



**The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)  
First Strike® Campaign  
2003 Report of Animal Cruelty Cases**

Since 2000, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has compiled reports of high-profile cases of animal cruelty and neglect from across the country. The following report covers incidents committed from January through December 2003. It contains available information on the animal cruelty offenses, demographics of animal abusers, types of animals abused, and other factors such as the incidence of family violence.

It is important to note that this is not a scientific study. Unfortunately, it is not possible to accurately determine the total number of animals who are victims of cruelty because there is no national tracking system in place to monitor all animal cruelty cases. This report is based on information from 1373 animal cruelty cases involving at least 1682 perpetrators, taken from well-documented sources including media reports as well as some reports from local humane societies and other animal welfare organizations. While the statistics reflect these specific cases, the report provides a relevant snapshot of animal cruelty and neglect in the United States. And because statistics have been relatively consistent from year to year, we can intuit that it presents a valid reflection of patterns of perpetrators, crimes, and victims.

Of the animal cruelty cases in the report, 784 (57%) involved intentional cruelty toward animals and 589 (43%) involved extreme animal neglect. The compilation also included cases of animal fighting (dog fighting and cockfighting), and animal hoarding/collecting. The types of animal cruelty that are covered in the findings include:

- **Intentional cruelty or abuse**, when a person knowingly deprives an animal of food, water, shelter, socialization, or veterinary care or maliciously tortures, maims, mutilates, or kills an animal. People who are intentionally cruel to animals take satisfaction in causing harm.
- **Neglect**, when a person fails to provide an animal with proper shelter, food, water, attention, grooming or veterinary care. Cases of neglect are acts of omission rather than commission and do not give satisfaction to the person whose animals are neglected.
- **Cockfighting**, when two or more specially bred birds, known as gamecocks, are placed in an enclosure to fight, for the primary purposes of gambling and entertainment. A cockfight usually results in the death of one of the birds; sometimes it ends in the death of both.
- **Dog fighting**, a contest in which two dogs—specifically bred, conditioned, and trained to fight—are placed in a pit (generally a small arena enclosed by plywood walls) to fight each other, for the spectators' gambling and entertainment.
- **Animal hoarding**, the accumulation of a large number of animals, where the caregiver provides minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation and veterinary care; and fails to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals and/or the environment.



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**Discussion**

This is the fourth report from The HSUS about high-profile animal cruelty cases. Overall, some of the results are consistent with findings in the 2001 and 2002 Reports, such as:

- Adult and teenage males commit a high percentage of intentional animal cruelty.
- Males have a higher percentage of involvement in animal neglect than females, but the gender gap is much more significant with regard to intentional cruelty.
- Females have a higher percentage of involvement in animal hoarding cases than males.
- Companion animals are the most common victims of animal cruelty, though cruelty to cats is not reported as frequently as cruelty to dogs.
- Shooting is the most common form of intentional cruelty.
- Hanging is the most common offense committed by females.
- Males are significantly more often the perpetrators when animal cruelty occurs in connection with family violence.

In 2001, 68% of the perpetrators in the cases reported in the media were charged with animal cruelty; in 2002, 75% of perpetrators were charged; and in 2003, 85% have been charged. It's not possible to know definitively whether this means that more perpetrators are actually being charged in cruelty cases as a whole, whether it's simply a matter that more such cases were reported by the media, or some combination of both.

**HSUS Recommendations: Community Solutions to Violence**

Although the cases covered by this report only represent a sample of the thousands of animal cruelty cases that local humane societies, animal care and control agencies, and law enforcement agencies investigate each year, the results provide us with a glimpse of who commits these acts, how they are penalized, what kinds of animals become victims, and how animal cruelty intersects with other forms of violence.

In 2003, 15% of the intentional cruelty cases also involved family violence, including child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse. This percentage is low compared to other research findings; however, it's important to note that family violence is quite often a hidden crime, where batterers threaten and injure their victims in the home. Batterers typically also isolate their victims and monitor their every move to prevent them from telling law enforcement officials, friends, or family members about the abuse. Animal cruelty can be considered a warning sign of other potential familial violence.

