

# Investigation Finds Three Operational Cockfighting Arenas in Lee County, Miss.

*Groups call on Sheriff to shut them down and arrest organizers, attendees*

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, February 3, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal Wellness Acting and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness ([SHARK](#)) – two national animal protection organizations with campaigns against cockfighting – urged Lee County Sheriff to shut down three cockfighting pits that SHARK has investigated within the last month and found to be staging illegal cockfighting derbies.

The request for action comes after Union County (Tenn.) Sheriff Billy Breeding and his deputies raided a

cockfighting derby in progress last 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.



Drone footage shows a cockfighting pit in Mississippi on the day of a "derby." The state must toughen its laws to combat this scourge.

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*wayne Pacelle, president,  
Animal Wellness Action*

[Animal Wellness Action](#) and SHARK conducted a press conference on Friday on Feb. 3, 2023, to release the drone footage and to call on Lee County Sheriff Jim H. Johnson to stamp out the activity in the Mississippi county.

“Our investigation shows that cockfighters are in full fighting mode in Lee County,” said Steve Hindi, president of SHARK. “We learned of these fights from an informant and notified the sheriff. We documented that the fights proceeded, and we are deeply disappointed that there was no law enforcement intervention to stop the cruelty and the illegal gambling.” SHARK’s campaign has received

strong support from the Humane Farming Association.

“It is highly unusual for three cockfighting pits to be operating in a single county,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. “Someone is asleep at the switch to allow this level of illegal conduct to occur on a rolling basis.”

#### LAWS MUST BE STRENGTHENED

Mississippi is one of just eight states with misdemeanor penalties for cockfighting. Alabama and Tennessee also have misdemeanor penalties and the groups have called on state lawmakers and the governor to strengthen all of these laws and align them with the prohibitions on animal fighting in other states and at the federal level. You can see a copy of the federal law here: [https://ukg.e60.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Section-26-of-Act\\_full.pdf](https://ukg.e60.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Section-26-of-Act_full.pdf).

Earlier this week, Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy released a [comprehensive 63-page report](#) on cockfighting links with avian influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease. According to a new report (<https://endcockfighting.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Cockfighting-HPAI-vND-Report-12.30.22.pdf>) 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.

“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., 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.

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.

Noting the barbarism of staged dogfighting and disease threats to poultry posed by cockfighting, Reps. Cindy Axne, D-Iowa, and Don Bacon, R-Neb., introduced legislation in November to strengthen the federal law against animal fighting. Reps. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., Troy Carter, D-La., Buddy Carter, R-Ga., Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Nancy Mace, R-S.C., Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Mike Quigley, D-Ill., joined them as original cosponsors of the legislation to crack down on staged combat between animals.

#### WHAT TO DO

Media may request a recording of today’s press conference by emailing

Joseph@animalwellnessaction.org. SHARK is also making drone footage available to certified members of the press corps.

Animal Wellness Action 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. Residents also can contact the appropriate U.S. attorneys, the state attorney general, or county sheriffs or district attorneys.

## ABOUT

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.

SHARK is a non-profit organization with supporters around the U.S. and beyond. SHARK receives no government funding and completely relies on donations and grants to work on issues ranging in scope from local to worldwide. With a small core of volunteers, and a staff of five, SHARK battles tirelessly against rodeos, bullfighting, pigeon shoots, turkey shoots, canned hunts and more. President Steve Hindi has an open invitation to debate "the opposition." Because of his domination of past debates with animal abusers, however, it has been years since the opposition has taken him on.

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