror," the Zoo Program made "good copy." Anderson lent credence to Sue's findings when he declared that he and his associates had reached 15 of the 17 zoos that had been deemed "ghettoes for animals" and that only one of them denied all of the Humane Society's charges. Even the Manager of the Norristown, Pennsylvania Zoo who, according to Anderson, called the description of the zoo's inadequacies "an exaggeration," acknowledged that the "cages and buildings in the zoo [were] in poor repair and . . . animals [had] almost no exercise." From her observations, Anderson reported, Sue was able to estimate that "25 percent of U.S. zoos [needed] immediate reform."

Over the years Sue has been quoted in such publications as The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, as well as countless other papers from the Detroit Free Press to small town weeklies and college campus newsheets. The Zoo Reform Program has also been covered in Town and Country and New York magazines; the Christian Science Monitor; Ranger Rick, the children's publication of the National Wildlife Federation; and in the Defenders of Wildlife Magazine. Sue's analyses of zoos have also appeared in Roger Caras's syndicated

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

column, "Pets and Wildlife," and were mentioned on his radio program.

Television and radio stations have proved to be as interested in the Zoo Program as newspapers and magazines. In addition to the dozens of local radio and television news programs which have covered the criticisms made of their local zoos, Sue has appeared to discuss zoo problems on the "Dick Cavett Show" and on "Bill Burrud's Animal World."

The rating system is discussed in some detail in a book entitled, Zoo: Animals, People, Places (Livingston, 1974). The Zoo Program is also referred to in Living Trophies: A Shocking Look at Conditions in America's Zoos (Batten, 1976), though no mention of the rating system is made (See: Criticisms and Praise of The HSUS Zoo Program).

The HSUS constituency welcomed with enthusiasm the Society's foray into the zoo world. At the Annual Conference in 1971 a resolution was passed by the membership directing the Society to continue the program and "encourage other humane organizations on a local level to involve themselves with zoo institutions and their programs, societies and management policies. . . ."

At the Annual Conference the following year, according to John Hoyt, a proposed resolution calling for the abolition of zoos was defeated. Instead, a resolution was passed calling for continued reform:

Whereas The Humane Society of the United States is the first major national humane society to show a real concern about the current condition, the future and the entire philosophy of zoos; and
Whereas, investigations have disclosed gross inadequacies and a need for correction; and
Whereas, the rationale for the continued existence of zoos requires that all zoo animals be provided with

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

habitat appropriate to that species and that each exhibit have significant educational value, be it Resolved, that The Humane Society of the United States continue to maintain and expand a working relationship with the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, with particular emphasis on development and implementation of their accreditation program. . . . and be it further resolved, that [The HSUS] encourage broad public participation in zoo reform through establishment and support of local zoological societies. . . .

Both years the resolutions concluded with particular emphasis on the need for adequate enforcement of federal legislation governing the welfare of captive animals.

More than 150 respondents to a questionnaire on the back of the July 1971 HSUS News expressed their observations about zoos all over the country. A minority indicated disapproval of zoos in general, while others compared the "bad" zoos with "good" zoos they had visited on other occasions. Still others expressed approval for a particular zoo, but their revelations indicating an absence of educational programs were construed by The HSUS as indicative of a zoo not living up to its responsibilities to the community. Most people complained of unclean conditions, sterile cages, lethargic animals, and overcrowding. A recurring complaint was the absence of keepers or other zoo staff members to whom questions and criticisms could be directed.

Initially, the official response of the AAZPA to The HSUS's criticisms of zoos was positive. At the Association's Annual Meeting in 1971, outgoing AAZPA President Gunther Voss "cited The HSUS for bringing zoo problems to public attention and urged zoo directors to cooperate with the Humane Society to improve their circumstances."

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

In the same issue of The HSUS News (November 1971) which carried Voss's comments, there appeared a letter from Peter Crowcroft, Director of Chicago's Brookfield Zoo. He said:

I want to congratulate you on your publication of Mrs. Pressman's article on zoos in your July issue. We are trying to change people's attitudes to animals and to zoos, but it is a long haul, usually hampered by the completely emotional attitudes of animal lovers. Mrs. Pressman's objective and sensible approach to our problems is a refreshing improvement. I hope that you will continue to publish such material about our problems.

