



Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
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RSPCA PROSECUTIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2019

René Olivieri

Chair of the RSPCA



The RSPCA is rightfully proud of its international reputation for prosecutions expertise and our practical knowledge of animal welfare. Our vision is of a world where all animals are treated with respect and compassion, and we aim to achieve this with the help of our members, volunteers, supporters and partners. Unfortunately, there is still much to do.

It is important to recognise that our prosecution work is not simply about enforcing the law and punishing offenders. The 'P' in RSPCA stands for 'prevention', and that is our long-term aim. We want people to behave well towards animals, not for fear of being punished but because it is the right and decent thing to do. So our focus is increasingly on changing the attitudes of offenders and on educating owners through our prevention work. We offer advice and guidance wherever it is needed, and we offer a new life of care (and love) to animals who have been abused or neglected, whenever that is possible.

The case studies in this report also demonstrate that there is a need for direct action to stop cruelty towards animals. While the vast majority of people in England and Wales cherish their animals, there are still those who are deliberately cruel to or neglectful of the animals that depend upon them. When you read about some of the cases the RSPCA's Prosecutions Department has dealt with during the past year, I think you will agree that it serves a vital function, ensuring that those who treat animals badly cannot do so with impunity. Our inspectorate and prosecutions team play an essential role in helping us achieve justice for animals.

The RSPCA continues to strive, in all it does, to improve animal welfare in England and Wales and to change people's attitudes towards animals for the better. Our enforcement work contributes powerfully to that mission.

Chris Sherwood

Chief Executive, RSPCA



The RSPCA acts as a private prosecutor for the public benefit to fulfil one of its charitable aims: to prevent cruelty and improve animal welfare by all lawful means. Much of the frontline work is conducted by

our inspectorate, whose role is to investigate complaints of cruelty and improve the welfare of our animals by offering advice, education and guidance to individuals. In fulfilling that prevention role, however, it is also very important that the laws to protect animals are properly enforced and the Society has years of prosecutions expertise in this area.

This report highlights some of the work that the prosecutions team dealt with in 2019 and we hope that it provides transparency to our readers, who can discover what it is we do, including the incredible accounts of the rehabilitation of animals taken into our care. Last year, I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet Jay, the dog featured on pages 6 and 7 of this report. It never ceases to amaze me that despite the terrible injuries he sustained, Jay made such a remarkable recovery and remains a lovely dog.

It is because of this amazing work that the RSPCA makes a difference to animals and the public in England and Wales, and we will continue to prevent cruelty and protect vulnerable animals when they are most in need.



Hayley Firman

Head of RSPCA Prosecutions

As I read this report, I reflect on another year of our prosecution work and the challenges that our inspectors face every day as they are called upon to investigate complaints of cruelty across England and Wales. Its pages highlight the diversity of

circumstances we meet and the range of species we help. The case studies illustrate that cruelty to animals ranges from gratuitous violence to neglect due to a lack of appreciation of an animal's needs and the failure to meet them. They also demonstrate how the prosecution of offenders for animal welfare offences can be complex, and how we are increasingly turning to forensic techniques and social media platforms to prove the abuse.

The RSPCA's prosecution role has a place in our criminal justice process and is as important now as it was in 1822 when Richard Martin worked on his first case. But the true success of much of our work over the past year is the rehabilitation of the many animals who survived their abuse and were cared for by our centres, branches and volunteers. There animals are brought back to health and rehomed into better lives, where they are treated with the respect and kindness they deserve.

I am proud of all at the Society and its partners who contribute to the prevention of cruelty, changing public attitudes towards animals, and improving animal welfare generally, with our commitment to high standards as endorsed by our independent oversight panel. This includes those working on our education programmes for adults and children, the advice and guidance given by our field staff, the work of the prosecutions team, and the vets and legal providers who support us as we continue to provide an invaluable service to animals in need of help, and much more.

This report is a testament to all of these people and I sincerely hope it provides you with an insight into the difference the RSPCA makes – each and every day – to the animals themselves and to many people and their relationships with animals.

Legislation

Animal Welfare Act 2006

Most frequently, offenders are prosecuted under Sections 4 and 9 of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) 2006.

Section 4: Unnecessary suffering

Section 4 covers causing an animal unnecessary suffering, either through a person's actions or their failure to act. That person should either know, or be expected to know, that this would be likely to cause unnecessary suffering.

Section 9: Duty of care

Section 9 of the AWA introduced a duty of care for animals in England and Wales for the first time; previously, action could only be taken once an animal had suffered unnecessarily.

Enforcement agencies and RSPCA inspectors can now advise and educate owners before their pets suffer. If the advice isn't followed and an animal's needs are still not being met, they can be given a formal warning or, in some cases, prosecuted.

Under the Act, an animal has five welfare needs that must be met:

- a suitable environment
- a suitable diet
- to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Sentencing

Community Order

When a custodial sentence isn't warranted, the courts may impose a Community Order. This is made up of one or more 'requirements' that are specified depending on the offender's needs and the seriousness of their offence.

Possible requirements include unpaid work, a rehabilitation activity, drug or alcohol treatment, mental health treatment, a curfew, and electronic monitoring.

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Headline prosecution statistics 2019

All figures relate to England and Wales

	2019	2018	2017
Defendants convicted (youth offenders)	661 (10)	747 (15)	696 (8)
Convictions secured in the magistrates' and Crown courts (youth offenders)	1,432 (18)	1,693 (20)	1,493 (25)
Prosecution success rate ¹	93.7%	92.5%	91.2%
Defendants with all offences dismissed after trial	12	12	20
Prison sentences imposed on individuals ²	49	66	42
Suspended prison sentences imposed on individuals ²	143	159	179
Disqualification orders imposed on individuals under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 ³	538	651	602

Footnotes:

1 Total defendants convicted as a percentage of all defendants.

2 One offender may have more than one sentence imposed.

3 A disqualification order can be imposed as a penalty in its own right, or it can be additional to any other penalty imposed.

Cover photos: Barlow when found (front) and (back) after rehabilitation by the RSPCA. See pages 4 and 5 for more on this rescue.

How Barlow became an inspiration to young people

Before



▲ When found, Barlow was trapped in filthy conditions with overgrown hooves.

Today, Barlow is a healthy and confident pony who is part of a scheme to improve the lives of young people, which is run by The British Horse Society. He has come a long way since the RSPCA found him living in appalling conditions, trapped in a dilapidated metal outbuilding that had caved in around him.

While the RSPCA was at a property investigating reports of animals kept in run-down conditions, an inspector heard banging noises from some metal roofing sheets, which were moving up and down. Underneath he found three ponies trying to escape from a collapsed building. The animals couldn't stand up without hitting their heads, faeces was piled up to a metre high and the floor was soaking. Barlow was lying on dirty, packed, wet ground and his hooves were overgrown and twisted.

Unforgettable conditions
A dead horse and further ponies in poor conditions were discovered in a rubbish-strewn paddock. Some had scrapes and cuts from the metal, bricks, glass and old machinery lying around.

More ponies were living in a building piled high with excrement and filthy bedding. The roof was falling in and the ponies were struggling to move without hitting their heads. The volume of faeces and soiled bedding was so great, it was pushing out the brickwork.

The veterinary surgeon said that the situation was one as hazardous, derelict, neglected and shocking as he had ever experienced.

The animals' owners
The couple who owned the animals was found to have failed to meet the needs of 35 ponies as they did not provide a hygienic, suitable environment free from dangerous hazards. They also caused unnecessary suffering to three ponies who were found to be underweight and six who were lame, and to the three found in the collapsed outbuilding.

The court heard that some ponies at the site were found groomed and in far better condition, as the couple was showing them.

The judge labelled the overall conditions at the site "disgraceful" and "disgusting".

Working together
The investigating RSPCA inspector said: "A whole RSPCA team, along with other organisations, was needed to help us care for and rehabilitate these animals. I find it hard to comprehend how people can let conditions become so harmful to their animals. RSPCA Cymru was left with no choice but to pursue legal action," adding, "I'm sure if the RSPCA had not found the ponies, they would still be in the dire conditions they were found in."

A new life
Barlow was seized and passed into RSPCA care, where he received extensive treatment for his overgrown hooves and given good quality food to build him up. This, together with a lot of time, patience and care, helped him develop into a healthy and confident character and he was selected by The British Horse Society to be part of a programme called Changing Lives through Horses. The programme aims to improve the lives of young people who are not in full-time education, employment or training and gives them the opportunity to develop skills and confidence. More than 25 RSPCA-rescued ponies have been assigned to the programme so far.

Barlow has come a long way and is now helping others gain confidence in the world, just like he did.



Martin Clunes is President of The British Horse Society.

▲ Barlow with actor Martin Clunes and participants of the Changing Lives through Horses programme, which is run by The British Horse Society.

▼ Martin Clunes meets Barlow with RSPCA Equine Welfare Operations Manager Gareth Johnson.

OFFENCES:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Eight: four each

SENTENCES*:
Man – disqualified from keeping horses for five years; 16 weeks' imprisonment suspended for one year; 180 hours' unpaid work requirement; 25-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £300 costs.
Woman – disqualified from keeping horses for five years; 12 weeks' imprisonment suspended for one year; 25-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £300 costs.

