

Animal Groups Reveal Scant Few Busts of Cockfights in Oklahoma Since Enactment of SQ 687, According to DA Survey

Groups note there have been more political donations from cockfighters in 2022 than the total number of cockfighting busts in 20 years

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- There's not been a single arrest in most of the biggest cockfighting counties in the state, including Atoka, Coal, LeFlore, and McCurtain counties. In fact, there's not been a single arrest of anyone named in an 87-page dossier assembled by Animal Wellness Action that exposes many of the biggest cockfighters

traffickers throughout Oklahoma. The data was assembled by the District Attorneys Council at the request of Oklahoma State Rep. Andy Fugate, D-94, and was obtained by Animal Wellness Action.



Cockfighting Match

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"Lawmakers should no more take money from illegal cockfighters than they should from dogfighters, the mob, or narco-traffickers wishing to weaken laws that apply to them."

Former Attorney General Drew Edmondson

"There has been a near-complete breakdown in enforcement of the state's voter-approved law against staged animal fighting," said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. "In dozens of counties throughout Oklahoma, law enforcement personnel — whether they are sheriffs or district attorneys — simply aren't doing their jobs and are allowing cockfighters to commit acts of animal cruelty with impunity."

Animal Wellness Action and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK) noted that Atoka County Sheriff Tony Head was provided with detailed and

credible information on a regular basis of a cockfighting arena in Stringtown that operated every other weekend during a cockfighting season. The sheriff took no action to apprehend the organizer or the hundreds of other participants. In neighboring Bryan County, Sheriff Johnny Christian did take action and raided a cockfighting arena there, apprehending 200 participant and spectators. In the end, the district attorney for Bryan and Atoka counties brought charges against a single individual, failing to charge even one other person with even a \$50 fine.

animal wellness action

Animal Wellness Action and SHARK have provided detailed evidence to law enforcement of ongoing crimes to law enforcement authorities throughout the state. Today, for instance, SHARK is releasing additional footage of a Coal County cockfighter who has prior felony convictions for money laundering and narcotics trafficking, shipping birds to a border town in Texas, with the birds clearly destined for fighting venues in Mexico.

“The problem is not that our anti-cruelty laws are too harsh,” said Drew Edmondson, former Oklahoma Attorney General (1994-2010) and co-chair of the National Law Enforcement Council for Animal Wellness Action. “Rather it’s that cockfighters are exhibiting knowing and reckless disregard for our laws, and some county sheriffs and district attorneys are failing to uphold the law without fear or favor.”

SHARK and Animal Wellness Action are continuing to conduct ongoing animal-fighting investigations, revealing that Oklahoma, despite a strong law that establishes felony-level penalties for a range of cockfighting crimes, continues to be the “cockfighting capital of the United States.”

“We have information about widespread illegal possession of fighting animals, shipment of fighting animals through the Postal Service all over the world, the movement of fighting birds to border towns to export the animals to other countries, and more,” said Steve Hindi, president of SHARK. “The proper response for lawmakers is to give law enforcement the resources it needs to enforce Oklahoma law, rather than to give comfort to cockfighters and gut the penalty provisions of state anti-cruelty laws.”

The organizations have also investigated the leaders of the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission, which donated \$41,250 to 34 sitting House members and nine Senators, with the single largest

recipient of contributions being Senator Lonnie Paxton, R-21 (\$2,500). Mr. Paxton is the author of SB 1006 to allow counties to cripple penalties in the anti-cockfighting law. Rep. JJ Humphrey has the companion bill, HB 2530, and received \$1,000 from the cockfighters' PAC. Both bills have passed from their assigned committees and await floor action.

Animal Wellness Action today asked lawmakers to return last year's political donations from the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission (OGC). The OGC has not disclosed its donors and clearly violated Oklahoma Ethics Commission rules; the group's leaders are cockfighting practitioners violating Oklahoma and U.S. laws barring possession of fighting animals; and lawmakers and cockfighting leaders continue to assert that their goal is to allow cockfighters to violate a federal law that bars shipping fighting birds to any other jurisdiction. Information about the leaders of the OGC is contained in Animal Wellness Action's 87-page report on cockfighting in Oklahoma.

"Lawmakers should no more take money from illegal cockfighters than they should from dogfighters, the mob, or narco-traffickers wishing to weaken laws that apply to them," added General Edmondson.

"There have been far more political donations from cockfighters in one year than there have been raids on cockfighting arenas and gamecock farms in Oklahoma in 20 years," said Tom Pool, D.V.M, MPH, DACVPM, the senior veterinarian with the Animal Wellness Action and a native of Lawton and an OSU veterinary college graduate. From 2016 through 2022, Dr. Pool tracked thousands of illegal shipments of fighting birds from Oklahoma cockfighters to Guam, where he served as territorial veterinarian for 17 years. Dr. Pool is a retired Army Colonel who ran the U.S. Army's Veterinary Command.

A month ago, The Center for a Humane Economy also today released a comprehensive 63-page report on the links between cockfighting and avian influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease. "By allowing a massive cockfighting industry to flourish in Oklahoma, the state is putting the enormous number of commercial poultry operations in eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas at risk," said Dr. Jim Keen, director of veterinary sciences for the Center for a Humane Economy and the primary author of the report.

The [HPAI \(H5N1 strain\) bird flu epidemic](#) that began in February 2022 in Indiana has already killed nearly 60 million commercial and backyard poultry and unknown thousands, perhaps millions, of wild birds in 48 states over the past 12 months.

Virulent Newcastle disease can cause commercial and backyard poultry devastation similar to that of HPAI if not contained. There have been 15 introductions of vND into the United States since 1950, 10 of which occurred via the illegal smuggling of game cocks across our southern border from Mexico. (Virulent Newcastle disease is endemic in Mexico and all of Latin America.) Just three of those outbreaks cost the federal government more than \$1 billion.

Animal Wellness Action provides a \$5,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest and

conviction of anyone involved in animal fighting crimes. Tips should be submitted by email at info@animalwellnessaction.org.

ABOUT

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.

The Center for a Humane Economy is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order.

SHARK is a national animal-protection organization focused on documenting and exposing cruelty to animals and holding animal-abusers accountable under the law.

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