

# Cockfighting Raid on Saturday in Union County Tennessee Produces 98 Arrests

*Sheriff reports juveniles in attendance at major cockfighting derby in Maynardville*

NASHVILLE, TENN., UNITED STATES, January 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Acting on a tip from the animal welfare group Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), Union County Sheriff Billy Breeding and his deputies raided a cockfighting derby in progress Saturday afternoon, citing 98 individuals with crimes related to cockfighting and preventing more fights that had been planned throughout the day at the major clandestine derby.



Latest cockfighting bust shows endurance of the animal-cruelty crime in Tennessee.

While cockfighting and associated activities (including bringing a minor to an animal fighting) are federal felonies, Tennessee still treats cockfighting as a Class A misdemeanor – one of just eight states without felony-level penalties for this crime. [Animal Wellness Action](#) just last week called

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*Wayne Pacelle, president, Animal Wellness Action*

on Tennessee lawmakers to give favorable consideration to SB 194, by Senator Jon Lundberg, R-Bristol, and H.B. 285, by Rep. Sam Whitson, R-Franklin, to make core cockfighting activities a felony offense in the state.

“We applaud Sheriff Breeding for breaking up this cockfight and sending a signal that the county finds this conduct reprehensible,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the [Center for a Humane Economy](#). “It confirms what we've been saying all along: cockfighting is an epidemic in Tennessee, spreading cruelty, crime, and contagion throughout the Volunteer state.”

The Union County Humane Society expressed support for the sheriff for cracking down on

animal cruelty. “These malicious crimes against animal should not be tolerated in our county and we are immensely grateful to Sheriff Breeding for taking action against these staged fights,” said Tammy Rouse, executive director of the Union County Humane Society in Maynardville.

The tip to the sheriffs’ office came from Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), which is doing pioneering field work to sniff out fights and alert law enforcement to their presence. The group has received support from the Humane Farming Association.

“Every cockfighting operator or enthusiast should be looking over their shoulder at us,” said Steve Hindi, founder of SHARK. “We’ve got your number and we’ve got a steady stream of information to know exactly what your next moves are.”

In 2020, Animal Wellness Action announced that an [investigation uncovered](#) extensive involvement in cockfighting from a large number of individuals in Tennessee, including several who ship cockfighting birds to Mexico, the Philippines, Guam, and other distant locations. The groups allege that these individuals are also involved in fights at illegal pits in Tennessee, Kentucky, and other states.

“Cockfighting drives outbreaks of serious poultry and zoonotic diseases especially virulent Newcastle disease (vND) and highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses,” said Jim Keen, D.V.M, Ph.D., who is the director of veterinary sciences for the Center for a Humane Economy. He added that HPAI (“bird flu”) and vND are the two most high-impact diseases of poultry worldwide. This week, Animal Wellness Action and the Center for Humane Economy are releasing a comprehensive 63-page report on cockfighting links with avian influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease.

According to a new report from the Center for a Humane Economy, the 15 known introductions of vND into the United States since the first outbreak in 1950 have led to three devastating epidemics in 1971, 2002, and 2018. Disease introductions occurred from legally imported pet birds (often parrots), imported infected poultry, or game fowl smuggled for cockfighting. Ten of the 15 US vND outbreaks originated from illegally smuggled game fowl for cockfighting.

The current outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza has resulted in the mass killing of 60 million birds, mainly laying hens. That extraordinary loss of life has driven a surge in egg prices, with a dozen eggs priced between \$4 and \$7.50 in Tennessee and other parts of the United States. Cockfighting birds, according to Dr. Keen, can play a role in extending the range, duration, and virulence of the outbreak.

A hearing for the alleged perpetrators of illegal cockfighting nabbed on Saturday in Union County will be heard on March 2nd. Animal Wellness Action urges the District Attorney Gen. Jared Effler of Union County to prosecute the individuals involved to the fullest extent of the law. Animal Wellness Action has offered its assistance to the Union County Sheriff and the District Attorney.

## WHAT TO DO

Animal Wellness Action is conducting a press conference at 1 p.m. Central Time/2 p.m. Eastern Time to discuss new investigations and enforcement actions against cockfighters in Alabama and Tennessee. Please contact Marty Irby at [marty@animalwellnessaction.org](mailto:marty@animalwellnessaction.org) for details.

The groups also announced a \$5,000 reward for information resulting in successful prosecution of any individual for violating the federal law (7 U.S.C. § 2156) or the state law (TCA Title 39) against animal fighting.

Anyone with information about illegal cockfighting activities can send information to [animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org](mailto:animalcrueltytips@animalwellnessaction.org). Residents also can contact the appropriate U.S. attorneys, the state attorney general, or county sheriffs or district attorneys.

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels that forbid cruelty. The group champions causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife, and it advocates against dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty. It also confronts factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, Animal Wellness Action promotes enacting good public policies and monitors the enforcement of those in place. To enact good laws, the group believes citizens must elect good lawmakers, and it helps educate voters on which candidates care about animal issues as well as those who are hostile to them. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all.

Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both. The Center believes helping animals helps us all.

WAYNE PACELLE

ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION

+1 202-420-0446

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