* Throughout this report, unless otherwise indicated, disqualified from keeping animals includes owning animals, keeping animals, participating in the keeping of animals and being party to an arrangement under which the person is entitled to control or influence the way in which animals are kept, in accordance with the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.



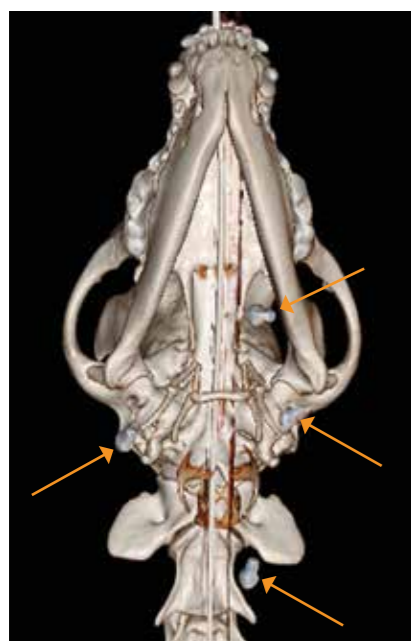
One dog's incredible journey to 10 Downing Street

After

Before



▲ A vet removes a plastic casing from Jay's skull during a three-hour operation.
▼ A CT scan of Jay's skull shows that he was shot three times in the head and once in the neck.



A young dog who was shot multiple times and left to die has made an amazing recovery, even paying a visit to 10 Downing Street with the inspector who investigated his case.

A young terrier-type dog, called Jay, was shot several times in the head and dumped in brambles. Incredibly, Jay was still alive five days later when a member of the public spotted him and took him to a veterinary surgery for urgent treatment.

Poor Jay was unresponsive, very lethargic and uninterested in people or his surroundings.

After cleaning off a white residue and clipping his fur, the vet found several puncture wounds around the dog's neck and head. An airgun pellet was retrieved from one of the wounds and an X-ray revealed further pellets.

Jay was placed on a drip, given pain relief every four hours and started on a course of antibiotics.

Tracing the owner

The dog's owner was traced and lived just 25 metres from where Jay had been found. He claimed a friend had taken Jay to be euthanased and said "...if he's tried to shoot him, I will go mad!". However, there had been no mention of shooting to him at any time. He referred to Jay as his "little mate".

Fired pellets surgically removed from Jay were compared to an air rifle and pellets recovered by police at the man's address. The RSPCA sent these for fingerprinting and a ballistics report, which concluded there was a strong probability that the pellets removed from Jay had been fired from the air rifle.

The road to recovery

The next day Jay was a little brighter, and was taken to a veterinary specialist for further assessment. CT scans confirmed he had been shot three times in the head and once in the neck.



Jay was operated on for more than three hours and three pellets and two plastic casings were removed from his skull. The fourth pellet was not removed because it was in a challenging location and surrounded by nerves. Due to its complicated nature, Jay's veterinary care cost the RSPCA more than £5,000.

It was touch-and-go at times, but Jay showed a fighting spirit and pulled through. Although he lost his hearing in one ear, his vision has been affected and he's a bit wobbly on his paws after he wakes up – a neurological-related issue – Jay now leads a happy life with his new family and has canine companions to play with.

OFFENCE:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEAS:

Not guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Two

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; 200 hours' unpaid work requirement; five-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £1,569 costs.

Following his remarkable recovery, Jay played a starring role at 10 Downing Street when the RSPCA joined other organisations to deliver a petition to bring in tougher sentences for animal cruelty. Jay accompanied the inspector who investigated his case.



▼ Jay has settled into his new home.



Main photo: Caroline Field/League Against Cruel Sports

Abused dog bounces back after suffering terrible injuries



▲ Star appeared blind and much older than her years, due to her ill treatment.
▼ Poor Star was beaten by metal pipes and this vacuum cleaner pole.



A man was sentenced to 18 weeks' immediate imprisonment and disqualified from keeping all animals for life after he repeatedly and violently attacked his partner's dog.

Star, a two-year-old bichon frise, was subjected to prolonged abuse by her owner's partner, who punched her, tried to drown her, and beat her repeatedly with a metal pole from a vacuum cleaner.

The RSPCA discovered the abuse after a visitor to the house noticed a dramatic change in Star – one eye was red and opaque, she was very withdrawn and she looked like a dog who had just given up. Her owner admitted that her partner regularly beat Star and had knocked out the dog's teeth. The visitor took her to a veterinary surgery where she was given pain relief for a broken jaw. The abuse was reported to the RSPCA and the police took possession of Star, passing her into the Society's care.

Extensive injuries

At first sight, the investigating RSPCA inspector thought she was looking at an elderly, blind dog. Star moved slowly, bumping into furniture. She was very timid and cowered towards the floor as the inspector bent down to stroke her. She flinched as she was picked up but didn't make a sound.

Radiographs suggested that Star had sustained a number of blunt force trauma injuries over a period of at least two to three months, resulting in a burst right eye, a fractured jaw, a fractured cheekbone, 10 broken teeth, two fractured ribs and a fractured leg bone.

Initially, vets thought it might be in Star's best interest if she were put to sleep, but after further assessment they reset her jaw

and removed her right eye. Over time, and with lots of care, Star recovered well from her surgery.

Evidence of assault

The inspector examined the owner's house, noting splatters of blood and holes in the walls created when the man had tried to kick Star but missed. She was given metal bars, a belt and a bottle with which the man was reported to regularly beat Star.

Her owner said she had been too scared to take Star to see a vet, and feared she would be beaten herself if she intervened.

Happy in her new home

Despite her abuse, Star has recovered well. She has been rehomed and has settled in well, behaving much more like a two-year-old dog should. She snuggles next to her new owners on the settee, is excited to see people and actively seeks out contact. Even though she is now blind, Star walks around spaces she knows, including going up and down stairs and on daily walks, and appears to be a happy young dog.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:
Not guilty

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals for life; 18 weeks' imprisonment.



The investigating RSPCA inspector is delighted by Star's recovery, saying: "This is such a great outcome for Star – at first we thought she was going to have to be put to sleep and that broke my heart."

Photos courtesy of new owner

Cats fed through letterbox to keep them from starving

Two cats were left for days without food or water by their neglectful owners, only surviving thanks to our inspector.

Before



When an RSPCA inspector visited a property, she noticed two cats inside who appeared extremely hungry, but there was no one home. Until she was able to get inside to help them, the inspector kept returning to push cat food through the letterbox, which they pounced on. She also placed tape seals on the doors to check if anyone was visiting the house but these were still intact four days later.

Thanks to help from the police, the inspector was finally let into the property by a family member. The two cats – a grey tabby called Peppa and a black-and-white cat called Smudge – came running towards her, clearly desperately hungry. The inspector couldn't find any food or water put out for them – their bowls were empty and dry and they had licked up every trace of the food that had been put through the letterbox.

Emaciated condition

As the inspector handled both cats she could clearly feel their spine, ribs, pelvic bones and shoulder blades. The animals were emaciated and infested with fleas. There was some faeces in the property and it smelled strongly of urine.

- ▲ The cats were emaciated after going days without food and water.
- ▼ Smudge and Peppa were rehomed together.

After



Photos: Johanna Tarkela

Smudge and Peppa were taken to a veterinary surgery for treatment. Their body condition score was just one out of nine (five out of nine is ideal), they had marked wastage to their major muscle groups and they were anaemic. The vet confirmed both cats were suffering as a result of emaciation and an untreated flea infestation. They were admitted to the veterinary hospital for treatment.

The owners

The RSPCA had had previous dealings with the couple who owned the cats, and we had given them advice about buying flea treatment from the PDSA.

During interview the pair tried to pass responsibility on to each other, claiming that the other was responsible for looking after the cats. Neither seemed to notice the animals had deteriorated to such an extent and neither showed concern or remorse for the condition in which the cats were found.

Happily rehabilitated

Fortunately, both cats thrived under veterinary care. They were signed over to the RSPCA and we were able to rehome the pair with caring new owners.

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Six: three each

SENTENCES:

Woman – disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; £208 fine; £150 costs. Man – disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; eight weeks' imprisonment suspended for 12 months; 150 hours' unpaid work requirement; 10-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £600 costs.

“I probably shouldn't have hit him so hard. Normally I just bend his tail back.”

When the RSPCA received reports that a cat had been beaten by his owner, the attending inspector was advised not to enter the house on her own because of the man's violent nature.

The RSPCA was called to a property where an elderly ginger cat called Borris had been beaten by his owner, who appeared to have been drinking. Though the cat was very badly injured, the inspector was advised not to enter the house on her own due to the known violent nature of the man, so Borris was brought out to her.

Severe assault

The man acted out how he had attacked Borris, demonstrating that he had held him up by the throat and punched him with full force, commenting: “I probably shouldn't have hit him so hard. Normally I just bend his tail back”.



▲ Sadly, Borris suffered brain injuries from his beating.

Borris's face was bloodied and swollen and his breathing very laboured. There was a small amount of blood coming from his right eye and he was sneezing blood from both nostrils. Due to the severity of his condition the inspector rushed him to a nearby veterinary surgery for emergency treatment.

Sudden collapse

At the surgery, Borris was initially dull, lethargic and unresponsive but then collapsed, and the inspector quickly stepped in to stop him falling off the examination table. He was rushed into intensive care to be stabilised.

