

Animal Welfare Groups Launch “Cruelty Isn’t OK” Campaign

Campaign calls for enforcement of laws against cockfighting and live-lure training, urges new state policy

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, USA, September 30, 2020 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Cruelty Isn't OK, a statewide campaign to end the abuse of captive big cats, illegal cockfighting, and live-lure greyhound training, was launched today by a coalition of key animal protection groups and advocates, including former Attorney General Drew Edmondson.



Cockfighting Match

In recent months, these problems have come to light following detailed investigations by Animal Wellness Action (AWA), the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) and GREY2K USA Worldwide.

“

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Christine Dorchak, president of GREY2K USA

“Oklahoma is a family-friendly state with a growing economy,” said Edmondson, co-chair of the National Law Enforcement Council of AWA and AWF. “We don’t want this good reputation tarred by the presence of persistent animal cruelty in our state.”

The organizations are calling for the creation of a statewide task force to examine improved enforcement of state and federal laws in Oklahoma and policies to fill gaps in the law, particularly when it comes to private ownership of big cats and other potentially dangerous exotic wild animals.

As part of its public awareness efforts, Cruelty Isn’t OK today launched an advertising campaign featuring full-page advertisements in Oklahoma newspapers. A copy of the first advertisement is available [here](#).

Additionally today, supplementing its original investigation into illegal cockfighting, AWA and AWF released letters, signed by Edmondson, to the U.S. Attorneys for the Western and Northern Districts of Oklahoma, detailing yet more illegal animal trafficking for cockfighting based in the Sooner State. In May, the groups wrote to U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Oklahoma to investigate allegations of ongoing trafficking of birds to Guam for cockfighting and for illegal animal fighting activities.

Edmondson, on behalf of AWA and AWF, alleges that “Oklahoma is indisputably the cockfighting capital of the United States.” Edmondson previously wrote to the District Attorneys for Cherokee, Haskell and LeFlore counties to investigate the allegations as well and to bring charges as appropriate. Since the investigative results were handed over to law enforcement in May, there’s been no apparent action taken.

The anti-greyhound racing group GREY2K USA this summer released a multi-state investigation, centered in Oklahoma, into live-lure training in greyhound racing. In live-lure training, dog trainers teach greyhounds to kill rabbits and other small animals to instill a bloodlust in the animals. Oklahoma bans live-lure training, and the greyhound racing industry has long denied that anyone in the industry uses live lures to prepare greyhounds for racing.

“Our investigation discovered a deputy sheriff involved in illegal animal cruelty,” noted Christine Dorchak, president of GREY2K USA. “The rule of law matters, and it’s important that all law enforcement agencies treat animal cruelty crimes with the seriousness they warrant.”

More than a month ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture suspended the exhibitor’s license of Jeff Lowe, who operates the Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park in Garvin County. Lowe took over for Joe “Joe Exotic” Maldonado, after he began serving a prison sentence for activities that included illegal killing of tigers. Big Cat Rescue, a Florida-based animal welfare group, takes

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Animal Wellness Brands Logo



GREY2K USA



Greyhound Protection Act | Photo: Craig Swanson

control of the park later this week.

“Oklahoma is one of a handful of states without restrictions on private ownership of tigers, lions and other big cats, and that’s precisely why Joe Maldonado and others have treated Oklahoma as a commercial playground and a stage for their menageries,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “Oklahoma was one of the last hold-outs on illegal cockfighting, and it’s one of the last hold-outs on exotic animal ownership. Keeping 350-pound wild carnivores in backyards or basements is a prescription for mayhem.”

While cockfighting is illegal, it’s clear that state and federal laws are not being enforced. Through public records requests to the Guam Department of Agriculture, AWF and AWA obtained nearly 2,500 pages of avian shipping records dated November 2016 to September 2019. These records detail approximately 750 shipments of birds from more than a dozen states to Guam.

Oklahoma cockfighters were the top shippers to Guam in the nation. Since then, AWA and AWF have reviewed 13 on-line videos, released by a Philippines-based broadcaster called BNTV, featuring Oklahoma cockfighters. BNTV broadcasters visited the gamecock farms throughout the United States, on its “U.S. Gamefowl Breeder Tour,” with the cockfighters essentially marketing their fighting birds to the Philippines, which is the site of the World Slasher Derby and other cockfighting events that attract participants from across the globe.

During his time as Oklahoma Attorney General, Edmondson defended the state’s anti-cockfighting law from constitutional challenges brought by cockfighters. In *Edmondson v. Pearce*, the Oklahoma Supreme Court determined in a unanimous ruling that the anti-cockfighting law represents a proper exercise of authority and that cockfighting and related activities are forbidden in the state. Numerous federal courts have upheld the federal anti-animal fighting law as constitutional.

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that’s why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don’t. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Animal Wellness Foundation is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that

prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

GREY2K USA Worldwide is the largest greyhound protection organization in the United States with more than 250,000 supporters. As a non-profit organization, the group promotes the adoption of ex-racers and works to pass laws to end the cruelty of dog racing around the world. For more information, visit GREY2KUSA.org.

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