

The Second International Companion Animal Welfare Conference

by Elizabeth Oliver



The First International Companion Animal Welfare Conference was held in October 1996 in Budapest, the Second was held this May in Bratislava.

In the intervening two years many changes for the better including new legislation, more government cooperation and a growing awareness of the need for animal welfare amongst young people, have been made especially in Eastern bloc countries. For example in Slovakia the host country for the conference, Slobda Zvierat - a volunteer organization which only formed two years ago - already has a well-organized shelter, a 24 hour emergency telephone line and ambulance service, all manned by a 1000 enthusiastic young volunteers. When we think about animal welfare we must consider what is best for the animals involved. Sometime we react emotionally, feeling we should save an animal at all cost. But quality of life should always be our main consideration not merely life itself.

ARK's Director Elizabeth Oliver attended the conference and will be writing about the different issues discussed, including early neutering, ID systems, controlling feral cat populations, rehoming rescued animals and legislation.

Part 1 Animal Welfare and the Law: Enforcement - the Crucial Component.

(Notes taken from a speech by Mike Radford, School of Law, University of East Anglia, UK.)

A new Animal Protection Law is now under review in Japan, hopefully to replace the current inefficient and un-enforceable Animal Control and Protection Law of 1973. We all hope sincerely that those drawing up this new Law will get it right this time and ensure it is really for the protection of animals. But as Mike Radford points out, 'although legislation is essential for the protection of animals and the promotion of their welfare, it is not an end in itself. Legislation on its own does not change anything, it has to be enforced.'

When the first animal protection law was passed in England in 1822, originally to prevent cruelty to cattle brought to market, it made no mention of how it was to be enforced or who was to enforce it. The man who had instigated this law, Richard Martin had to patrol the streets himself to make sure the law was being enforced. He also had to bring offenders before the courts by means of private prosecution. Eventually because this was too much for one man, other like-minded people joined to form what would become Britain's largest and most well-known animal welfare society, the RSPCA, (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.) The RSPCA through its body of trained inspectors, specialist veterinarians and with cooperation of the police, investigates hundreds of cases of cruelty every year, often bringing offenders before the courts, where they may be fined or banned from keeping animals or even imprisoned.

What should enforcement do? What are its functions?

- * it informs people about the law's existence
- * it educates people as to their legal responsibilities towards animals
- * it is instrumental in raising and maintaining standards
- * it can prevent animal abuse
- * it enables animals to be removed from the source of abuse
- * it upholds the law by demonstrating that the courts will punish those who disobey
- * it identifies problems and weaknesses in the legislation which can form the basis of reform in the law

Who is responsible for enforcement?

The legislation should make this clear.

Those who have the responsibility of enforcement should be given the necessary powers to perform their function.

What powers should these be?

Prosecution through the courts is a costly and lengthy process. Enforcing powers, whether the police, local authorities, animal welfare societies, veterinarians or combinations of these, should also consider what possible steps can be taken short of prosecution; for example: advice, warnings or formal cautions. It is important that those cases which do come before the courts are the most serious and receive the most publicity. This in itself can act a deterrent.

Mike Radford concludes: 'Legislation alone is never enough. It must be accompanied by effective enforcement. It is better to have a few laws that are properly enforced than a statute book stuffed full of legislation which, in practice, is simply ignored'.



RSPCA statistics for 1997

Number of inspectors: 307

Phone calls received (one call every 22 seconds): 1,397,516

Cruelty complaints investigated: 133,664

Rescues (animals trapped etc.): 8,255

Establishments (such as breeders, pets shops, farms etc.) inspected: 21,531

Prosecutions: 872

Convictions (often two or more people are prosecuted in one case): 2,650

Prison sentences: 57

Banning orders (from keeping animals again): 795

Defendants who should have been banned but were not: 261