Borris was stressed and in shock and so was placed on intravenous fluids and given pain relief. The vet confirmed that he was showing signs of traumatic brain injury as a result of his severe beating, and he was in no doubt that the cat had been subjected to extreme cruelty and suffering.

At the hospital, Borris was kept quiet, calm and in the dark. The vets gently cleaned his nose to enable him to breathe more easily and tempted him with food. Over the next few days the bleeding from his nose stopped, the swelling to his face started to go down and he was able to enjoy being fussed over. An oesophageal feeding tube was put into his neck so he could be fed without hurting his painful face.

A new home

Borris continued to improve until he could feed himself and was alert, active and looking well, though he continues to suffer from epileptic seizures. Borris has been happily rehomed.

After



Photo courtesy of new owner

▲ Borris has settled in with his kind and loving new owner.

OFFENCE:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:

Guilty

CONVICTION:

One

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; 18-month conditional discharge; £400 costs. The defendant was remanded in custody for other matters, so the court made no separate penalty for the animal welfare offences.

Exotic species kept in filthy, cold and wet conditions



▲ This green-winged macaw was kept in a tiny cage in freezing conditions.
▼ Wild green-winged macaws live in the forests of north and central South America.



When the police discovered a hoard of exotic animals kept on a farm in inappropriate and freezing conditions, they requested specialist assistance from the RSPCA.

RSPCA specialists found a huge variety of exotic animals being kept in near-derelict buildings as snow was falling. Although each species needs their own specialist diet and levels of heat, light and humidity, just as they do in the wild, inspectors found animals in dirty, freezing conditions, along with bones and carcasses.

No thought for the animals

A polytunnel-like enclosure provided very little protection from the cold for three agouti, two white pelicans and 13 peafowl. Two plastrons (the underside part of a tortoise shell) were found on the floor, as was a dead peafowl.

A run-down static caravan converted into animal holding pens was littered with animal remains, including a dead coati, which was found inside a bird cage along with the carcasses of two birds. Nearby, two maras were kept in a plastic crate with no access to water and no room to stand up or move around.

A small concrete-floored enclosure contained four crested porcupines, exposed to the cold and damp, and with no means of burrowing.

At a second location, six green iguanas were discovered in a vivarium where the temperatures were much too low; four were missing their tails. Numerous exotic birds including a green-winged macaw and two Jardine's parrots, a Cape parrot and a golden pheasant, as well as a bird given the highest level of protection on the CITES (Convention on International Trade

in Endangered Species) register – a Bali starling – was found, along with carcasses on the floor and in a freezer.

Blind to the suffering

The veterinary surgeon confirmed that the animals needed to be removed as they were suffering or likely to suffer. The police seized them and the owner later signed them over to the RSPCA.

When interviewed, the owner admitted that when animals died he would leave the carcasses in situ as they provided a food source for the live animals. Although he accepted that the animals' living conditions were far from satisfactory, he didn't accept that any of the animals suffered as a result.

Appropriate care

All the surviving exotic animals have been rehomed to specialist keepers.

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

15

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping, dealing and transporting all animals for five years; 20 weeks' imprisonment suspended for 12 months; 120 hours' unpaid work requirement; 25-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £500 costs.

Exotic pets such as reptiles and other wild animals in captivity, have similar needs as pets as they would in the wild, so it can be challenging to meet their environmental, dietary and behavioural needs.

Main photo: reisgraf.ch/Shutterstock.com

Pet shop abandoned with the animals still inside

When the proprietor of a pet shop ceased trading, she simply shut up shop, leaving a large number of exotic animals still in their cages. When they were found five months later, it was clear the animals had been without food, water, heat and lighting for some time.



▲ Incredibly, some animals survived.
▼ Ernest, one of the surviving bearded dragons, in his new home.

The RSPCA was called to an abandoned pet shop after energy suppliers entered under a warrant to disconnect the electricity and found a range of dead and dying exotic animals.

The shop was very dirty and smelled strongly. Fifteen animals were found dead in their cages, boxes and vivaria, including lizards, snakes, rabbits, guinea pigs, and a macaw in a freezer. The investigating inspector said the dead bearded dragons were so thin they felt as if they could snap in two. Of all the deceased animals, only one snake was in a condition where



Photo: Reptile World Zoo

a post-mortem examination was possible; the others were so decomposed they were just skin and bone, appearing almost mummified.

A chest freezer contained a further 22 dead and frozen animals, including various birds, reptiles, and small mammals.

Some survivors

Incredibly, five animals were alive – a corn snake, two bearded dragons, a tegu and a leopard gecko. A veterinary surgeon advised that the tegu lizard was in the worst condition he had ever seen, and the animal later died. The leopard gecko had long-standing metabolic bone disease and untreatable eye problems and had to be euthanased. The corn snake survived, as did the bearded dragons, despite the pair being emaciated, anaemic and dehydrated. The three survivors were rehomed to responsible, specialist keepers.

Serious suffering

The court was told the owner had health problems, which caused her to close the shop after running it successfully for many years. In sentencing her, however, the magistrates said: "This is an overwhelmingly sad set of circumstances... However, [mitigation] does not detract from the serious suffering which was caused to animals which you owned and were responsible for."

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Not guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Four

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping caged exotics, rabbits, reptiles, guinea pigs and caged birds for life; 250 hours' unpaid work requirement; £300 costs.

From wild animals to small furries, they all need the right environment

Legislation in England and Wales gives owners a duty of care for their animals and identifies five welfare needs that must be met to prevent an animal suffering unnecessarily. Providing a suitable environment is one of these welfare needs.



The RSPCA discovered two Asian leopard cats in a hot conservatory with just dirty green water to drink. They had eaten the food left for them and only smears of blood, feathers and small bones remained. Our inspector was able to prove that no one had visited the property for eight days.

In the wild these cats are active at dawn, dusk and night, avoiding the heat of the day when they seek shade in the cooler forests. They live in grasslands and forests close to water.

The leopard cats were very frightened and a veterinary surgeon couldn't examine them thoroughly. They

▲ This Asian leopard cat – a wild animal – was kept in a hot conservatory.

were identified as listed under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and seized by the local authority. Although the owner said he was very interested in exotic cat breeds, he didn't have a licence to keep them and provided very little stimulation. He didn't live at the property, though claimed to visit every couple of days to feed them. The cats are now being looked after at a specialist centre that knows how to meet the needs of these wild animals.

At the same time, our inspector found eight Aylesbury ducks in the backyard with only dirty water to drink and



▲ Ducks were found in the backyard, with no food and nowhere to swim or bathe.

no food. There was nowhere for them to swim or bathe. The ducks were seized and have been rehomed.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s9

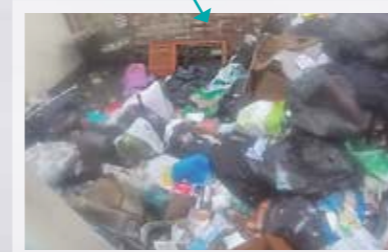
PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Three

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; 180 hours' unpaid work requirement; £600 costs.



▲ Dotty had severe urine scalds and her coat was dirty and matted.
▼ A run can be seen in the yard among piles of rubbish.



In a separate case, a pet rabbit almost died after being left to survive among dirty nappies and household rubbish in a filthy concrete backyard.

There was a run cage against a wall, though this wasn't suitable for permanent housing. The rabbit was loose in the yard, soaking wet, cold and shivering among the rubbish and faeces. Her coat was matted and her skin red raw; she had sores and was underweight.

Rabbits are sociable and active animals and need lots of space to graze, forage and exercise, as well as a secure shelter that is safe, clean, dry and draught-free, with warm bedding.

Our inspector explained to the owner that the environment was totally unsuitable and for welfare reasons the rabbit, called Dotty, needed removing from those conditions as

she didn't have adequate shelter or access to food and clean water. However, the owner refused to let him take Dotty to a veterinary surgery to be checked over so the inspector called the police, who seized the rabbit and passed her into RSPCA care.

Dotty is now happily rehomed, enjoying comfort and companionship with fellow rabbit Reggie.

OFFENCES:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Two

SENTENCES:
Disqualified from keeping rabbits for five years; £276 fine; £150 costs.

Dotty (left) has made a great recovery and is living happily with companion Reggie.



After

Photo courtesy of new owner

Media appeals provide crucial evidence

When the RSPCA needs an urgent response to an investigation, we often put out an appeal for information via the media. Press releases can be taken up by local and national media, in print and on their websites, while social media appeals swiftly reach a diverse audience.

A joint press and social media appeal for information led the RSPCA to the owner of a dog who was so underweight an inspector could put her fingers right around his abdomen.

Admiral, an 11-year-old Dobermann, was so emaciated that his ribs, hips and spine were clearly visible. His eyes were sunken, and in one place his skull bone had pierced his skin, causing a sore. He was very shaky on his legs and trembling.

The dog had been taken to a veterinary surgery by a man claiming he had spotted him roaming around a park. After examination, the vet gave the emaciated and dehydrated dog a body condition score of 1.5 out of nine. The police seized the dog and he was admitted to a veterinary hospital to receive urgent medical care and rehabilitation.

Press appeal

The inspectors found details of Admiral's owner on his microchip, however, the man told them he had rehomed Admiral

a few months before. Local enquiries didn't help, so we launched a press appeal for information in local papers and on Facebook. Several witnesses came forward who confirmed that the man still owned Admiral.

