

# From Pets to Companion Animals

# 4

CHAPTER

*Researched by Martha C. Armstrong, Susan Tomasello, and Christyna Hunter*

## A Brief History of Shelters and Pounds

**A**nimal shelters in most U.S. communities bear little trace of their historical British roots. Early settlers, most from the British Isles, brought with them the English concepts of towns and town management, including the rules on keeping livestock. Each New England town, for example, had a common, a central grassy area to be used by all townspeople in any manner of benefit, including the grazing of livestock. As long as the livestock remained on the common, the animals could graze at will, but once the animal strayed onto private property or public thoroughfares, a “pound master” took the animal to the pound, a small stone-walled corral that was usually just a few feet away from the common. For a small fine, the owner was able to retrieve his stray livestock.

As the United States began to grow and as towns became more populated, urbanization brought a new type of stray to the city. Stray dogs allowed to roam the streets could present all types of problems: barking at and frightening working horses, creating sanitation problems, and biting passersby. The old stone-walled corrals were not appropriate for dogs. Instead unused warehouses or enclosed barns were employed.

Housed in crude pens or tied to hooks on the side of the wall, pound dogs stood little chance of escaping

their destiny: death by starvation, injury, gassing, or drowning. There were no adoption, or rehoming, programs and owners reclaimed few strays. And while early humanitarians, like Henry Bergh, founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and George Thorndike Angell, founder of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), were concerned about animal abuse, their focus was more on working animals—horses, in particular—than on the fate of stray dogs. It was through the efforts of Caroline Earle White, founder of the Women’s SPCA of Pennsylvania, that the fate of stray dogs began to change. White secured the first contract from a city to a humane society to operate a more humane pound or shelter for dogs and cats and implemented an adoption program, as well as more humane ways of housing, caring for, and, if need be, euthanizing the animals in the care of the SPCA.

### Shelters at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Expansion of urban life and contraction of agrarian interests created increased problems for city managers, including protecting the public’s health and safety. Stray dogs not only

harassed working horses, pedestrians, and shopkeepers, but also spread rabies and other zoonotic diseases.

In outlying areas, unchecked breeding of farm dogs and abandonment of city dwellers’ unwanted pets created packs of marauding dogs, which killed wildlife and livestock and posed significant health risks to humans and other animals.

State and local governments were forced to pass laws requiring dog owners to control their animals. Although laws that prohibited deliberate abuse of or cruelty to animals had passed in most states by the turn of the century, few states had laws that provided for the control of dogs beyond their owners’ property. Only later in the 1900s were laws requiring leashing and licensing of dogs passed throughout the United States and money allocated to hire dogcatchers and run pounds. Although some laws were passed strictly on the grounds of protecting public safety, most were tied to other laws that required dogs to be vaccinated against rabies and/or that provided additional penalties for a dog who killed livestock. A proliferation of local ordinances and by-laws were passed in the late 1930s and early 1940s to strengthen state animal control laws and to provide a revenue source to pay for animal control programs.

While most citizens did not want stray dogs roaming the streets, they also did not want the captured strays kept in facilities near their homes. The barking, howling, and fighting among hundreds of strays made pounds unpopular neighbors. As a result, the shelters were usually found near a locality's other dumping ground, the municipal landfill. Early municipal pounds were crudely constructed, lacking heat, cooling, and, in many instances, hot and cold running water. Animals entering a pound were rarely claimed, even more rarely adopted or rehomed, and normally destroyed within hours of arriving. Those who did have some sort of identification—a collar with a license or identification tag—were usually afforded an additional period of holding time before they were destroyed. Irregular cleanings and rarely disinfected cages provided ample opportunity for diseases to run rampant throughout pounds. Coupled with the fact that few strays had received any vaccinations against highly contagious diseases such as distemper, even the “lucky” owner-identified animal who escaped immediate destruction with his fellow strays would usually contract and succumb to disease shortly after entering the pound.