The HSUS did continue to publish the results of its investigations of zoos and in July 1972 published its first "Special Report on Zoos" which compared the HSUS's efforts to those of Ralph Nader. The report emphasized the need for zoos to have an educational purpose and criticized the drive-through parks for not being sufficiently educational in spite of the additional space they provided for animals in more naturalistic settings than those provided by old-fashioned cages. The report had one shortcoming: It made no mention that the call for reform had been sounded long ago by members of the zoo profession, however few in number they might have been. This would not really prove to be a problem, however, until the next special report was published in 1975 and zoo people would take umbrage at The HSUS's "arrogance."

It is not surprising that the report made no mention of the positive work of the few progressive zoos in the country, since The HSUS believed it was necessary to draw attention to the worst conditions in zoos in order to inspire a meaningful movement for reforms. The AAZPA was obviously not getting the message across to a large enough audience--including many of its own members. As Sue responded to

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

the Supervisor of the Children's Zoo in Houston, Texas, who had criticized the report of The HSUS's investigation as it had appeared in Jack Anderson's column (HSUS Houston Zoo File);

What the investigation is meant to do is to make it impossible for an employee to ever say again what you said in the middle of your third paragraph, 'almost every zoo has areas which should change but cannot. . . .'

Sue continued to urge the members of the AAZPA to make use of The HSUS's attention-getting abilities to achieve the mutual goal of the Humane Society and the modern zoo to inspire in the zoo-going public a respect for animal life and desire for its preservation. She stated to the audience at the AAZPA's Western Regional Conference in 1972 (HSUS files):

You can look at The HSUS as a service. We are in a position to help your zoo, to communicate with people outside your circle who often are unreachable through other means, and to emphasize the reasons for zoos. . . . Use us, use the concerned public, the news media, and other groups organized to lobby for just such causes as yours.

The Assistant Director of the Oklahoma City Zoo was so favorably impressed with Sue's remarks that he asked for a copy of the speech to share with his staff members.

But not all members of the zoo world welcomed The HSUS's involvement or agreed with its philosophy concerning zoos. Zoos were different as the rating system indicated, and The HSUS was striving to make them more alike. The substandard zoos were generally resistive to change.

By 1975, The HSUS had developed a written statement of policy concerning zoos.

The HSUS Makes Its Findings Public

It states:

The Humane Society of the United States acknowledges two broad categories of institutions that are identified as zoos. The first is the true zoological garden, often municipally owned and operated, though sometimes administered by a zoological society composed of citizens of the community in which it is located. Some within this category are run by a commercial enterprise. Both have the potential to provide a unique opportunity for conservation and wild-life education. Additionally, some such zoos may serve as survival centers for endangered species that would otherwise be extinct.

For the potential good that The HSUS sees in such zoos, it is forced to state that too few institutions have come close to realizing that potential. The fault often lies in the concepts and purposes for creating such zoos, in antiquated caging and housing, in the lack of sufficient and often inadequately trained personnel, and especially with the community or commercial enterprise that fails to support and finance such institutions in order that they may be maintained with the highest degree of humaneness and care toward the animals and function educationally for the benefit of visitors who attend in extremely large numbers.

The HSUS feels that any community or commercial enterprise that fails to provide adequate financial support to insure these objectives does not deserve to have a zoo and should be denied the opportunity. No presumed educational potential can justify an institution in which animals are maintained under inhumane conditions. Indeed, it is the position of The HSUS that inhumane conditions in the zoo when seen by an impressionable public provide a negative educational experience by seeming to condone cruelty and indifference. The HSUS does not find these qualities of any merit and certainly does not see them as justification for maintaining a zoo at all.

The second category of zoos is the so-called "roadside zoo," seldom more than permanently substandard menageries whose sole purpose is to attract people to other facilities such as diners, gift shops and motels. The HSUS finds no justification or merit in these latter institutions and calls for their immediate and permanent closing.

In summary, The HSUS acknowledges the value of some zoos in this country by reason of their achieved excellence; it recognizes the potential of others now believed to be making strides in the areas of our concern; and at the same time recognizes that there are zoos for which little hope can be expressed. With this in mind, The HSUS pledges itself to constant efforts toward improvement of conditions of all zoos and the eradication of those that will not or cannot improve.