In a recent sample of some of the largest domestic violence shelters around the country, The HSUS found that 91% of adult victims and 73% of children talk about incidents of pet abuse



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when they enter the shelter. However, only 18% of the shelters surveyed routinely ask about pets when a victim comes to them for services. This finding indicates that some domestic violence shelters may be missing a critical opportunity to assist victims in finding a safe place for their companion animals.

**Why do batterers threaten, abuse, or kill animals?**

- To demonstrate and confirm power and control over the family
- To isolate the victim and children
- To force the family to keep violence a secret
- To perpetuate the context of terror
- To prevent the victim from leaving or coerce her/him to return
- To punish the victim for leaving
- To degrade the victim through involvement in the abuse

It's important for law enforcement officers, animal care and control officers, animal sheltering professionals, family violence advocates, and others to be aware of the connection between animal cruelty and family violence and develop interagency networks to reduce this problem. Starting a Safe Havens for Animals™ program is one solution. These programs involve collaborative relationships between domestic violence shelters, animal care and control agencies, animal shelters, veterinarians, and even private boarding kennels to provide safe, temporary housing for pets who come from violent homes.

As part of the annual Animal Cruelty/Human Violence Awareness Week in 2004, The HSUS offered new guidelines on how to start a Safe Havens for Animals program as well as a new poster reflecting the theme, "Animal Cruelty *IS* Family Violence." The HSUS, with the help of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), distributed the poster to several thousand animal shelters and domestic violence groups around the country. The HSUS also features an online listing of Safe Havens for Animals type programs on [www.hsus.org/firststrike](http://www.hsus.org/firststrike).

The following are suggested ways for individuals to help address the animal cruelty/family violence connection locally:

- Collect pet-related items such as bowls, leashes, toys, carriers, food, and treats that can be donated to a local Safe Haven for Animals type of program. Consider asking a local pet supply store to donate these items or invite co-workers, friends, and neighbors to contribute. (First contact your local animal shelter or domestic violence agency to see if they have such a program and if so, what kind of items they need.)
- Contact a local animal shelter or domestic violence agency to see if they have a



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temporary sheltering program for pets who come from violent homes, and if so, volunteer to be a foster caregiver. (The program may require a criminal background check and for you to successfully complete an orientation program).

- Ask local veterinary clinics, pet supply stores, groomers, and other businesses to display the new HSUS poster, which reflects the theme "Animal Cruelty *IS* Family Violence." To order a free 81/2X11 size poster, e-mail [firststrike@hsus.org](mailto:firststrike@hsus.org) and include a mailing address or call First Strike toll free at 1-888-213-0956. Bulk orders of 11-20 are \$3.00. Make your check or money order payable to The HSUS and send to The HSUS, 2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.
- Create a visual display of the theme "Animal Cruelty *IS* Family Violence" at a local animal shelter, police station, library, school, county government building, shopping mall or other appropriate public area.

For more information on the animal cruelty/family violence connection write to First Strike, The HSUS, 2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037 or call 888-213-0956.

**Who commits animal cruelty?**

Male perpetrators were involved in the majority of all animal cruelty cases as well as nearly all those involving intentional cruelty and animal fighting. Females had a much lower percentage of involvement in intentional cruelty and animal fighting cases as compared to males, but they had a higher percentage of involvement in animal hoarding cases. This data is consistent with The HSUS' findings in the 2000, 2001, and 2002 Reports.

Of reported cases in which teenagers were responsible for intentional cruelty, male teenagers were the perpetrators in 95% of the cases. This is also consistent with the findings in 2001 and 2002 cases. In addition, children under 13 continued to have a low percentage of involvement in intentional cruelty. In our report for 2001, 4% of children under 13 were responsible for intentional cruelty and in 2002, 2% were responsible.

