

California called “cockfighting mecca” in U.S., with organizers raising tens of thousands of gamecocks for fights

Cockfighters illegally shipped 1781 fighting birds to the small U.S. territory of Guam, with two Bay Area cockfighters accounting for the bulk of the shipments

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Despite state and federal laws forbidding the practice, California is one of the nation’s top cockfighting states, according to a new report from Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and the Los Angeles-based Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) released today.



Cockfighting Match

[The report](#) documents that California has a robust cockfighting trade, with fights throughout the state and live-animal shipments originating in California and destined for Mexico and multiple Pacific Rim destinations. There are no national laws against cockfighting in Mexico or the

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*Dr. Annie Harvilicz, DVM,
president of the Animal
Wellness Foundation*

Philippines, but in the United States, it has been illegal to transport birds in interstate or foreign commerce since 2002. These activities have been subject to felony penalties since 2007, thanks to a successful legislative effort led by former Congressman Elton Gallegly, R-Simi Valley. It has been illegal to stage or participate in cockfighting in any part of the U.S., including the U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Marianas Islands, since an amendment to the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 took effect in December 2019.

“Cockfighting and breeding birds for export for that same purpose is rampant in California, with fights occurring from

San Diego to Monterey to Del Norte counties and with the sale of fighting animals to Mexico, Guam, the Northern Marianas Islands, and other destinations throughout the world,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “Our investigation has uncovered cockfighters touting their fighting birds in produced videos, shipping live animals to U.S. destinations, driving birds to Mexico, and flying birds on commercial aircraft to the more distant foreign venues. Cockfighters are raising tens of thousands of birds in cockfighting yards and complexes all over the state.”

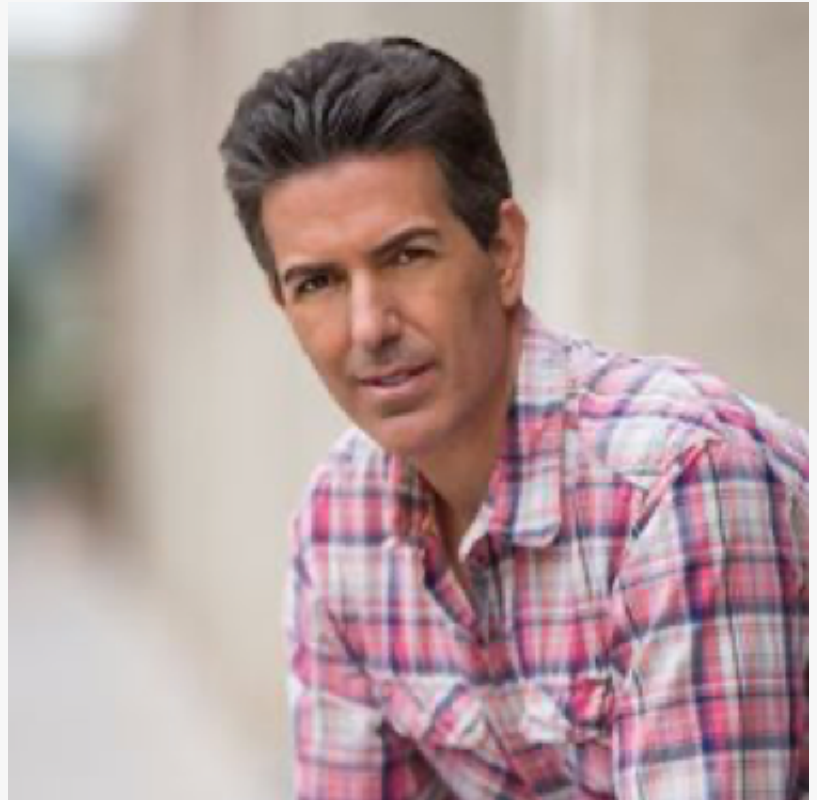
AWA and AWF applaud federal and local authorities for shutting down some major complexes in recent years. In 2019, federal authorities brought charges against Joe Sanford from Ceres, Calif., for operating a [massive 10-acre complex](#) with approximately 3,000 gamefowl. In 2017, law enforcement came upon a “cockfighting stable” in Val Verde, in northern Los Angeles County, discovering nearly 8,000 birds. A Monterey County Civil Grand Jury’s 2019 report concluded there were up to 1,000 cockfighting operations in that county alone.

