

Long-Serving Territorial Veterinarian Says He Refused to Sign Import Permits for Cockfighting Birds Destined for Guam

Just-Retired Official Says No Other Agriculture Department Official Should Authorize These Illegal Shipments Either

HAGÅTÑA, GUAM, September 26, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The long-time Guam Territorial Veterinarian [publicly announced](#) on Sunday announced that shipment of more than 11,000 adult birds to the island from the states has been conducted only for cockfighting purposes and that he refused to sign the import permits for these birds because the trade has long been illegal under federal law.

Thomas Pool, D.V.M., M.P.H., a retired full Colonel who led the U.S. Veterinary Command prior to serving from 2005 to 2022 as the Territorial Veterinarian for the Guam Department of Agriculture, denounced cockfighting and called the trade in fighting animals a crime. There “is simply no other rationale for the shipment of very expensive adult roosters to our island but for cockfighting,” wrote Dr. Pool [in a column](#) published over the weekend. “We know that the people on both ends of these transactions have been involved in the criminal practice of cockfighting.”

Guam has no commercial poultry industry, and no show-bird industry, so the movement of thousands of birds from breed types used for cockfighting effectively amounts to illegal contraband under federal law.

Congress banned any interstate or any inter-territorial transport of animals for fighting in 2002. Interstate or inter-territorial shipments were made a felony offense in 2007.

[Animal Wellness Action](#) led the effort to fortify the federal animal fighting law in 2018 that banned cockfighting everywhere in the U.S., including on Guam. Congress delayed the implementation of that provision for a year, with the fighting-ban on the island taking effect in December 2019. After retiring from the Guam Department of Agriculture in in late May 2022, Dr.



Guam must stop the importation of birds for cockfighting, and states must stop making the shipments.



The shipment of fighting birds to Guam by global cockfighting traffickers must stop. No other Department of Agriculture employee should authorize this illegal trade either.”

Dr. Thomas Pool, senior veterinarian, Animal Wellness Action

Pool has been consulting with Animal Wellness Action (AWA) as Senior Veterinarian.

An ongoing review of live-animal shipping records by Animal Wellness Action revealed that cockfighters sent more than 11,500 fighting birds to Guam over the last five years, with more than 90 percent of those birds being adult males. The leading exporting states by volume are Oklahoma, California Hawaii, Alabama, and North Carolina.

The GDOA's new standards announced in April, presumably a reaction to Animal Wellness Action's call to

halt shipments of adult fighting birds to the island, will deliver no practical changes to live-animal imports.

“The shipment of fighting birds to Guam by global cockfighting traffickers must stop,” Dr. Pool wrote in a column published on Sunday. “No other Department of Agriculture employee should authorize this illegal trade either.”

“Officials from the Guam Department of Agriculture take an oath to uphold the laws of the United States, and that’s not happening when they allow cockfighting traffickers to ship birds by the hundreds or the thousands to feed illegal fighting pits on the island,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “The top veterinarian inside the Department has rightly called out these shipments as illegal and said that Department personnel need to act in accordance with the laws of the United States.”

Under Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act, 7 U.S.C. 2156, it is a crime to:

- * Knowingly sponsor or exhibit in an animal fighting venture;
- * Knowingly attend an animal fighting venture, or knowingly causing an individual who has not attained the age of 16 to attend an animal fighting venture;
- * Knowingly buy, sell, possess, train, transport, deliver, or receive any animal for purposes of having the animal participate in an animal fighting venture;
- * Knowingly use the mail service of the U.S. Postal Service, or any “written, wire, radio televisions or other form of communications in, or using a facility of, interstate commerce,” to advertise an animal for use in an animal fighting venture, or to advertise a knife, gaff, or other sharp instrument designed to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture, or to promote or in any other manner further an animal fighting venture except as performed outside the U.S.;
- * Knowingly sell, buy, transport, or deliver in interstate or foreign commerce “a knife, a gaff, or any other sharp instrument” designed or intended to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an

animal fighting venture.

Penalties for each violation of any one of these provisions allows for a maximum of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for perpetrators, except for an adult attending an animal fighting venture. Penalties for adult attendance are one year in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

In December 2021, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed a ruling of the U.S. District Court for the District of Guam that Congress has the authority to bar animal fighting throughout the United States, including in the territories. Two months earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal initiated by cockfighters in Puerto Rico to hear about a parallel challenge to the federal law that came before the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Animal Wellness Action has offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone involved in illegal animal fighting activities. Individuals with information can send tips to animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org.

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.

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