The following table shows the percentages of men verses women involved in various types of animal cruelty in high profile cases:

<b>Gender</b>	<b>All Cases</b>	<b>Intentional Cruelty</b>	<b>Animal Fighting</b>	<b>Neglect</b>	<b>Animal Hoarding</b>
<i>Males</i>	75%	92%	93%	54%	34%
<i>Females</i>	25%	8%	7%	46%	66%



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The table below provides a breakdown of intentional animal cruelty by offender age.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Intentional Cruelty</b>
<i>Child (7-12)</i>	1%
<i>Teen (13-19)</i>	22%
<i>Adult (20 and over)</i>	77%

This table shows the percentage of intentional animal cruelty committed by age and gender.

<b>Intentional Cruelty</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<i>Child (7-12)</i>	100%	0%
<i>Teen (13-19)</i>	95%	5%
<i>Adult (20 and over)</i>	91%	9%

**Who are the victims of animal cruelty?**

Companion animals were the most common victims of animal cruelty in the cases reported in 2003. These numbers are consistent with those reported in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

The following is a percentage breakdown of animal abuse victims for 2003 as well as a comparison to 2000, 2001, and 2002.

<b>Animal Type</b>	<b>Percentage of Cruelty Cases for 2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>
<i>Companion Animals</i>	71%	76%	74%	76%
<i>Farm Animals</i>	18%	15%	14%	12%
<i>Wildlife</i>	4%	5%	6%	7%
<i>Exotic Animals</i>	2%	2%	2%	Unknown
<i>Multiple Types</i>	5%	2%	4%	5%

**Do certain age groups appear to target particular types of animals for cruelty?**

Children, teens, and adults all have a high percentage of committing acts of cruelty against companion animals. The following table shows a breakdown of cruelty by offender age and type of animal. This finding is also consistent with prior Reports. One difference with this report; however, is that 59% of teens abused companion animals as compared to 75% of teen offenders in 2001 and 70% of teen offenders in 2002. There is a greater spread in percentages over the



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types of animals teens abused for 2003. Again, there's no way to definitively know whether the statistics indicate a trend outside the universe of cases reported in the media.

<b>Animal Type</b>	<b>Offender Age</b>		
	<i>Child</i>	<i>Teen</i>	<i>Adult</i>
<i>Companion Animals</i>	75%	59%	74%
<i>Farm Animals</i>	12.5%	16%	19%
<i>Wildlife</i>	12.5%	18%	2%
<i>Exotic Animals</i>	0%	3%	2%
<i>Multiple Types</i>	0%	5%	3%

**How many dogs vs. cats are victims of cruelty?**

As in prior years, cruelty incidents perpetrated on dogs were more commonly reported than cruelty cases against cats in 2003. This does not necessarily mean that dogs are at greater risk for being victims of cruelty than cats. In fact, many animal care and control agencies report a higher incidence of cat abuse. However, these findings may suggest that cat cruelty incidents are underreported by the public and media. It may also suggest that law enforcement is less likely to respond to and prosecute acts of cruelty against cats than acts against dogs.

The following table shows a percentage breakdown of dog and cat cruelty.

<b>Animal Type</b>	<b>All Cases of Cruelty</b>
<i>Dog</i>	70%
<i>Cat</i>	30%

**What are the offenses?**

In cases of intentional animal cruelty, the most common offenses involved shooting, animal fighting, torturing, and beating. For 2003, there was an increase in media reports of animal fighting as compared to 2002 where they made up only 8% of the violent cases.

The following table is a breakdown of common violent offenses perpetrated on animals.