Californians appear prominently in a preceding examination of live-animal shipping records catalogued by the Guam Department of Agriculture (GDOA), which has long been a hotspot for cockfighting in the Pacific Rim. According to records AWA and AWF examined from the GDOA, California-based cockfighting operators shipped 1,781 fighting birds to Guam over the last four years, making California the number two state by volume, after Oklahoma. There were eight Californians who appeared on the shipping records, with Vito Paredo and Domi Corpus, both referencing the same Livermore, Calif. address accounting for about 85 percent of the total. According to sources on Guam – whose major fighting arena is called “The Dome” – these shipments came exclusively through the U.S. Postal Service, with the birds placed in cardboard boxes and sent on a journey to the opposite side of the Pacific Ocean. Our report includes

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Wayne Pacelle

pictures and video of the live-shipment of roosters to Guam and to other destinations in the Pacific Rim.

To corroborate that the birds came from shippers involved in cockfighting, we examined satellite images of California-based gamecock farms, captured social media posts and images explicitly demonstrating involvement in illegal animal fighting ventures, mined cockfighting magazines and other primary industry sources for profiles and evidence of their participation in fights, and even obtained videos where the cockfighters touted their breeding operations and discussed the performance of the birds in major derbies around the world. AWA also obtained drone footage of the cockfighting complex, apparently operated by Domi Corpus in Livermore, in eastern Alameda County. That drone footage shows a massive complex with perhaps as many as 2,500 birds in cages or on tethers. Cockfighters separate birds by caging or tethers to prevent birds bred for fighting from attacking others of their kind.

Last Friday, 36 Members of Congress pressed the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), the law enforcement arm of the service, to crack down against illegal animal fighting shipments that continue to be uncovered by AWA in their ongoing investigations. The lawmakers specifically call out the shipment of thousands of fighting birds shipped through the U.S. mail from cockfighters in the states to the U.S. territory of Guam.

[The letter](#), led by Reps. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services & General Government, and Nancy Mace, R-S.C., the Ranking Member of the relevant House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee, was signed by 36 Members of the House including 24 Democrats and 12 Republicans, including Reps. Julia Brownley, D-26. Reps. Mike Garcia, R-25, Sara Jacobs, D-53, Ted Lieu, D-33, Zoe Lofgren, D-19, Scott Peters, D-52, Norma Torres, D-35 from California,

"It is appalling that birds are packed in boxes with no food or water and sent on a multi-day journey to Guam, only then to be hacked to death in an illegal fighting pit," said Annie Harvilicz, DVM, and president of the Animal Wellness Foundation in Los Angeles. "There's nothing about any of this that is proper or legal."

Cockfighting has been banned everywhere in the United States since December 2019 yet shipping fighting animals to Guam and to all other parts of the United States has been outlawed since 2002.

"I am proud that we made dogfighting and cockfighting and associated activities felony offenses throughout the United States," noted former U.S. Rep. Elton Gallegly, R-Simi Valley, who represented Ventura County for 24 years in Congress. "Time and again, we saw animal fighters involved in other criminal activities, from narcotics trafficking to illegal weapons possession to human-on-human violence." Gallegly was the lead author of the Animal Fighting Prohibition Act, enacted in 2007 making animal fighting a felony and banning the shipment of the fighting implements that attach to the birds' legs.

The release of the California cockfighting investigation from Animal Wellness Action comes on the heels of the U.S. Supreme Court's denial of a writ of certiorari from political leaders in Puerto Rico seeking exemptions from a federal law that bans cockfighting there and in every other part of the United States. The federal law against animal fighting has been consistently upheld by the U.S. courts., including by a U.S. District Court on Guam.

Animal Wellness Action has also conducted detailed investigations on cockfighting in Alabama, Guam, Hawaii, Kentucky, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

WAYNE PACHELLE

ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION

+1 202-420-0446

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