During interview, the owner initially claimed that although he had given his dog away, the animal had somehow turned up back at his address. Finally, he admitted that he had asked a friend to pretend to find Admiral in the park and hand him in to a vet.

Taking care of Admiral

At first Admiral deteriorated despite his care. He had an infection in his paw and was unresponsive. When the inspector went to visit him, he was curled up in a tight ball and seemed to have given up. But when she got down on her knees to encourage him to stand, he was able to walk with some assistance. Though still very wobbly, his whole demeanour changed when

he got outside and he started to take an interest in his surroundings and look for attention.

Gradual recovery

As Admiral began to recover, his eyes improved and his coat looked glossy and clean. He was less unsteady on his feet and his swollen foot improved. The crusty sore on the top of his head started to heal and he gained weight on a healthy diet.

With continued care, Admiral went from strength to strength, and he is now a bright and alert dog who is living with a loving new owner.

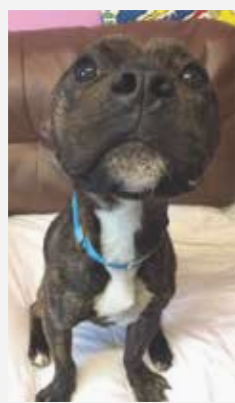
OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:
Guilty

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals indefinitely; six-month alcohol treatment order; five-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement; £120 fine; £300 costs.

Facebook appeal identifies owners



After receiving a neglected and severely underweight Staffordshire bull terrier called Zak from the local dog warden, an animal rescue centre put out a Facebook appeal to find his owner as the couple named on his microchip claimed to have given him away some time before.

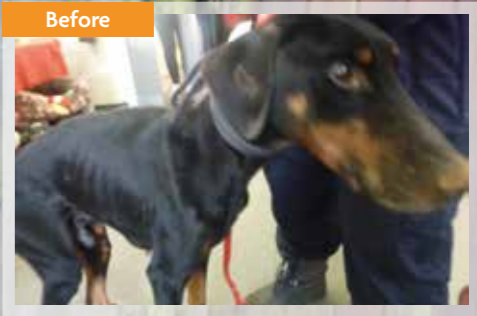
A number of people quickly identified Zak as still belonging to the couple, so the dog warden called in the RSPCA to investigate.

The RSPCA was able to show that the couple themselves had neglected Zak and a family member had taken him to the vet, claiming he was a stray.

The couple was disqualified from keeping any domestic pet for five years and ordered to pay £50 each towards costs. Zak made a good recovery and is thriving in his new home.



Photo: Rebecca Weaver



Before
▲ When Admiral was found, his ribs, hips and spine were visible.



After
Admiral has flourished since his rescue and is now bright and alert.

Video footage proves hare-coursing guilt

The hunting of hares with a dog was made illegal by the Hunting Act 2004, but is still an all-too-common activity. The offence is being given priority by various rural police forces, assisted by the RSPCA.



During an RSPCA cockfighting case, seized material led the Society to conduct research on social media as part of an investigation into illegal hare-coursing activity. Material gathered included video clips and photos of dogs being used to chase and catch hares, as well as dogs being posed next to dead hares, and a suspect was identified.

The police arrested the suspect and the RSPCA carried out a search of his property. A number of dogs were found and these were identified as the dogs shown hunting hares on social media. Five lurcher-type dogs were seized.

No remorse

In interview the man admitted filming his dogs chasing and catching hares but claimed it hadn't been intentional and the dogs had chased the hares of their own

volition. However, one of the video clips shows that as soon as a hare appears the man slips off a dog's lead so the dog can chase after the hare. In other clips, the man is seen holding a dead hare and praising his dogs after making a kill. The sheer volume of clips over a prolonged period demonstrated that the hunting was no accident.

The man didn't show any remorse. He was already in prison for unrelated offences and refused to attend court, so the case was proved in his absence.

New homes were found for all five dogs.

OFFENCE:
Hunting Act 2004

PLEAS:
Found guilty in absence

CONVICTIONS:
Six

SENTENCE:
£600 fine; £500 costs.



▲ Evidence of hare coursing found on a mobile phone led to this man's prosecution.
▶ Wild hares are protected by the Hunting Act 2004.



Hare photo: AR Artur Rydzewski/Shutterstock.com

Covert camera captures pheasant cruelty

The RSPCA was called in after three men were caught on a surveillance camera torturing a pheasant, seemingly for their own entertainment.

A county council contacted the RSPCA to investigate after one of its covert cameras – which had been set up to tackle fly-tipping – captured footage of a man and two youths attacking a pheasant.

The footage showed three males getting out of a car and taking a live pheasant from the boot. The bird struggled to escape. Two of the men violently attacked the bird for several minutes, while the third man filmed the abuse on his phone. It is highly probable that the pheasant would have died after the sustained and brutal attack.

The RSPCA appealed for information on the males' identity and received an overwhelming and consistent response.

The magistrates commented on the "deliberate and gratuitous" abuse and the bird's "high level of suffering", calling it a "particularly brutal attack" and saying to the two youths: "...we hope you've both learnt a severe lesson from this process and what has happened to you."

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Three: one each

SENTENCES:
Man – 18 weeks' imprisonment suspended for two years; 250 hours' unpaid work requirement; £350 costs.
Both youths – six-month referral order; £100 costs.



▼ Three men were filmed violently attacking a pheasant.



Main photo: WildMedia/Shutterstock.com

Cat dies in washing machine while youths stand by

A young cat suffocated to death after she was shut in a washing machine overnight.



▲ A vet explained that Bubbles (above) would have suffocated over four to eight hours when trapped in the washing machine.



After spending an evening with two teenage friends, the owner of a young tortoiseshell-coloured cat, Bubbles, went to bed, leaving them in the lounge with his pet.

Bubbles was shut in the kitchen but she scratched at the kitchen door. They threw her to each other before one of them put her in the washing machine and closed the door. It is thought that Bubbles was left in the machine for around 10 hours.

The next morning, her owner asked where she was and his friends laughed. He found Bubbles dead in the washing machine – her eyes were white and her tongue was hanging out. His friends blamed each other and kept changing their stories. One moved her mouth, like a puppet's, saying: "Look she's alive, her mouth is moving," and later threw her body into a bin.

The cat's suffering

A veterinary surgeon calculated that Bubbles would have survived for between four and eight hours in the machine before dying. Each breath would have increased

the carbon dioxide levels and decreased the amount of oxygen available to her. As the level of carbon dioxide increased, her level of discomfort would have increased, causing an unpleasant sensation leading to confusion, dizziness, coma and eventual death.

Failure to act

In court, one of the friends pleaded guilty. He accepted that because he had not taken action to free the cat, he had caused her suffering. This led to the withdrawal of proceedings against the other defendant.

OFFENCE:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:

One youth pleaded guilty, leading to the withdrawal of proceedings against the other

CONVICTION:

One

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping all animals for five years; four-month Detention Training Order; £200 compensation to cat's owner.

Youth offenders: balancing rehabilitation and prosecution

Although the RSPCA's prosecution policy recognises that young people should be diverted from the criminal justice system wherever possible, we may prosecute very serious offences. Even in those cases, however, rehabilitation and intervention can still play their part, as can be seen from the two cases on these pages.

The youth in Bubbles' case was given a Detention Training Order, which is a custodial sentence for 12 to 17 year olds. It combines detention with training and is used for young people who commit a serious offence or several offences.

The offender spends half the sentence in custody and half supervised by the youth offending team when back out in the community. It includes a significant amount of training and education in a bid to help young people stop offending when their sentence is finished.

As part of his sentence, Prince's owner was given an 18-month rehabilitation order, which included Making a Change, a five-day course run by the local justice area that aims to change a youth offender's thinking and, in this case, his attitude towards animals in particular.

Prince finally finds his happy ending

An upsetting sequence of cruelty was uncovered when a teenager photographed his abuse of his dog, Prince.

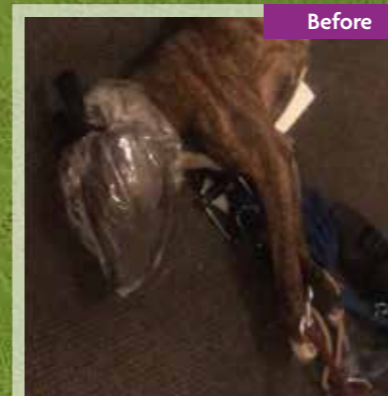
A catalogue of animal abuse was discovered when a photograph came to light of a dog bound and hung by his hind legs with a plastic bag over his head. Forensic examination showed that the image had been taken by the phone of his young owner. Luckily, the dog, Prince, survived the suffocation.

However, this incident was just a small part of the youth's ill treatment of Prince and other animals. Two witnesses had seen many instances of similar abuse first hand, while one of them had also seen videos of abuse on the youth's phone. The police seized Prince and a number of other animals.

Known to the authorities

The investigating RSPCA inspector had a meeting with police and psychiatrists to try to address the youth's behaviour, but although he was already known to the authorities for other offences involving animals, only the RSPCA pursued his prosecution.

Some months later, the youth was seen on CCTV poisoning some fish by pouring salt and pepper into their tank. All five fish



Before



After

died. The water in the tank was later tested and found to be "off the pH scale".

