

Animal Welfare Groups Urge State Lawmakers to Get Behind Bill to Make All Staged Fights Felony Offenses

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, USA, March 6, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal Wellness Action and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK) publicly endorsed SB 243, by Sen. Greg Elkins, R-Winchester, to make cockfighting a felony in Kentucky.

"In addition to playing host to an extraordinary number of fighting arenas, Kentucky is at the center of the American and global cockfighting industry, with major traffickers shipping birds all over the world," said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. "A strong state law, with felony-level penalties, will shut down 90 percent of this industry, and that law is desperately needed."



Cockfighting Match

Last year, led by SHARK's sustained undercover investigations and informants' network, SHARK and AWA released a list of 16 cockfighting arenas from Butler to Pike counties that have illegally operated in the state. SHARK obtained drone footage from numerous cockfighting arenas with hundreds of cockfighting enthusiasts dispersing after learning of the surveillance. The organizations released the actual coordinates of these fighting venues – a first-ever disclosure of this number of fighting arenas in any state in the nation.

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Steve Hindi, president of SHARK

While enforcement has stepped up, law enforcement is hobbled by an archaic state statute that provides only misdemeanor penalties for these malicious crimes.

“SHARK has pulled the curtain back on a network of fighting pits throughout Kentucky,” said Steve Hindi, president of SHARK. “There is no reason for even one more animal to be hacked to death in any of these fighting venues. SB 243 is needed to cleanse the state of this malicious cruelty.”

The report identified Shaker Hill Pit Club in Butler County, the New Pinemountain Game Club in Harlan County, Charlies Game Club in Martin County, and Honest Abe’s Game Club in McCreary County, and a dozen other pits that have had a long history of operations in the state.

And as far back as 2020, the organizations also released details on six massive cockfighting breeding operators supplying fighting pits across the world. The organizations stress that there are dozens of other pits and traffickers who conduct illegal operations throughout the state.

- Dink Fair Gamefarm, apparently run by Albert Dink in Smithfield, is one of the largest gamecock farms in the United States, with thousands of birds seemingly raised for fighting purposes.
- Chris Copas, of Bowling Green, described his participation in cockfighting at the World Slashers Cup Derby in the Philippines earlier this year.
- Cody Boone proudly announced on his Facebook page that he’d sold out his “cocks and stags again” and shipped them to “Hawaii, Guam, Honduras, Philippines, Kansas, Colorado, California, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, New Mexico, Mexico, and many more.”
- Tammy Shive-Ayala, of Green River Gamefarm in Columbia, told one interviewer that she and her husband “send to breeders all over the world, Philippines, Guam, Mexico, Vietnam, Hawaii, everywhere, they go all over.”

The presence of the fighting pits and the cockfighting breeders is particularly alarming in light of the Avian Influenza virus that has spread to Kentucky and 47 other states. The connection between cockfighting and avian diseases is [detailed in a scientific report](#) from two agricultural veterinarians at the Center for a Humane Economy. 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.

A Philippines-based cockfighting broadcast company, known as BNTV came to the United States, with its hosts and production crew and visited 50 or so major cockfighting farms. During this U.S game farm tour, they produced and broadcast dozens of incriminating videos. With seven videos, Kentucky was second only to Oklahoma in the number of game fowl farms visited.

Thomas Pool, DVM, MPH, 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. As a Department of Agriculture official on Guam, he saw 11,500 fighting birds shipped from Kentucky and other U.S. states to the small, western Pacific island.

"There is simply no other rationale for the shipment of very expensive adult roosters to our island but for cockfighting," noted Dr. Pool, who is senior veterinarian with Animal Wellness Action. "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 from Kentucky effectively amounts to illegal contraband under federal law."

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 to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all. X: @AWAction_News.

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.

Joseph Grove

ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION

+1 502-472-6225

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