## **A Half Century of Progress: From Dog Pound to Animal Shelter**

After World War II, pounds underwent a massive transformation. Pet owners were no longer willing to let a concrete-block-and-wire building at the town dump represent their community's effort to house and care for homeless and stray animals. They wanted a place that humanely sheltered the animals under its roof, but they also demanded programs that were aimed at decreasing the homeless animal population and shelter staff trained to be more caring and professional in the care and treatment of animals.

While most large U.S. cities already were served by an SPCA, many of which ran shelters, smaller cities and rural communities were either underserved by the local SPCA or relied solely on municipal government to provide animal care and sheltering services for their community's animals. During the early 1950s, humane societies, animal rescue leagues, and other animal welfare groups proliferated. Many were created to fill a void in the locality they served. Others were formed to provide an alternative to a substandard municipal pound.

The new shelters were different not only in their look and location, but also in the programs they offered. They sought more to prevent animal control problems than to provide curative and punitive measures. Humane education, spaying and neutering, and differential licensing were part of the broad menu of services added to the new animal shelters' lists of programs provided to their communities.

As the traditional pound disappeared, the stereotypical dogcatcher followed right behind it. The days when a driver's license and the willingness to be bitten occasionally were the only prerequisites gave way; knowing a bit about animal behavior, animal first aid, conflict resolution, and legal procedures was now required. The new animal control officer was more physically fit than his or her predecessor, as well.

Training opportunities to professionalize the field were also increasing. The MSPCA offered training for executives and law enforcement officers in the early 1950s. The American Humane Association (AHA) launched a series of educational and training venues through universities, state federations, and local shelters. In the late 1970s, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) launched its Animal Control Academy in conjunction with the University of Alabama to provide certification to animal control officers. Several state animal control associations offered training through state law enforcement training institutes or academies.

## **Pound Seizure**

The conditions and location of the pound were not the only reasons for the formation of hundreds of new humane societies and animal welfare organizations. The proliferation of stray dogs shortly after World War II, the shortage of sheltering facilities, and the growth of government-funded biomedical research combined to bring about a new policy, pound seizure, which horrified many pet lovers. First passed in Minnesota and then pushed along by the National Society for Medical Research (NSMR) and local research organizations elsewhere, pound seizure laws required municipally run animal shelters or pounds to release unclaimed animals on demand to any accredited research facility or university that requested them.

Local humanitarians found pound seizure to be the antithesis of the true purpose of an animal shelter—to provide a safe haven for stray and lost animals. To avoid the law, local humane societies built their own shelters or contracted with municipalities to run their facilities. By agreeing to run the shelter under contract with the city or county or by establishing a separate facility, these organizations found that they were exempt from being forced to comply with pound seizure laws since they fell outside the definition of covered entities. The MSPCA was one of the first to challenge pound seizure laws by filing suit in court, stating that the Massachusetts law mandating pound seizure violated the mission of animal shelters. Although the case went all the way to the state's Supreme Judicial Court before a decision was finally rendered, the court's ruling still left the subject in limbo. The Court stated that the MSPCA did not have standing to sue, since the pound seizure laws applied only to municipally operated pounds or shelters. Since the MSPCA was a private, nonprofit organization that did not serve as a pound, it was not an aggrieved party.

The controversy surrounding pound seizure was not limited to the local

level. AHA found itself embroiled in the battle when legislation was proposed on the federal level that would have regulated the sale, care, and use of dogs and cats in medical research. Seeking to find common ground with the research community, AHA entered into an agreement with NSMR only to find that agreement later discarded. Some members of AHA's board of directors and staff were so angered by the executive director's decision to enter into any discussions that would allow shelter animals to go into research that they forced the issue onto the ballot of the general membership meeting in 1954. Although a membership battle on the issue was ultimately avoided, the dissidents who forced the issue left AHA and formed the National Humane Society, later renamed The Humane Society of the United States.