The RSPCA summonsed the youth for his mistreatment of Prince and the fish. The investigating inspector said: "In my 20-year career I have never dealt with someone as frightening and dangerous as this young individual."

The magistrates stated they were gravely concerned about the youth and his pattern of offending and that his attitude towards animals was extremely worrying. However, they explained they were conscious of their sentencing objectives in the Youth Court, the welfare of the youth, his circumstances, and the fact that the youth offending service genuinely felt there was hope for change with him.

◀ Despite awful abuse, Prince survived.

A new beginning

There was a happy ending – and a new beginning – to Prince's story as he was rehomed with a loving new owner and is now living the life he deserves.

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9; Criminal Damage Act 1971

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Four

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping animals for life; 18-month youth rehabilitation order; five-day Making a Change programme; 60 hours' unpaid work requirement; £400 costs deferred until the defendant's 18th birthday.

Compassion shown in the worst of circumstances

When the owner of a large number of horses was suffering from ill health and could no longer look after his animals properly, RSPCA inspectors spent many days and nights working to rescue the animals, while demonstrating compassion for the owner.



Before

RSPCA inspectors repeatedly visited a man who claimed he could cope with looking after his 69 horses even though he was in poor health and unsteady on his feet, and had very little in the way of financial resources. Unfortunately, despite advice from the inspectors on how to meet his horses' needs, a warning notice, regular visits and practical help, the situation deteriorated to such an extent that prosecution was unavoidable.

Throughout the case our inspectors demonstrated compassion and understanding as they recognised the man wasn't deliberately harming the animals but that his situation had spiralled out of control.

- ▲ The owner was keeping his horses in unacceptable conditions.
- ▼ One of the rehomed horses with her foal.

Serious neglect

When the man was given a warning notice, it was explained to him what was wrong and what he needed to do to meet his responsibilities towards his animals. He said he understood what was required. He was asked to call us for assistance before letting circumstances deteriorate to a point where his horses suffered.

We then received a complaint that one of the man's mares had an untreated broken leg, and advised him to call out a veterinary surgeon immediately. The vet advised him that the mare needed euthanasing, but the owner said he wanted a second opinion. When our inspectors arrived, the man told them he'd shot the mare himself. Her foal was later put to sleep as she was suffering.

The inspectors found multiple hazards in the man's fields including barbed wire, farm equipment and plastic wrapping.



After

The grazing was poor and there was no supplementary feed. Many horses were in such poor condition their ribs could be seen through their winter coats. Several were infested with lice and many hadn't had their hooves trimmed in years. Five badly decaying horse carcasses were discovered and there was a pile of equine bones nearby.

Caring for the horses

Our inspectors arranged for bales of haylage to be delivered to feed the horses. The following week, on a return visit, the inspectors saw some of the haylage still sitting in the yard, waiting to be put out for the horses.

▲ Surviving horses have been rehomed.

The vet identified a number of horses that needed to be removed. This was done gradually, either following seizure by the police or through the man signing them over to the RSPCA. On each visit, further issues were discovered, leading to 35 horses being removed during the investigation.

The neglect was so serious that it was necessary to prosecute in this case. Many of the man's horses had suffered over a period of time. Some needed significant care to recover, while others died or were put to sleep. Another 25 horses were removed as part of his

sentence, making 60 horses removed in total. The RSPCA and other equine charities settled the surviving animals in new homes.

Help from the RSPCA

The prosecuting solicitor commented: "... throughout [the case inspector] has dealt with [the defendant] most compassionately and with understanding of his difficulties. She was supportive of him at court and clearly has looked out for his welfare during this prosecution. I believe she has been of significant credit to the RSPCA in this case."

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Four

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping, dealing and transporting equines for 10 years; 12-weeks' imprisonment suspended for one year; £300 costs.



After

Gratuitous violence by farrier captured on camera

A trusted professional abused an animal in his care.

A farrier with more than 20 years of professional experience was caught on CCTV punching and kicking a horse and repeatedly jabbing him in the abdomen with the sharp end of a pair of pliers.

The police passed the case to the RSPCA to investigate. A veterinary surgeon reviewed the footage and provided evidence that the horse would have suffered unnecessarily, both mentally and physically.

Blaming the horse

When interviewed, the farrier tried to defend his actions by claiming the animal was being difficult. He said he didn't kick the horse viciously and the animal was trying his patience. He appeared to be trying to blame the horse for the sustained attack.

However, the footage showed the farrier made no attempt to talk to, stroke or

reassure the horse and at no time was the horse's behaviour difficult. The horse has since been shod by a different farrier without difficulty.

Supervision required

In addition to his sentence, the court said the man can only continue to work as a farrier if he is supervised at all times.

OFFENCE:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:

Guilty

CONVICTION:

One

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping, dealing or transporting equines for three years; six-month curfew with electronic tag; £300 costs.



▲ CCTV footage showed the farrier ill treating the horse.

Tip off leads RSPCA to pigs suffering serious neglect

A farmer was sentenced to 18 weeks' imprisonment and disqualified from keeping animals for 15 years following a harrowing case of pig neglect. He had more than 100 pigs in his care.



Our inspectors visited a pig farm after an anonymous letter and photographs were sent to an RSPCA animal centre.

Many of the pigs were very thin and several were emaciated, with their ribs and spines clearly visible. Two dead pigs were in an advanced state of decay and pig bones were found in a pen. A young pig had got a leg caught in bailing twine and died. The smell at the farm was overpowering.



Several pig pens were connected to a water supply, however, all except one of the tanks were empty. The only tank containing water had the nipple drinker set too high for the young pigs to reach so only the older pigs could drink. When the young pigs were given access to water they fought among themselves to get to it.

▲ Inspectors could see the ribs and spines of pigs at the farm (top), while some had sadly died (above).

An independent veterinary surgeon assessed that 41 pigs were suffering and all 106 pigs were likely to suffer if their

circumstances did not change. He advised that 11 of the pigs should be euthanased.

During interview, the farmer said he had been aware that his pigs were losing weight and had changed their food. However, when they didn't improve he had failed to bring in a vet. He was aware there were dead pigs on site and had known for a couple of days that some of the pigs were in such poor condition they should be put to sleep.

Pigs rescued

All the surviving pigs were signed into RSPCA care.

OFFENCES:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
10

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals for 15 years; 18 weeks' imprisonment; £600 costs.

Farm pigs cried out as their keepers attacked them

Three farm workers who repeatedly abused pigs in their care were disqualified from working with commercial livestock.

Cameras hidden by Animal Equity, an organisation that strives to end cruelty to farmed animals, captured three men repeatedly and viciously attacking pigs on a farm, including kicking them and jabbing them with pitchforks. The men swore and joked as the violence continued, while the pigs can be heard squealing as they are kicked. The footage was passed to the RSPCA to investigate.

The three men had been trained in pig management and handling. Ironically, the main culprit was an animal welfare officer who attended monthly meetings with a veterinary surgeon and farm management and then passed information on good animal welfare practice to other staff.

The RSPCA inspector said: "Their attitude towards the animals was appalling. At times the supervisor and animal welfare officer can be seen going into pens for

no apparent reason other than to attack the pigs."

When sentencing the three men, the judge commented: "Let me be very clear that the footage of the offences that you three have committed is sickening to watch. These were deliberate and gratuitous attempts to cause suffering – it was ill-treatment in a commercial context. For people who have worked in this industry for many years, you should be ashamed."

The farm's reaction

The farm's directors reported the matter to the RSPCA and cooperated fully with our investigation. They had acted as soon as they were made aware of the issues – and before RSPCA involvement – to ensure that access to the animals was removed from the staff members involved. They then removed the men from the company.

▼ Pigs are highly intelligent and sociable animals.

► CCTV footage showed the farm workers going into the pens just to attack the pigs.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEAS:
All three men – guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Three: one each

SENTENCES:
All three men – disqualified from keeping, dealing or transporting commercial livestock species indefinitely; eight weeks' imprisonment suspended for 12 months; 100 hours' unpaid work requirement; £500 costs.



Police slavery inquiry uncovers animal abuse

When a police inquiry into modern slavery turned up mobile phone footage containing images of animal abuse, an inspector from the RSPCA's Special Operations Unit (SOU) investigated, resulting in three offenders being successfully prosecuted.



Case 1 During their investigation, police officers discovered a video clip on a mobile phone showing a man chasing a cockerel with a metre-long skewer or knife, before catching him, holding him upside down by his feet, and beating him severely enough for his bones to break.

The cockerel was struck at least seven times before he appeared to be dead. The man then struck the bird another 10 times before tossing him to the ground.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:
Found guilty in absence

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping, dealing and transporting any animal for five years; 18 weeks' imprisonment; £750 costs.

Case 2 The police seized a phone, which contained two videos of a man baiting rabbits in his back garden in front of children.

The first video showed the man putting a wild rabbit in front of a lurcher puppy, encouraging the rabbit to run, then releasing the puppy. The man then gave the rabbit to a child and the child and puppy played tug of war with the body. His girlfriend filmed it all. A second video showed the man encouraging two lurcher puppies to chase a wild rabbit. The rabbit was caught and mauled by the dogs.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:
Guilty

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals for two years; 12 weeks' imprisonment suspended for 24 months; 80 hours' unpaid work requirement; £300 costs.



Case 3 Evidence gathered from the previous two cases led our SOU inspector to a man involved in cockfighting, rabbit baiting and coursing.