<b>Common Offenses</b>	<b>Percent of Violent Cases</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Males</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Females</b>
<i>Shooting</i>	17%	94%	6%
<i>Animal Fighting</i>	17%	93%	7%
<i>Torturing</i>	11%	95%	5%
<i>Beating</i>	11%	97%	3%

<b>Common Offenses Continued</b>	<b>Percent of Violent Cases</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Males</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Females</b>
<i>Mutilation</i>	10%	95%	5%



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<i>Throwing</i>	7%	94%	6%
<i>Burning</i>	6%	91%	9%
<i>Poisoning</i>	4%	100%	0%
<i>Stabbing</i>	3%	78%	22%
<i>Kicking</i>	3%	93%	7%
<i>Dragging</i>	3%	85%	15%
<i>Suffocating</i>	1%	89%	11%
<i>Drowning</i>	1%	89%	11%
<i>Animal Sexual Abuse</i>	1%	88%	12%
<i>Hanging</i>	1%	83%	17%
<i>Run Over with Vehicle</i>	1%	100%	0%

In terms of neglected animals, 70% were malnourished, meaning they did not receive proper nutrition or a sufficient diet, and 30% were emaciated, meaning they were extremely thin and victims of starvation. Interestingly, males and females had the same percentage of involvement with each neglect offense.

The following table is a breakdown of common offenses of neglect.

<b>Common Neglect Offenses</b>	<b>Percent of Neglect Offenses</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Males</b>	<b>Percent of Cases Involving Females</b>
<i>Malnourished</i>	70%	53%	47%
<i>Emaciated</i>	30%	53%	47%

**What is the connection between animal cruelty and family violence?**

Approximately 15% of the reported intentional animal cruelty cases also involved some form of family violence, including domestic violence, child abuse, spouse/child witnessing animal cruelty, or elder abuse. In cases where there was a co-occurrence of animal cruelty and family violence as a whole, males had a higher percentage than females as perpetrators; however, the gender gap is smaller with the co-occurrence of animal cruelty and child abuse.

Here is a breakdown of the co-occurrence of animal cruelty and family violence by gender.

<b>Type of Family Violence (Co-occurrence with animal cruelty)</b>	<b>Gender of Perpetrator</b>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	100%	0%
<i>Child Abuse</i>	60%	40%
<i>Elder Abuse</i>	67%	33%

The following table shows a breakdown of common animal cruelty offenses that involved a simultaneous report of a spouse or child witnessing the act of cruelty or where the perpetrator was charged with domestic violence or child abuse.

<b>Offense</b>	<b>Percentage of Co-Occurrence with Domestic Violence, Child Abuse,</b>
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	<b>or Spouse/Child Witness</b>
<i>Throwing</i>	29%
<i>Beating</i>	26%
<i>Kicking</i>	11%
<i>Suffocating</i>	9%
<i>Stomping</i>	8%
<i>Stabbing</i>	8%

**How many perpetrators are charged with animal cruelty?**

In the reported cases, 85% of the perpetrators for all forms of animal cruelty were charged. In addition, more than three-quarters of teens and adults were charged with animal cruelty. Compared to the other age groups, children were not charged as frequently.

At the time of this report's printing, 20% of the 2003 cases had a known outcome and of those, 33% of the perpetrators were found guilty of animal cruelty and sentenced to incarceration. The following tables provide a breakdown of who was charged with animal cruelty by looking at gender and age of the offenders.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Charged</b>
<i>Male</i>	88%
<i>Female</i>	85%

<b>Age</b>	<b>Charged</b>
<i>Child</i>	50%
<i>Teen</i>	83%
<i>Adult</i>	90%

**What percentage of animal cruelty perpetrators have been convicted of a prior offense?**

6% of the media reports included information on prior criminal records for the animal cruelty perpetrators. Prior offenses included animal cruelty and neglect, illegal drug possession, firearms violations, domestic violence, burglary, assault, kidnapping, rape, and incest.

**How many animals were killed or euthanized as a result of their injuries?**

Sadly, of the cases compiled for this report, 62% of the animals involved in the incidents of cruelty, neglect, or hoarding were killed by the perpetrators or had to be euthanized as a result of their injuries. This is slightly higher than 2002 and 2001 where 55% of the animals died or were euthanized each year.