Thirty years later, The HSUS and AHA joined with nine other animal protection groups to form National ProPets, a coalition organized to overturn pound seizure on the state and local levels. The fight over pound seizure initially concentrated on local referenda in California and Florida. Outspent by and losing to the research community on the local level, ProPets turned its attention to the U.S. Congress when Rep. Bob Mrazek of New York sponsored the Pet Protection Act of 1986. The bill later passed in a very weakened version in 1990.

At the height of the pound seizure era, more than fourteen states and hundreds of localities required local municipally owned and operated shelters to give up unclaimed animals for research purposes. As of 2000 only three states still mandated pound seizure and more than a dozen prohibited it. Even in states that neither required nor prohibited pound seizure, most municipalities had dropped the practice, noting its unpopularity with the public and tiring of the public relations nightmare it created for the local animal shelters.

## The New Look of Shelters

As the number of households keeping pets grew, the look and function of the shelter that served the canine and feline population in the community changed drastically. The new shelter was more centrally located and usually had indoor runs to reduce noise and to make it a better neighbor to businesses and residences. It not only had hot *and* cold running water, but also had central heat and air-conditioning, heated floors, and built-in cleaning systems to help keep disease transmission down and odors under control.

On the East and West coasts, larger humane societies also incorporated spay/neuter clinics and education centers into their facilities. Beneficiaries of funding from a large trust established by George Whittel in the 1970s named shelter clinics and humane education centers all along the California coastline after him.

But the look of the shelter was not all that changed in the late 1960s and 1970s. Shelters pushed to win acceptance as an HSUS accredited shelter or to comply with AHA's Standards of Excellence program. The standards for both programs looked at day-to-day operations, as well as adherence to programs to reduce the numbers of homeless animals within the community. Many shelters had as part of their adoption contract a provision that animals adopted from them must be spayed or neutered. Most gave the adopter thirty days from the date of the adoption to comply (or thirty days from the date of the animal's "maturity," since six months was considered the youngest age at which an animal could be surgically sterilized). Some had spay/neuter clinics within the shelter and the adopter could make an appointment for the surgery before leaving with the new family pet. Others worked with area veterinarians and required the adopter to select a veterinarian prior to leaving the shelter. Still others required the adopter to leave a refundable deposit to encourage follow-through. But far too often, shel-

ter efforts proved to be insufficient incentive for the adopter to have the animal sterilized.

Even if the shelter was interested in using the adoption contract to ensure compliance with spay/neuter policies, most were limited to civil action. The shelter would have to sue the adopter to force the sterilization or to recover the animal. Most shelters did not have the resources or the time to pursue this option.

In the late 1970s, the Animal Welfare League of Arlington (Virginia) decided to make sterilization of its adopted animals a requirement by law. After the League convinced the county board that intact animals adopted from the shelter were adding to the potential for animal control problems, the board unanimously approved an ordinance that required any animal adopted from the shelter to be spayed or neutered by the time specified in the adoption contract. Failure to do so would result in a \$300 fine and/or a year in jail, with each day beyond the specified time being considered a separate offense. In addition, the local commonwealth attorney stated that he considered each puppy or kitten born to a League-adopted animal to be a separate offense.

Several other humane societies and animal control agencies worked with municipal officials to pass ordinances to help reduce the homeless and stray pet populations within their communities. The Santa Cruz (California) SPCA worked with its city officials to pass an ordinance that required intact animals to be spayed or neutered if they were picked up by animal control for a third time in a twelve-month period.

Differential licensing (charging a higher license fee for intact animals than for sterilized animals) also increased in popularity across the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s. A few brave communities took on the issue of cat licensing and the licensing of breeders. Charlotte/Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) passed cat licensing in 1981, but not without a storm of controversy.

The day after the law went into effect, the headline in the *Charlotte Observer* read, “Charlotte Is Killing Its Cats” (M. Blinn, personal communication, Sept. 13, 2000). The town of Oxford, Massachusetts, passed a cat licensing bylaw in the early 1990s, but had to deflect three separate challenges in town meetings to keep it on the books. Some towns and counties that required cat licensing were issuing almost as many cat licenses as they were dog licenses. While these licensing laws helped to increase the return-to-owner rate of stray cats three- or fourfold, going from 1 percent to 4 percent was still unacceptable.