While accompanying the police on a warrant, the inspector found a dog collapsed on a bed of hay, panting. She was emaciated and suffering from a large ulcerated mass, and cried out in pain when attempts were made to move her. The dog was euthanased by a veterinary surgeon to end her suffering.

When interviewed, the man said he knew his dog would be put to sleep if he had taken her to a vet so he was waiting for her to die naturally. She had not been seen by a vet for three years.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEA:
Guilty

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping animals for five years; 12 weeks' imprisonment suspended for 24 months; £300 costs.



RSPCA turns to the latest in forensics testing to help secure convictions

When there are question marks over how an animal has died, the RSPCA will work with university pathology departments to gain conclusive evidence of cause of death. In this case, a forensic test used for the first time by the RSPCA secured convictions against a man who denied drowning his dog in a canal.

The police asked the RSPCA to investigate after finding a dog's body floating in a canal with a chain around her body and a heavy weight attached.

Post-mortem and tests

A post-mortem examination revealed the dog had been suffering from a lung disease for a number of weeks. She had two stab wounds to her abdomen, though these were not thought to be the cause of death, and bruising to her body in the pattern of the chain attached to her, meaning she was alive when the chain was attached. The advancement of decomposition showed her body had been in the water for around three weeks.

As it was suspected the dog had drowned, a sample of the canal water was sent to Liverpool University to test for diatoms (see box), along with samples of her bone marrow. The results came back positive, concluding that the dog was alive when she went in the water – approximately 200 metres from where her owner lived.

Investigating the owner

During interview, the owner claimed his dog had died and he had buried her in woodland, so he had no idea how she had ended up in the canal weighed down with chains. His account was at odds with the post-mortem and diatoms test, which confirmed that she died from drowning and so couldn't have died beforehand. The owner was successfully prosecuted for his appalling treatment of his dog.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

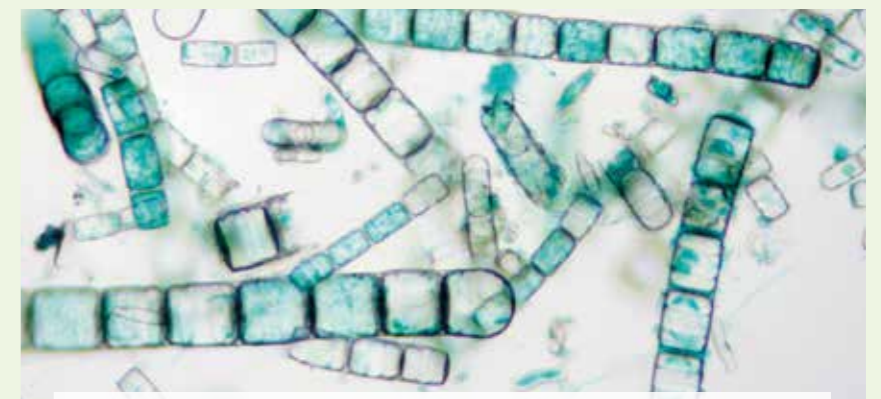
PLEAS:
Not guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Three

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping, dealing or transporting animals for 10 years; 10 weeks' imprisonment suspended for 12 months; £300 costs.



▲ Forensic tests proved this dog was alive when she went into the water.



Diatoms

Diagnosing drowning after the event based on post-mortem is incredibly difficult and although a post-mortem may be strongly suggestive it is very rarely definitive. With testing for diatoms (single-celled algae), we now have a way of proving that an animal's heart was beating when they entered fresh water and hence that death was through drowning. Diatoms only get inside the organs of an animal if they are alive when immersed in fresh water, as algae from the water is inhaled into the lungs and passes into the bloodstream, ending up in the bone marrow.

Photo: egw/Shutterstock.com

Transforming the lives of people and their animals

The nature of our work means we often come across some very sad stories, but all too often the public doesn't get to see what a difference the RSPCA can make to people's lives, as well as to the lives of the animals they keep. Indeed, compassion for the individuals we deal with is one of the most important qualities of an RSPCA inspector, as demonstrated by these two cases.

When the RSPCA was introduced to a vulnerable woman who was a hoarder of objects and animals, the inspector treated her with compassion and patience, and this helped her to make a fresh start.

The woman had been known to local agencies for a few years. With help, things would improve for a while but then quickly spiral out of control. On the RSPCA's initial visit, the house was dirty and full of clutter and there was a strong smell of ammonia.

Birds were kept in filthy cages and three dogs lived on the stairs as there was

no room for them. The owner became very argumentative when given advice. The inspector gave her a warning notice and left some food and bedding for the dogs. She also left her card and asked the woman to call if she needed help.

When she returned, the woman had made a small amount of room for the three dogs and the house was cleaner but still cluttered and smelling of ammonia. The inspector visited a couple more times but the woman wasn't at home, so she left food and bedding outside.

A turn for the worse
On the inspector's next visit, she

discovered that conditions inside the house had worsened. There was so much mess everywhere it was hard to move about and faeces was smeared on the floor. The smell of ammonia was overpowering and she found it hard to breathe. She called a veterinary surgeon, police and colleagues for assistance. They discovered two cages in the living room, one on top of the other, with three puppies in the top cage and two large dogs in the lower. Another dog was running around on top of the clutter.

In the kitchen they found a small cage holding two finches and a canary and more bird cages containing parrots. One had cut a foot and there was blood all over the cage. The cages were filthy; there was little food and the water was dirty.

When they opened the back door, two dogs came running in – they had been locked in a tiny, cluttered area. Another two dogs were kept in the back garden without shelter, and there were more in the front garden.

The vet advised that the animals couldn't stay in the house as they were likely to suffer. When the woman heard this, she started screaming and swearing and tried to lock the front door. Our inspector attempted to calm her down, as the police were going to arrest her, and spoke to the social workers out of concern for the woman's welfare.

Our inspector kept in touch with the woman's daughter, who said she'd had a long talk with her mother and she had agreed to clean up the house. Her mother attended a voluntary interview with her solicitor present, before signing over a number of animals. She accepted an RSPCA caution.

◀ **Robbie (front) was found in a cage with two other puppies. There was another cage of dogs stacked below it.**

Good news

A few weeks later, the woman had cleaned her house, with the help of neighbours, and there was new carpet and a new sofa. The housing officer explained that she would be allowed to keep two animals in the property in 12 to 18 months' time if she kept her house clean. The woman wanted to keep one of the dogs, explaining that her neighbour would look after him until he could live with her again, as she wanted to walk him every day.

The woman has been keeping on top of things and her house remains clean, clear and tidy. She apologised to the inspector for swearing at her, and the inspector says she is like a different person.

After



▶ **Robbie has been rehomed and is enjoying life with his companion.**



When police contacted the RSPCA for help after discovering a retired woman living in squalid conditions with her two Labradors, the empathy shown by a newly qualified inspector not only brought about a huge improvement to the welfare of the woman's dogs but also greatly improved her quality of life.

The woman's house was full of rubbish, smelled badly, and there was no heating or hot water. She spent her days in one chair. However, it was clear to the inspector that the woman loved her dogs dearly – and she was living in the same poor conditions as her dogs.

The woman struggled with her mental health. She had no immediate family and hadn't had a visitor in years. As

our inspector helped her, she said a weight was being lifted off her shoulders and she could begin to get better.

Turning her life around

Her dogs were taken to a safe place and the woman stayed in a hotel. Each day she came back to the house to clear rubbish, and arranged for cleaners and skips. She even had her kitchen and bathroom refitted. She seemed desperate to change

her life around and was eager to get her dogs back. It was clear nothing would be gained from a prosecution and the risk of re-offending was considered to be low, so the RSPCA cautioned her.

A bright future

Our inspector has remained in regular contact with the woman, making sure that she and her dogs are keeping well. She has invited the inspector round to her home to show her the progress she has made, and she now goes out every day to walk her dogs. Her outlook on life has been transformed and her dogs' welfare assured.



Before

Operational statistics 2019

Table 1: General RSPCA facts and figures for England and Wales

	2019	2018	2017
Calls to 24-hour cruelty line	1,218,364	1,175,193	1,037,435
Cases reported to RSPCA Prosecutions ¹¹	1,179	1,182	1,309
Suspects reported to RSPCA Prosecutions	1,685	1,703	1,776

Footnote:

11 A case may concern one or multiple suspects.

Prosecution statistics 2019

All tables relate to England and Wales

Table 2: Prosecution outcomes ^{2.1}

	2019	2018	2017
Defendants convicted (youth offenders)	661 (10)	747 (15)	696 (8)
Convictions secured in the magistrates' courts (youth offenders)	1,425 (18)	1,678 (20)	1,492 (25)
Convictions secured in the Crown courts (youth offenders)	7	15	1
Convictions following guilty pleas	1,003	1,255	1,105
Convictions following not guilty pleas and trials	422	423	381
Defendants with proceedings wholly discontinued or withdrawn by the RSPCA prior to or at trial ^{2.2}	32	48	46
Defendants with all offences dismissed after trial	12	12	20
<i>of which</i>			
Defendants dismissed – no case to answer ^{2.3}	3	1	0
Defendants with proceedings wholly discontinued by the CPS following a request to the DPP to intervene	0	0	1
Prosecution success rate ^{2.4}	93.7%	92.5%	91.2%
Offenders cautioned ^{2.5}	430	518	438
Offences for which cautioned ^{2.5}	552	667	614
Suspects reported but not cautioned or prosecuted because evidential test and/or public interest tests not met	514	595	531

Footnotes:

2.1 Some outcomes from 2019 will relate to persons reported in previous years; some persons reported in 2019 will not have outcomes until 2020 or later. Prosecution outcomes are calculated on the basis of defendants, not cases.

