

CRUELTY

GENERAL

Cruelty to animals can take many forms and be either intentional or unintentional. Animals may suffer many forms of abuse during the time they are in the keeping or control of man, irrespective of whether they are companion, livestock, research or wild animals.

Companion animals generally suffer from the unintentionally cruel practices of their owners who due to ignorance or a lack of understanding of their pet's needs, bring about the types of situations which result in stress and suffering. This lack of knowledge or a caring attitude results in a mentally unhappy and often physically neglected pet. Such things as a lack of exercise, continual chaining, improper diet, lack of water, constant pregnancy, lack of veterinary treatment and overcrowding can, individually or collectively, lead to suffering and misery. It is a sad fact that many people choose a pet without giving any thought to or having any knowledge of its needs.

The RSPCA investigates many cases of cruelty each year and the following is a brief outline of the types of cases most frequently dealt with.

DOGS

Habitual chaining or confinement.

Chaining without access to shelter from the rain and cold in winter, the sun in summer.

Chaining without access to water.

Incorrect chaining methods resulting in restricted movement, tangling and discomfort, and occasionally death by strangulation, hanging or heatstroke.

Heat stress and death due to confinement in cars during hot weather.

Incorrect diet, particularly for puppies, resulting in loss of condition, digestive problems, diarrhoea, rickets and sometimes death.

Heavy parasite burdens - fleas, worms, mites. These are irritating and can be painful (particularly ear mites) and debilitating. Severe worm infestations can result in death.

Lack of care with pesticides, resulting in fatal poisoning, generally from snail baits.

Collars allowed to remain on when too tight, eventually becoming embedded into flesh.

Lack of preventative veterinary attention e.g. vaccinations. Vaccinations prevent pain, disability and death from diseases such as distemper, tetanus and parvo, etc.

No control or training. This causes confusion, fighting, motor vehicle injuries and the trauma of being lost.

Neglected grooming.

Surgical mutilation - debarking, ear cropping, tail docking, declawing.

In addition to the above, dogs can be subjected to deliberate acts of cruelty and violence from their owners and other persons. Such cruelty often takes the form of kicking, beating, poisoning, starvation, abandonment.

CATS

Lack of food and/or water.

Lack of preventative veterinary care and of treatment for injuries or bite abscesses.

Inhumane methods of newborn kitten disposal (drowning, suffocating, abandonment), all of which could be avoided if pets were desexed.

Neglected grooming resulting in external fur balls (which in severe cases can restrict movement) and can cause internal fur balls and vomiting.

Like dogs, cats are also subjected to deliberate acts of cruelty. Such acts are often committed by individuals with a grievance against the animal which may have created a nuisance, as is frequently the case with un-desexed tomcats. Whilst such acts of cruelty cannot be condoned, the situations leading to them could be avoided by responsible pet ownership and desexing.

The Inspectors attend a number of cases where cats have been shot at with guns and air rifles, deliberately poisoned, caught in illegal (in municipal areas) steel jawed traps, strangled or beaten.

HORSES

Horses are often left unattended by uncaring owners for long periods of time and such treatment along with general neglect in other ways leads to some of the following:

Suffering or death due to starvation, unattended wounds or illness.

Neglected feet e.g. incorrect trimming, shoeing or being left standing in waterlogged paddocks for long periods. Serious cases result in deformities, inability to walk and may reach the point where the animal can not be treated and has to be destroyed.

Lack of water or shelter.

Underfeeding or incorrect diet, especially in younger animals, leading to metabolic disorders such as rickets.

Overfeeding of grain, amongst other causes, leading to a condition known as Founder, which can be fatal or lead to chronic foot problems.

Other problems investigated include:

Continual confinement in a small stall, resulting in circulatory and foot problems, loss of condition, behavioural problems and mental suffering.

Abandonment.

Beatings.

Cruel training techniques or excessive use of whips or spurs. The use of worn, severe or incorrectly fitting bits.

Incorrectly fitted harness equipment and/or bridles being left on and becoming embedded into flesh.

Overworking. This is a particular problem at some riding schools.

Working a sick or injured animal.

Lack of regular preventative veterinary treatment and/or parasite control.

There was a time in the past when horses, which were the main means of transportation, were treated abominably and one of the prime reasons that societies such as the RSPCA were formed was to help the plight of those poor horses, mules, donkeys (and bullocks) whose day to day lives were a constant misery of neglect and overwork. Happily, the situation has changed, although there are still far too many people who buy a horse without having any idea of correct horse care. It takes a considerable amount of time and money to adequately care for a horse and much of the cruelty to which they are subject results from owners who are either not prepared or able to devote that necessary amount of time to look after them.

BIRDS

Birds too can be the victims of accidental or deliberate cruelty:

Lack of correct and sufficient food for the particular species or for juvenile birds.

Lack of water, particularly in hot weather.

No shelter from rain, wind or sun. Many people hang a birdcage in a shady spot on a wall and leave it there all day and, as the sun moves the bird can be subjected to full sun later in the day. Many are unable to withstand this and die from heat stroke.

Overcrowding. This results in stress on the birds which in turn leads to an increase in the incidence of latent diseases.

Cages which are too small in size for either the types of bird or number of birds they contain.

Filthy cages, water and food dishes all of which lead to ready transmission of diseases and parasites, thereby causing unnecessary pain, suffering and death.