## Opportunities and Challenges in Companion Animal Care

### Advances in Medical Care for Companion Animals

Recent advances in companion animal veterinary care have been a leading benchmark for the status of companion animals. The life span of a dog or cat has increased significantly through improved delivery of preventive health care measures, such as vaccines to protect from Parvo virus, feline leukemia, and Lyme disease. New cures and treatments for diseases and injuries that seemed beyond the scope of the veterinary field—as well as the pocketbook of the average pet owner—have become almost commonplace. With more disposable income and delayed commitments to marrying and starting families, pet owners are willing to go to any length to prolong their companion animals’ lives. Hip replacement surgeries for dogs, kidney transplants for cats, and chemotherapy or radiation treatment for pets with cancer may now be requested by dog and cat owners. This is par-

ticularly remarkable given that such services are paid for exclusively by the pet owners. Pet owners purchase few third-party or insurance payer systems, and those pet owners who do purchase them rarely find such procedures covered.

### The War between the Humane and Veterinary Communities

The growth in the veterinary profession and the growing acceptance of veterinary care by pet owners in the 1970s and 1980s did not produce better relations between the humane and veterinary communities. Shelters, and in some instances, municipal governments, desperate to stop the growing homeless pet population and unable to negotiate agreements with local veterinarians, began opening and running their own low-cost spay/neuter clinics. A few shelters established full-service clinics, setting a sliding fee structure that allowed them to subsidize the costs of caring for indigent or low-income families’ pets through fees from those who could afford to pay full price.

Full-scale war broke out between local shelters and veterinarians when veterinarians, seeing some of their clients move over to the shelter-operated clinics, decided to file suit to shut down or halt the growth of these nonprofit clinics. Three major challenges, in Michigan, Virginia, and Louisiana, fueled animosity between the camps.

Veterinarians claimed that humane societies enjoyed an unfair tax advantage over private practitioners. The nonprofit-run clinics sat on land that was exempt from property tax; they enjoyed an exemption from paying sales tax on most items; they were allowed to accept tax-deductible donations of money and property from the public; and they paid no state or federal income tax on the revenue they received. Veterinarians incurred the same costs for equipment, personnel, drugs and medical equip-

ment, but enjoyed none of the tax advantages that nonprofit, humane society-run clinics did.

Each of the lawsuits resulted in different judgments. In Virginia the state legislature passed a law making it illegal for anyone other than a veterinarian to own and operate a veterinary clinic. This effectively forced the Virginia Beach SPCA to sell its clinic and contract with the new owner for services. In Louisiana the state veterinary licensing board refused to license or renew the license of any veterinarian working for the Louisiana SPCA (LA SPCA). LA SPCA filed suit in court to force the state registry board to license or re-license its veterinarians. The resulting ruling found that the passage of an ordinance purporting to make the SPCA an “employee” of the City of New Orleans brought the plaintiffs within the statutory exception found in La.R.S. 37:1514 (I) and rendered this case moot (*The Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Animal Cruelty and the City of New Orleans v. Louisiana Board of Veterinary Medical Association 1990*). In two separate cases in Michigan, the Internal Revenue Service ruled that the running of a spay/neuter clinic by a humane society was a reasonable service of a charitable organization, not a business. As long as the humane society did not advertise its services, it was legally allowed to operate a spay/neuter clinic (HSUS 1985).

In 1986 the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) joined with other organizations to ask Congress to impose taxes on nonprofits that operated any type of business not directly related to their mission. Included business activities were elective surgeries at university or church owned hospitals; sales of toys, games, or other items in nonprofit aquariums, zoos, or other wildlife organizations’ shops; and spay/neuter surgeries and vaccinations of animals at humane society-operated clinics.