2.2 Consideration of the evidence and the public interest may lead to proceedings being discontinued or withdrawn at any time before a trial. Discontinuance usually occurs in advance of a hearing; withdrawals usually occur at court.

2.3 Cases in which the defendant pleads not guilty and the prosecution evidence is heard but proceedings are dismissed by the magistrates without hearing the defence case.

2.4 Total defendants convicted as a percentage of all defendants.

2.5 Formal non-statutory caution – offence has been committed but it's not in the public interest to prosecute.

Table 3: Convictions under the following legislation

	2019	2018	2017
Animal Welfare Act 2006	1,351	1,626	1,434
Protection of Badgers Act 1992	25	8	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	17	20	26
Magistrates' Courts Act 1980	6	4	1
Hunting Act 2004	6	0	10
Criminal Law Act 1977	4	6	3
Fraud Act 2006	3	8	14
Deer Act 1991	3	0	0
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991	2	1	2
Criminal Damage Act 1971	2	1	0
Breeding of Dogs Act 1973	2	0	0
Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976	2	0	0
Pet Animals Act 1951	1	1	0
Farriers (Registration) Act 1975	1	0	0
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	0	1	1
Pests Act 1954	0	1	0
Serious Crime Act 2007	0	1	0
Sexual Offences Act 2003	0	1	0

Table 4: Convictions for cruelty and neglect

	2019	2018	2017
Offences of cruelty contrary to the Animal Welfare Act 2006	1,341	1,626	1,434
<i>comprising of</i>			
Contrary to section 4 (causing unnecessary suffering)	757	876	821
Contrary to section 5 (mutilation)	3	1	0
Contrary to section 6 (tail docking)	2	1	0
Contrary to section 7 (administration of poison)	1	1	5
Contrary to section 8 (fighting)	0	17	15
Contrary to section 9 (duty to ensure welfare)	531	674	554
Contrary to section 34 (9) (breach of disqualification)	47	56	39

Table 5: Sentencing outcomes under all Acts ^{5.1, 5.2}

	2019	2018	2017
Prison sentences imposed on individuals	49	66	42
Suspended prison sentences imposed on individuals	143	159	179
Community sentences imposed on individuals	340	370	337
Fines imposed on individuals	201	247	206
Conditional discharges imposed on individuals	33	56	65
Absolute discharges imposed on individuals	1	0	0
Disqualification orders imposed on individuals under the Animal Welfare Act 2006	538	651	602

Footnotes:

5.1 One offender may have more than one sentence imposed.

5.2 A disqualification order can be imposed as a penalty in its own right, or it can be additional to any other penalty imposed.

Table 6: Appellant proceedings ^{6.1}

	2019	2018	2017
Total number of appeals	32	37	32
<i>of which</i>			
Appeals against conviction	2	0	6
Appeals against sentence	26	26	16
Appeals against both conviction and sentence	4	10	10
Appellants with all convictions quashed after appeal	0	1	0
Footnote: 6.1 Number of appeals determined in court.			
Appeals withdrawn/abandoned by appellant prior to or at an appeal hearing	7	10	12

Table 7: Number of convictions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 relating to: ^{71, 72}

	2019	2018	2017
Dogs	810	970	882
Cats	196	293	188
Equines	182	264	225
Exotics	64	57	43
Small mammals	50	85	78
Farm animals	43	12	25
Rabbits	37	38	48
Domestic fowl	36	23	52
Wild birds	10	13	7

Footnotes:

7.1 The number of animals above and the number of convictions recorded elsewhere may be different because one offence can relate to multiple animals, or multiple offences could have been committed in respect of one animal.

7.1 'Exotics' refers to snakes, monkeys, terrapins, parrots, etc.
 'Small mammals' refers to ferrets, guinea pigs, hamsters, mice, etc.
 'Farm animals' refers to cattle, goats, pigs, sheep, llamas, etc.
 'Domestic fowl' refers to chickens, ducks, geese, etc.
 'Wild birds' refers to owls, woodpeckers, birds of prey, robins, etc., under the control of man.

Table 8: Costs against the RSPCA

	2019	2018	2017
Costs awarded against the RSPCA following the dismissal of cases in the magistrates' court (cases/amount)	0/0	0/0	0/0
Costs awarded against the RSPCA following an appeal hearing (cases/amount)	0/0	0/0	0/0

Further explanatory notes:

- The figures shown in the statistical tables were correct at the time of compilation but may be subject to revision.
- Prosecution costs are subject to audit and audited figures are published in the *RSPCA Trustees' report and accounts*.

Table 9: DPP (CPS) referrals ⁹¹

	2019	2018	2017
Cases referred to DPP for intervention	2	5	2
Cases in which the DPP intervened to continue with the prosecution	0	0	0
Cases in which the DPP intervened to wholly discontinue the prosecution	0	0	0
Cases in which proceedings were partially discontinued by the CPS following a request to the DPP to intervene	0	0	1

Footnote:

9.1 Data based on the date of a CPS decision on a referral case.



The past year has seen many challenges, but also great promise and much hope. Prosecutions in Wales remain high and the nature of cases throughout 2019 continues to demonstrate the importance of the RSPCA's unique work on the frontline. Our contribution to animal welfare is also evolving and expanding through the successful rehabilitation and education of young people and the refining of our inspectors' role.

From pets to wildlife to farm animals, animals were subjected to treatment so harrowing last year the RSPCA had to take matters to the courtroom. As can be seen on page 37, where we hear of teenagers inflicting horrific abuse on a chicken, some of that cruelty was carried out by our younger citizens. We explore the reason for prosecution as well as the rehabilitation element of their sentences.

Yet we believe there is much reason for hope for the future. Many young people are taking part in the RSPCA's Great Debate initiative, which has its foundations in Wales and is one of our Generation Kind projects. This groundbreaking schools programme sees 11 to 14 year olds debate animal welfare in a competition, with the finals hosted in the Welsh and UK parliaments. We are already witnessing an increase in empathy, compassion and understanding in the young people we reach through the programme, and we hope they will become the animal ambassadors of the future, supporting our mission of creating a caring world where all animals are respected.

Nevertheless, as the breadth of cases on the frontline in Wales over the past year highlights, the work of RSPCA

inspectors remains as important as ever. A reporting project that could pave the way for the Welsh Government to give RSPCA inspectors greater powers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 concluded at the end of 2019, and discussions on its possible implementation continue. This change could better equip our inspectors and positively transform how they work to investigate animal cruelty in Wales.

Our Generation Kind programme and the inspectorate powers project lay the foundations for an exciting period of change for the RSPCA in Wales. Amid these changes, of course, our hard-working and caring inspectors will continue to respond to emergencies and protect animals in need.



▲ School children taking part in the RSPCA's Great Debate initiative.

Rescued dogs find a forever home together

Two young dogs chained and caged to keep them out of a family's way are now enjoying life together in the countryside.



Before

▲ Lady was shockingly thin and neglected.
▼ Bruno was locked in a small cage with no water or bedding.



▼ Lady and Bruno enjoying the sunshine.

The RSPCA discovered two neglected and restrained dogs in a family house. Lady, a Staffordshire bull terrier-cross, was found curled up in a ball on the floor, tied on a short tether to a stairlift. She was emaciated, shaking and extremely nervous and at first the inspector was concerned she wouldn't even be able to stand. Bruno, a French bulldog, was found locked in a dirty dog cage with no water or bedding. He was sitting in faeces, his claws were overgrown and his coat was stained with urine. There was discharge from his eyes and nose.

The owner let the inspector take the dogs to a veterinary surgery. As soon as Lady was out of the house, she began to drink dirty rainwater.

After examination, the vet concluded that Lady was suffering and Bruno had not had his needs met. Lady ate and

drank ravenously while at the vet's. Bruno received treatment for his eyes and, later, for nasal discharge.

In interview, the owner admitted Lady was often chained up by the stairs because the family didn't like her jumping around. She wouldn't tell the inspector how long Bruno had been caged.

After care and a special diet for weight gain, Lady and Bruno were rehomed together with a caring family who are giving them the life they deserve.

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Four

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping all animals for five years; £180 fine; £400 costs.



After

Man caught fly-tipping unwanted pet rabbits

Two domestic rabbits, thrown away by their owner, were saved by an observant member of the public.

Footage from a privately owned CCTV camera caught a man pulling into a layby, getting out of his car and throwing two rabbits into undergrowth before leaving the scene. Clips show the rabbits somersaulting several times through the air after the man picked them up by their ears and threw them into bushes. He then chucked a small cage after them and drove off.

The horrified witness managed to catch and confine the rabbits before contacting the RSPCA and local authority.

A veterinary surgeon gave the rabbits pain relief and confirmed that both animals were caused unnecessary suffering – the ears are a sensitive part of a rabbit's body and lifting a rabbit by their ears, let alone throwing them, causes pain.

When interviewed, the man said he had to get rid of the rabbits because his landlord had complained about the smell. It also became clear the rabbits had been permanently kept in the inadequate cage and hadn't been let out to exercise.

