

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Cases of animal cruelty are multiplying in state

Just last week, this newspaper editorialized on state legislation which, if approved, would make mistreatment of animals a felony. Yes, it would provide for punishment, but more importantly, it would provide for psychiatric help so that the reasons for the mistreatment could be understood and not repeated.

It was coincidence that in the same issue the Westland Observer published a story about a dog, Cleo Bo Jackson, who had died from rat poison. It had taken a week for Patricia Cope-Byrne and her fiancé, James Hanson, to recover enough to report the incident to the Observer & Eccentric and offer a \$100 reward for information leading to whoever poisoned the dog.

"It's the first time I could talk about it without breaking down," she said.

Anyone who has ever lost a pet can understand the sense of emptiness. Certainly I do. Thursday, I lost my 12-plus-year-old cat, Acorn, to advanced stages of kidney failure. It's still something I can't talk about, despite the support of my co-workers. At least I

have the consolation of knowing that his death was a biological process. But for Cleo, death brought senseless days of misery for him and his owners from a cruel act.

While our story was a coincidence, mistreatment of animals is anything but, according to Gary Tiscornia, executive director of the Michigan Humane Society. There were 7,000 rescue runs involving about 10,000 animals handled last year. "It's a very big problem," he said.

While Oakland County does a "very credible" job of handling strays, it's more difficult in Detroit, which sells strays for research, he said. The Humane Society's rescue unit runs from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. 365 days a year, and would like to run 24 hours a day when possible.

Nine out of 10 breed cats come down the first day, but the Humane Society will come out when they're up in a tree for longer periods, Tiscornia said.

Cases of poisoning, cruelty and lack of food, shelter or water totaled about 4,000 last year. And in August, despite



SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

the cool summer, the society recorded its first animal who died from heat stroke — a Doberman with an internal temperature of 107 degrees.

There are all manners of abuse, from use of battery chargers to having pets placed in barbecue grills. Yes, that's a very gruesome thing to have to think about. But it is what motivates you to write to your legislator to urge passage of Senate Bill 1092.

Cruelty is a "non-stop thing," said Sherry Silk, director of operations for the Michigan Humane Society. The

numbers are going up each year, and since "judges pay more attention to felonies," there is added impetus to getting the legislation passed.

There are other cases of abuse. She recounted the case of a 5-month-old Great Dane found shivering in a mud puddle at the end of a chain. The Humane Society got a search warrant and had the animal removed.

Sometimes it's a matter of just educating people, Silk said. Other times people are themselves homeless and abandon their animals; unfortunately, some are abandoned while chained to a fence and unable to search for food. Also confounding her is why neighbors don't call discreetly to report the abuse.

"I'm not making this stuff up," Silk said.

Packs of dogs now roam Pontiac, and a recent immunization clinic there drew about 1,000 animals.

The Michigan Humane Society has tried to help out with free food barrels at each of its shelters in Detroit, Westland and Rochester. Information is re-

quested so there is no "scam" involved.

"Don't be cruel to a heart that's true," wrote our cartoonist, Arkie Hudkins, reminding us of an Elvis Presley tune last week. In no way does that trivialize the importance of animal life. At issue here is whether an animal is nothing more than a piece of property, to be disposed of at will, or whether he/she is a loving, living entity expecting only, in the words of Silk, protection and food.

That's why it's so hard for Cleo's family to understand why he was poisoned a short time ago.

For those of us who have lost our pets, for whatever reason, there will be new friends to come along. But no one, and no thing, can take away our memories. We do insist, however, that the Legislature bring justice to those memories.

Westland police ask anyone with information on Cleo to call the detective bureau at 721-6311.

Sandra Armbruster is editorial page coordinator for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## Tiresome debate shows inability to compromise

The Kirtlands' Warbler keeps following me around. It's a dumb little bird that nests in the humped out tops of jack pine trees and only in Michigan. At least one person has died for this little bundle of endangered feathers, and it's now perched on the presidential campaign.

But the bird is no stranger to controversy, and probably feels at home on the campaign trail. The town of Grayling is always at odds over the song bird. The local nature freaks don't like the way the National Guard makes noise when training at Camp Grayling. The blasts from the guns disturb the warblers when nesting.

That makes me wonder if the noisy jets that fly over Livonia disturb the folks there in the same way. We'll have to check the birth rates.

But back to the warbler. Because it nests in burned out trees, only in

northern Michigan, there's been an environmental question in our state: Should we burn trees for a bird?

For a while we did, but in the mid 1980s a forest fire set to create love nests for the little couples got a bit out of control and a forest service worker died fighting the blaze that eventually burned 25,000 acres in Oscoda County.

After that, I thought I had heard the warbler's swan song. But then it showed up again in a newspaper story about George Bush, of all people. It was an account of a speech he made in the Pacific Northwest during which he told loggers that he cared more about their jobs than he did the Spotted Owl. Trees and birds again.

The story quoted some Michigan tree hugger comparing the Kirtlands' Warbler to the Spotted Owl and going on endlessly about how logging had destroyed the forests of Michigan in the



JEFF COUNTS

19th century.

It's a tiresome debate. The environmentalists would have us turn back the clock 200 years and designate the entire country as a tree museum, laying us all off from our jobs.

The logging industry, on the other hand, would pave it, turning timber into a scarce commodity.

The situation made me think about an idea expressed by veteran State

Rep. Jim Kosteva, D-Canton, who wonders where our ability to compromise has gone. He traced it to the 1960s, and questions if the political activism of that era has evolved into the gunz-style politics practiced by the "Me Generation" which now belongs to special interest groups of every shade and flavor.

If Kosteva is right, it's more scary than the national deficit. Bills can be paid off in time, but when there's no way to agree which one to pay first, we end up with the national paralysis that we now have.

Sure we'd like to save the Spotted Owl and the stupid little Kirtlands' Warbler, but not at a cost of all the timber cutting jobs. Neither the owl nor the warbler make much of a dinner for a loggers' family when shot and cleaned. We once calculated that all the warblers in Michigan wouldn't weigh more than a pound, even with

feathers intact.

We need a president who can hit the middle ground on this one, because if he can find a compromise, there are other such issues to be tackled. The only trouble is neither Bush nor Little Billy Clinton seem able to understand that.

Little Billy acts like a Methodist at a Baptist picnic: Nature Boy Al Gore appears ready to turn Detroit auto workers into rice farmers; Bush is ready to pave the Grand Canyon with Theima and Louise in it; and Quayle wouldn't know a warbler from a pheasant.

Somehow I don't trust any of them to protect either the logging jobs or the warbler.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers, who despite many centuries into Michigan's woods has never seen a Kirtlands' Warbler, but has seen plenty of loggers.

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