Fortunately, relations between the humane community and the veterinary community improved in the aftermath of a congressional hearing

on the matter (no congressional action was taken). Their representatives now jointly advocate for legislation on the state and federal levels to improve anticruelty laws and to increase funding for enforcement; research on myriad issues to help improve animals' lives and welfare is being jointly sponsored by the two communities. This is not to say that there is complete agreement on all issues, but the communities are closer on many issues than they have ever been.

## **Pet Overpopulation**

The humane community has traditionally appeared to be perpetually at odds with all other animal-related interests on the topic of pet overpopulation. In the latter part of the twentieth century, shelters were not primarily a refuge for stray animals, but rather the repository for unwanted animals, most of which were puppies and kittens. Humane societies felt overwhelmed by a tremendous influx of young animals, many just one generation removed from being purebred.

In the 1960s and 1970s, mass commercial dog-breeding establishments known as puppy mills, where dogs were often kept in substandard conditions, quickly outdistanced private hobby breeders in the number of animals being produced each year. For farmers in the Midwest (the location of most of the puppy mills), the returns on producing a crop of purebred puppies—with registration papers—were appealing.

The resulting surge in the number of dogs and puppies registered through the American Kennel Club, the primary registry for purebred dogs in the United States, swelled the coffers of the organization. Large numbers of puppies were pumped into the market by pet stores, which purchased in volume from puppy mills and enjoyed prime retail locations, such as suburban shopping malls.

Sterilization of dogs and cats was considered a costly and undesirable procedure by organized veterinary medicine. As animal control facilities and humane societies struggled to

care for thousands of unplanned and homeless puppies, the veterinary community and hobby breeders began to respond to the increased demand for a dialogue on the subject.

In 1974 the first of several meetings among animal-related interests was held in Denver, Colorado. Attendees included the American Dog Owners Association, which traditionally opposed any legislation that would regulate dog breeding or ownership, and the AVMA. A second meeting two years later produced a number of scholarly papers and the beginnings of a consensus on how to reverse the tide of unplanned, and usually homeless, litters. This consensus could be summed up as a strategy promoted by Phyllis Wright of The HSUS known as L.E.S.—legislation, education, and sterilization.

Subsequent meetings of animal-related groups to look at the issue of pet overpopulation were limited to one-time workshops, some of which produced scholarly papers but few other results. Then, in 1993, veterinarians and researchers, humane societies, and breeder organizations met to quantify and qualify “pet overpopulation.” This meeting was the beginning of the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP), comprised of eleven animal-related organizations. The NCPSP has the mission to gather and analyze reliable data that further characterize the number, origin, and disposition of pets (cats and dogs) in the United States; to promote responsible stewardship of these companion animals; and, based on data gathered, to recommend programs to reduce the number of surplus/unwanted pets in the United States.

The NCPSP's efforts to define the scope of pet overpopulation, at least through those animals relinquished or brought to shelters, were no less frustrating than previous efforts. Mailings to more than 4,800 U.S. shelters for four consecutive years produced a 25 percent return rate in any given year. Fewer than four hundred shelters responded all four years.

There were many reasons why no accurate count of the number of animals relinquished to shelters each year was obtained. Among them were a lack of consensus on what constitutes a shelter, a lack of uniformity in record keeping, a lack of any record keeping on the part of some shelters, a distrust on the part of shelters of anyone asking for their data, and a lack of an accurate database of shelters. Some shelters felt that the animals they handled were just the tip of the iceberg and did not want their numbers to be used out of context to quantify the problem of animals “in transition” from one household to another.

Surveys from various sources, including the AVMA and the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA), indicated that the majority of Americans acquired their pet from some source other than an animal shelter. Cats, in particular, are more likely to be acquired through a friend, relative, or neighbor or taken in as a stray (76 percent combined) than from all other sources (breeder, shelter, pet shop, etc.).

As difficult as it was to obtain numbers from shelters regarding their intake and disposition of animals, getting data from such other sources as purebred registries, pet stores, and commercial breeding facilities was even more problematic. There was, however, general consensus among most animal-related organizations that the term pet overpopulation was not only difficult to define, but that it was also probably no longer an accurate catchphrase to describe the reasons for animals leaving their original homes, especially for dogs.

