



# JUST REWARDS

ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS PAY OFF TO PROTECT WILDLIFE FROM ILLEGAL KILLING

BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

If not for the concentrated activity of a bald eagle, ravens and magpies, the freshly butchered remains of a female moose might never have come to light.

The call came into the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on April 10, 2012. Someone working in a greenbelt area near Spokane had tracked the birds and discovered moose parts, including a severed head. The area is popular with hikers and mountain bikers, says state wildlife agent Paul Mosman, and people enjoyed the special moose-watching opportunity.

The area was not designated for hunting and neither was it hunting season. Clearly, she'd been poached.

Agents found Kool brand cigarette butts, a tribal casino bag and blood tracing the cow's last steps. A metal detector yielded

the partial shaft of a Thunderhead arrow in her stomach. Agents took photographs, bagged the evidence and measured the tire tracks leading from the access road to the moose, dead for less than a day. But without leads, evidence wouldn't do much good.

The agency issued a press release offering a \$500 reward and contacted local news outlets to generate interest. "The best cases," Mosman explains, "are because someone picks up the phone to report the crime."

The media attention caught the eye of the anti-poaching arm of the HSUS Wildlife Protection Campaign and the Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust, which added \$2,500 to the reward. That same day—three days after the moose was discovered—an anonymous caller pointed authorities to two brothers, one a convicted felon.

Agents linked evidence from the crime

scene to both men: the offending bow, Thunderhead arrows, moose blood and hair in a truck, matching tire tracks, Kool cigarettes, another casino bag and moose meat in a freezer. They also found deer meat from another illegal kill. The older brother was convicted in 2014 of illegal possession of closed season moose and deer, and the reward was paid out soon after.

Since 2008, the HSUS anti-poaching program and the Trust have partnered with state and federal agencies and offered more than \$700,000 in rewards in 39 states. Fourteen rewards have been paid out, including in Florida for details about crocodile and bear killings, in Oregon after the conviction of a shooter who killed five antelope and in Idaho for details about an illegal killed doe and two fawns.

Poachers target just about any wild ani-

mal, Mosman says, even salmon and shellfish. They kill for all sorts of reasons: trophies, money and even for fun. Sometimes, they see the animal as a nuisance. But rarely do they need it for food. "In my 12 years in Washington, I came upon only one house that *needed* the food. And I have dealt with hundreds of cases."

Poaching is such a huge problem that wildlife officers can't possibly be expected to tackle it on their own, says Katie Stennes, HSUS wildlife abuse campaign manager.

People have slashed pelicans' throats in Florida, killed countless birds and mammals in a poaching ring in Nevada and shot sea lions in California. Just last year, someone bludgeoned an endangered monk seal pup to death in Hawaii.

Finding justice for these animals requires a multipronged approach. The HSUS and Trust anti-poaching programs offer robotic animal decoys and forensic equipment, assistance with K-9 programs in which rescued dogs are trained to sniff out poachers, support for policymaking efforts to increase penalties and help with undercover investigations and prosecutor outreach.

Though some wildlife agencies reach out to The HSUS for reward funds, the partnership usually begins with HSUS and Trust staff searching the Internet for news of poaching incidents across the country and then contacting the investigating agency.

Hunters and wildlife lovers alike should want to catch poachers, Mosman says. According to an *ABC News* report in 2014, poachers steal an estimated \$100 million worth of wild animals and fish annually in California alone. In Washington, state biologists factor in the animals killed illegally

when determining the number of hunting permits allowed each year.

Special agent Glen Pye with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works about 30 cases a year in Arkansas. Those are just the cases he has time for due to limited manpower and resources. Over the past year, his office

worked with The HSUS and the Trust on rewards for the deaths of an eagle, alligator and several endangered least terns. While rewards provide an incentive to potential tipsters, they also act as a deterrent for would-be poachers, he says. "If

they think there's any way someone is going to see them do it, they'll think twice."

A reward became crucial in solving the case of a young bottlenose dolphin discovered on the Alabama coast in December 2014 with an arrow in his back. "Based on [physiological evidence], it is likely the dolphin lived for at least five days after being shot," says Stacey Horstman with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The story received substantial media attention and the reward grew to \$24,000 from 11 entities, including The HSUS and the Trust. An anonymous tip led federal wildlife agents to a juvenile who admitted to shooting a bottlenose dolphin with a hunting arrow in Florida state waters.

The HSUS and the Trust, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, are offering a \$5,000 reward for information about another shooting: a pregnant dolphin killed off the Florida coast. "It's the 13th dolphin [illegally] killed since 2010," says Stennes, "and an example of how brutal poaching is and why we need to crack down on this crime."

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## A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM

A 2009 study found about 111,000 hunting violations and poaching incidents over a three-year period in 26 states, about 100 per day.

## LAYING DOWN THE LAW

*When the horse arrived at Blaze's Tribute Equine Rescue in Jones, Oklahoma, she looked like she'd been through hell.*

*Emaciated and suffering from parasites and a bacterial skin disease called rain rot, she was given a body condition score of one. Any less and she probably would have been dead. The other 63 horses found on Carolyn Vaughn's property in Seminole County, Oklahoma, were in no better condition.*

*Sheriff's deputy David Hanson discovered the horses in April 2013 while following up on calls from neighbors. There were 120 or so animals crammed onto the property. At least 23 dead horses were in varying states of decay. Of the survivors, says Hanson, "I did not expect some [to] live through the weekend."*

*Vaughn had been convicted of animal cruelty in 2012 but received only a \$2,500 fine. Hanson didn't want her to get off that easy again, so he wrote detailed notes, took copious photos and gathered veterinarian notes and, later, progress reports from Pontotoc Animal Welfare Society and other caregivers.*

*Like Hanson, assistant district attorney Paul Smith wanted Vaughn to pay for her crimes. So he and fellow assistant district attorney Chris Anderson worked with the investigating team to build their case.*

*Vaughn was convicted of 64 counts of animal cruelty and sentenced to 15 years in prison (eight years to serve and seven deferred as probation), and The HSUS honored Hanson, Smith and Anderson with a 2014 Humane Law Enforcement Award. Hanson, now an investigator, says everyone on the case helped bring justice. When The HSUS and law enforcement work together, he adds, "we can accomplish anything."*

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