Inadequate perching and nesting facilities.

Pinioning of wings. Birds with pinioned wings which are allowed to roam free have no way to escape predators.

LIVESTOCK

Livestock can be subjected to a variety of inhumane practices whilst at pasture, in transit or during loading and offloading. Things NOT to be condoned include:

Deprivation of food and water for long periods. There are Codes of Practice and Regulations which must be adhered to.

Inhumane slaughtering techniques.

Not attending to sick or injured animals which should be either treated or destroyed.

Performing certain surgical procedures without veterinary supervision e.g. castration, de-antlering deer, etc.

Excessive use of electric cattle prodders or other instruments which may inflict pain.

Leaving stock in pastures which are barren or failing to provide food for stock in pastures which are barren, burnt out, flooded or contain a noxious weed.

Abandonment.

Tethering without shelter and/or water. This is frequently done with goats.

Improper loading and transportation of livestock.

Failure to make regular checks of stock in transit and to take action to relieve suffering.

Improper offloading techniques e.g. throwing from truck.

Calf roping and bulldogging at rodeos.

Generally, it is in the interests of the farmer to care for his animals in a responsible manner as they are his livelihood. Responsible farmers who make a full time living from animal husbandry usually do all that is necessary to keep them healthy. However, there are always the irresponsible few that neglect or abuse the animals in their charge and it often happens that neglected livestock are kept on properties other than those where their owners live, the owners only coming at irregular intervals to check them.

One way in which many animals suffer is during drought periods - at such times many die, but this is an occurrence which cannot be predicted and most farmers try to prevent their animals suffering, even if it means humanely destroying them if no solution can be found. Where possible, drought animals are hand fed or shipped to other areas which are not drought affected. The same situation can occur in floods. Unfortunately, in some particularly remote areas removal, hand feeding or destruction cannot effectively be done and many animals do die.

In Australia, there are a number of Codes of Practice which govern the way in which livestock must be treated and these, along with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Acts in each State, have done much to lessen the suffering and stress to which livestock were once subjected.

In South Australia, the Inspectors are empowered to take action under the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985.

OTHER ANIMALS

Problems with native animals, snakes, lizards, frogs, tortoises, rodents and the like do occur, and are usually the result of a lack of knowledge as to each particular animal's feeding and housing requirements. With many of the native and exotic animals being so difficult or expensive to obtain, they are not usually subject to deliberate acts of cruelty by their owners.

SPORTING

In various countries throughout the world, including Australia, animals are used in certain sporting practices. In many, fighting (where animals are teased, trained and goaded to fight one another) and coursing (where one animal is used to chase another) are the norm and not considered to be cruel. In South Australia, releasing an animal to chase another animal or allowing animals to fight are both now illegal under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985.

In a number of European and South American countries, bullfighting is still practised in spite of growing opposition and in other areas of the world, dogs and roosters continue to be forced to fight; hares, rabbits and foxes are still chased by dogs and animals of all types are subjected to deliberate

acts of cruelty for public entertainment, gambling, sport and religious reasons and no legislation exists to prevent it.

Racing of animals is worldwide and in general the RSPCA in South Australia does not oppose racing, provided there is no abuse during the training or the course of the event. Veterinary surgeons are in attendance at horse races and any horse considered unfit will be removed from the race.

Shooting of animals and birds for pleasure, culling and feral animal control is carried out in South Australia and whilst many hunters do kill animals outright with the first shot, there are many more that do not and much unnecessary pain and fear are inflicted on animals and birds each year as a result of hunting. Generally, the hunter killing for sport is more likely to cause suffering than the professional shooter. Where it is necessary, the RSPCA does not oppose culling of wild animals, however killing other than by authorized humane procedures is opposed.

ENTERTAINMENT

The training of animals to perform acts in circuses, etc. can lead to unnecessary stresses and possible injury and there is the close confinement under which such animals are kept. The Society does sometimes receive calls when a circus is in town and has to make checks on circus animals. Similarly, some zoos can be a place of cruelty, but the role of zoos has changed for the better and in most places they are now areas for education where many endangered species are housed and bred. The type of zoo which existed in the Victorian era where animals were housed in unnatural, small, crowded conditions has, in most places, disappeared. Modern zoos endeavour to provide spacious, climatically controlled environments for their charges and few cases of neglect or cruelty at zoos are reported to us.

RSPCA POLICY

Copies of RSPCA Policy Statements are readily available upon request. The RSPCA is empowered under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985 to prosecute offenders who cause unnecessary pain or suffering to any animal.

It is the Society's policy where possible, to educate and instruct rather than to prosecute in those cases where the cruelty has been caused through ignorance. RSPCA Inspectors advise and inform owners about correct care of their animals and of their legal obligations to them under South Australian law. Depending upon the seriousness of the offence Inspectors will caution offenders and make follow up inspections to ensure that all is well and their instructions have been heeded. Where an offender fails to take heed and correct the situation the Society takes further action. The RSPCA endeavours to prosecute those cases where deliberate and malicious acts of cruelty or neglect are perpetrated upon an animal or animals.

There are other more indirect ways in which man is cruel to animals e.g. intrusion and loss of native habitats causing interruption of breeding, starvation and so on. Industrial pollution also has a marked effect, but the amount of stress and suffering caused by these is difficult to gauge.

HELP US HELP ANIMALS AND STOP CRUELTY NOW!