## **Dangerous or Vicious Dogs**

In every decade since the 1950s, a breed of dog has emerged as a vicious or dangerous dog. In the 1960s, the German Shepherd was the “bad dog du jour”; in the 1970s, it was the Doberman pinscher. In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2001, it has been the pit bull, also known as the American Pit Bull Terrier.

Originally bred to fight other dogs of their breed, pit bulls have been the breed of choice for illegal dogfighting activities, such as organized fighting in well-hidden barns or warehouses and spur-of-the-moment street fights.

The reputation of a pit bull as a “bad” dog has been enhanced by a number of highly publicized attacks by pit bulls and pit bull-type crosses on children and other human victims. During the 1980s, hundreds of municipalities passed legislation to prohibit the keeping of pit bulls but found breed-specific legislation virtually unenforceable. How dogs were to be identified and by whom proved insurmountable problems. Rarely did laws prohibit the owners of pit bulls—or of other prohibited breeds—from acquiring another dog after the offending animal had been destroyed by the local animal shelter.

Where pit bull owners opposed breed-specific laws, officials found that they were spending more time and money defending a law that would probably not survive court scrutiny than they had budgeted for enforcing the law in the first place. One case that went all the way to the state’s Supreme Court placed all breed-specific ban laws at risk. The court ruled that breed-specific ban laws were unconstitutional, violating due process laws, and that such laws were vague in their definitions of what constituted a pit bull. Some laws were over-inclusive, including breeds of dogs not known to be aggressive in any way; others were under-inclusive, leaving out breeds or mixes of breeds that had a record of inflicting serious injury or death on their victims.

Most towns and cities tried to regu-

late vicious or dangerous dogs by opting for generic laws that imposed restrictions on dogs and their owners based on the individual dog’s past behavior. But, even in these municipalities, rarely was enough funding appropriated for animal control to enforce dangerous-dog laws.

Breed-specific ban legislation has once again surged in various areas of the United States, in part in response to a new “bad breed,” the rottweiler. While most of these laws are targeted at pit bulls, some are including new breeds of dogs like the Dogos Argentina, whose reputations as fighting dogs in their country of origin and their physical characteristics make them difficult to distinguish from the American Pit Bull Terrier.

Humane organizations are struggling to create new strategies to combat the proliferation of dogs bred to fight or be aggressive without labeling an entire breed as inherently vicious. The HSUS, which wrote guidelines for regulating dangerous and potentially dangerous dogs in 1985, has recently committed to updating those guidelines and to recommending solutions for targeting breeds for additional regulations when the numbers of attacks and/or incidents of aggressive activities involving the breed are escalating.

## **Present State of Companion Animals and Animal Shelters**

Almost two-thirds of U.S. households have a dog, cat, bird, or reptile as a pet. The number of dogs, and particularly puppies, relinquished to shelters was rapidly diminishing as of mid-2000, to the point that some shelters did not have any puppies for adoption for many months. Those dogs and cats fortunate enough to be in lifelong homes are enjoying a longer life span than those who shared our homes in the first half of the twentieth century.

Additional good news is the way that animal shelters—whether run municipally, privately, or through a combination of municipal and private funding—are different from their predecessors in most communities throughout the United States. Their physical structure and their programs have advanced to include a host of new animals and new challenges that most municipal planners and humane society board members would never have dreamed of fifty—or even twenty—years ago.

Shelters have had to adapt, reconfiguring existing space or adding additional space to handle more cats than dogs; accommodating a growing number of small mammals, reptiles, and exotic pets; and housing livestock and equines confiscated or relinquished due to neglect or abuse. Some shelters have had to deal with an increasing number of large wild cats, such as lions, tigers, cougars and leopards, seized by police or humane officers for ordinance violations.