The RSPCA successfully prosecuted the man for causing unnecessary suffering and not meeting the animals' needs, while the local authority prosecuted him for fly-tipping and for this he was fined £500.

Both rabbits were successfully rehomed. Our inspector said: "There was absolutely no need to treat the rabbits so badly or to abandon them in this way – lots of organisations will take in animals when they're no longer wanted."

OFFENCES:

Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:

Guilty

CONVICTIONS:

Three

SENTENCE:

Disqualified from keeping all animals for 10 years; eight weeks' imprisonment; £400 costs.

▼ CCTV images capture the moment the man threw his rabbits into the undergrowth.



▲ The rabbits had both been kept in this tiny cage.



▲ The animals appeared scared after their ordeal.



Daytripper kills gull



▲ The man's violent attack killed the gull.
▼ A lesser black-backed gull.

While at the seaside, a daytripper reacted violently to a gull knocking his chips out of his hand.

A man on a day out at the beach attacked a gull trying to take his chips – grabbing the bird by the leg and smashing the body several times into a wall. The lesser black-backed gull died.

The man's violent reaction shocked bystanders, including children. When a mother challenged him about attacking the gull in front of her children he told her they needed to learn about vermin. He was later seen laughing about the incident.

When later interviewed by an RSPCA inspector, the man claimed it had been an accident and he said he thought his actions were proportionate.

OFFENCE:
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 s1

PLEA:
Not guilty

CONVICTION:
One

SENTENCE:
12-week curfew requirement; £750 costs.

Main photo: Martin Fowler/Shutterstock.com



Shocking discovery in holdall

An emaciated, diabetic dog was found in a holdall in an “unimaginable” condition.



▲ Molly was emaciated and had lost most of her fur due to her owner's cruel neglect.

When an RSPCA inspector looked inside a small holdall, she was shocked to discover an elderly Jack Russell terrier in a terrible condition – emaciated, unresponsive and shivering, with virtually no fur over her body and legs.

The dog, Molly, was unable to lift her head and found it almost impossible to eat and drink. A veterinary surgeon examined her and gave her a body condition score of just one out of nine. Sadly, Molly was so unwell that the vet had no choice but to put her to sleep to prevent further suffering.

Molly's owner appeared indifferent to her condition. He had ignored the dog's weight loss and left her diabetes untreated, which caused further complications.

OFFENCES:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4 and s9

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
Two

SENTENCE:
Disqualified from keeping all animals for three years; £200 fine; £100 costs.

Providing care and education for young offenders

When two teenagers were prosecuted for an act of gratuitous and extreme violence, part of their sentence included referral to an RSPCA initiative, implemented by youth offending teams, which is designed to help young people see the impact of cruelty on animals.



▲ Delila (back) in her owner's garden, before the attack.

Two teenagers stole a domestic chicken from a garden before killing the bird in a prolonged and violent attack. They took the bird, called Delila, out of her coop, wrapped her in a jacket and went to a friend's house. There they attacked Delila – kicking, hitting, clubbing and burning her, before killing her.

Despite a veterinary surgeon describing the incident as “gratuitous torture” and confirming that the bird would have suffered “indescribable pain”, the police interviewed the boys only in relation to the theft of the chicken. However, the RSPCA then investigated it as an animal welfare offence.

Delila's owner and her young children were caused considerable distress by the youths' actions, with the owner saying: “Delila was very tame and friendly and she loved to be petted... I'm so grateful to all those at the RSPCA who helped get justice for her. She wasn't just a chicken to us, she was a part of

our family – incredibly loved – and she'll be sorely missed.”

As this was an extremely serious case involving deliberate and gratuitous violence, prosecution was clearly in the public interest. The two youths – aged 15 and 16 – were sentenced to a 12-month referral order, which included participating in the RSPCA's Breaking the Chain intervention programme.

The court heard that both boys now considered the incident repulsive, and they spoke up in court in person to apologise.

OFFENCE:
Animal Welfare Act 2006 s4

PLEAS:
Guilty

CONVICTIONS:
One each

SENTENCES:
Each youth – disqualified from keeping all animals for a year; 12-month referral order, including the RSPCA's Breaking the Chain programme; £200 costs.

Breaking the chain of animal cruelty

The RSPCA's Breaking the Chain initiative explores and tackles the issues surrounding young people and animal cruelty. It was produced with the support of teachers and youth offending teams and aims to nurture a sense of empathy in young people, helping them understand the impact of cruelty on animals.

In this case, the youth offending team worked through the programme with the two boys.

One of the boys commented that he has learnt that abuse covers all animals, not just cats and dogs – he had felt that a chicken didn't count. The youth officer said the boys reacted very well to an RSPCA inspector wrapping up the session, who also talked to them about how to help animals.



▲ Young people spend time looking at the effect of abuse on animals, and how to help them.

Photo: Posed by models

Prosecution statistics for Wales

Table 1: Headline statistics

	2019	2018	2017
Cases reported to RSPCA Prosecutions ¹¹	95	111	121
Suspects reported to RSPCA Prosecutions	136	173	164
Defendants convicted (youth offenders)	60 (2)	80 (3)	67 (0)
Convictions secured in the magistrates' courts	122	164	148
Convictions following guilty pleas	108	142	113
Convictions following not guilty pleas and trials	14	22	35
Defendants with proceedings wholly discontinued or withdrawn by RSPCA prior to or at trial ¹²	3	8	6
Defendants with all offences dismissed after trial	3	2	1
<i>of which</i>			
Defendants dismissed – no case to answer ¹³	0	1	0
Prosecution success rate ¹⁴	90.9%	88.8%	90.5%
Offenders cautioned ¹⁵	38	41	52
Offences for which cautioned ¹⁵	50	48	68
Suspects reported but not cautioned or prosecuted because evidential and/or public interest tests not met	36	48	44

Footnotes:

- 1.1 A case may concern one or multiple suspects.
- 1.2 Consideration of the evidence and the public interest may lead to proceedings being discontinued or withdrawn at any time before a trial. Discontinuance usually occurs in advance of a hearing; withdrawals usually occur at court.
- 1.3 Cases in which the defendant pleads not guilty and the prosecution evidence is heard but proceedings are dismissed by the magistrates without hearing the defence case.
- 1.4 Total defendants convicted as a percentage of all defendants.
- 1.5 Formal non-statutory caution – offence has been committed but it's not in the public interest to prosecute.

Table 2: Convictions for cruelty and neglect

	2019	2018	2017
Offences of cruelty contrary to the Animal Welfare Act 2006	102	154	148
<i>comprising of</i>			
Contrary to section 4 (causing unnecessary suffering)	55	96	85
Contrary to section 5 (mutilation)	0	0	0
Contrary to section 6 (tail docking)	0	0	0
Contrary to section 7 (administration of poison)	0	0	0
Contrary to section 8 (fighting)	0	7	0
Contrary to section 9 (duty to ensure welfare)	43	48	58
Contrary to section 34 (9) (breach of disqualification)	4	3	5

Table 3: Sentencing outcomes under all Acts ^{3.1, 3.2}

	2019	2018	2017
Prison sentences imposed on individuals	7	7	2
Suspended prison sentences imposed on individuals	17	16	13
Community sentences imposed on individuals	22	37	37
Fines imposed on individuals	29	37	14
Conditional discharges imposed on individuals	1	1	8
Absolute discharges imposed on individuals	0	0	0
Disqualification orders imposed on individuals under the Animal Welfare Act 2006	39	65	53

Footnotes:

- 3.1 One offender may have more than one sentence imposed.
- 3.2 A disqualification order can be imposed as a penalty in its own right, or it can be additional to any other penalty imposed.

Table 4: Appellant proceedings ^{4.1}

	2019	2018	2017
Total number of appeals	5	6	2
<i>of which</i>			
Appeals against conviction	0	0	0
Appeals against sentence	5	5	1
Appeals against both conviction and sentence	0	1	1
Appellants with all convictions quashed after appeal	0	0	0
Footnote: 4.1 Number of appeals determined in court.			
Appeals withdrawn/abandoned by appellant prior to or at an appeal hearing	0	1	0

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Table 5: Number of convictions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 relating to: ^{5.1, 5.2}

	2019	2018	2017
Dogs	43	91	107
Equines	26	21	17
Cats	11	37	11
Domestic fowl	10	0	6
Small mammals	9	7	16
Rabbits	7	4	5
Exotics	1	1	0
Wild birds	0	2	0
Farm animals	0	1	3

Footnotes:

- 5.1 The number of animals above and the number of convictions recorded elsewhere may be different because one offence can relate to multiple animals, or multiple offences could have been committed in respect of one animal.
- 5.2 'Domestic fowl' refers to chickens, ducks, geese, etc. 'Small mammals' refers to ferrets, guinea pigs, hamsters, mice, etc. 'Exotics' refers to snakes, monkeys, terrapins, parrots, etc. 'Wild birds' refers to owls, woodpeckers, birds of prey, robins, etc., under the control of man. 'Farm animals' refers to cattle, goats, pigs, sheep, llamas, etc.

Further explanatory notes:

- The figures shown in the statistical tables were correct at the time of compilation but may be subject to revision.
- Prosecution costs are subject to audit and audited figures are published in the *RSPCA Trustees' report and accounts*.