Shelter programs and services are far more preventive in nature than those of the 1900s. A few municipally owned and operated animal shelters stand out in their progressive tackling of animal control problems within their community and creation of “outside the box” solutions. In 1997 Palm Beach County (Florida) Animal Regulation (PBCAR) launched a Spay Shuttle, a converted camper/recreational vehicle that served the lower-income neighborhoods of Palm Beach County. In addition to low-cost sterilization services, the Spay Shuttle offered low-cost vaccination clinics and pet owner education programs in neighborhoods that represented the highest numbers of animal control complaints. PBCAR also offered low-cost sterilization for qualifying pet owners. All adopted animals were sterilized prior to leaving the facility and new adopters were encouraged to enroll their dogs in training programs offered at the shelter in conjunction with area dog trainers (Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control, personal communication Sept. 14, 2000).

Alachua County (Florida) Animal

Services created a two-week internship with the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. This allowed veterinary students the opportunity to see every aspect of the operation of a government animal control agency. Thus exposed, students could educate their clients on how to become more responsible pet owners.

Humane organizations created programs to help pet owners resolve problems with their animals before the problems reached the point at which the pet owner was ready to relinquish the animal. Based on research conducted as part of a master's degree thesis at Tufts University, shelters learned that the decision by the owner to relinquish an animal was neither easy nor impetuous (DiGiacomo, Arluke, and Patronek 1998). Most pet owners spent months agonizing over the decision and tried multiple venues for finding the animal another home before they drove to the shelter. Once there, the decision to relinquish the pet was irreversible.

Studies conducted by the NCPPSP found that behavior problems and lifestyle issues are the top reasons for relinquishment of a pet. More than 90 percent of individuals relinquishing a dog to the twelve shelters that participated in the study had not invested any time in training their dogs (Salman et al. 2000). Focus groups sponsored by The HSUS and conducted by research firm Jacobs Jenner and Kent revealed that pet owners who experienced behavior problems with their companion animals sought help with resolving those issues, but often received incorrect or inappropriate responses from individuals not qualified to deal with the pets' problems. Most of these pet owners were desperate to find solutions that would keep the pets in their homes. Shelters were usually the last choice for most pet owners when relinquishment was necessary. Almost unanimously, the focus groups felt that behavioral assistance should be offered by animal shelters and humane societies to help pet owners resolve their pets' problems (Jacobs 1999).

Many shelters have incorporated assistance with behavior problems into their menus of services offered to the community. One of the most inclusive programs exists at the Dumb Friends League (DFL), serving the greater Denver, Colorado, area. Another in a much smaller community is the Humane Society of Washington County (Maryland) that serves a rural and rather remote area.

The DFL's behavior-assistance program was initiated in conjunction with Suzanne Hetts in 1995. Temperament testing of animals within the shelter coupled with dog training classes and a behavior helpline sought to identify undesirable behaviors earlier and to offer solutions that pet owners could understand and easily incorporate to keep the pets in their new homes. Initially limited to those who had adopted from the DFL and aimed at reducing the recidivism rate of shelter adoptees, the program has now been expanded to include additional prevention programs and to serve the broader petowning community. Pet parenting classes, additional dog-training classes, and a stress reduction program have assisted thousands of additional animals both inside and outside the shelter (Rohde 2000).

The DFL and The HSUS also established the Pets for Life National Training Center at the DFL's facilities to instruct shelter staff from all over the country in creating similar behavior assistance programs for their communities.

Handling less than one-quarter the number of animals of the DFL, the Humane Society of Washington County launched a "Petiquette" program, similar to the DFL's Head Start program, which helped to identify and resolve the problems that brought the animal into the shelter. The Society also offered dog training classes open to all dog owners in the community to keep animals in their homes.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, several shelters run by nonprofit organizations that had contracted with their municipalities for animal control services reevaluated

those relationships. Chronically under-funded for the services they provided the community, these nonprofits informed their localities that without substantial increases in funding, services would be eliminated or their contracts cancelled. In some instances, municipalities responded with the additional resources. In others, the nonprofits revisited their demands when they discovered that municipal funding was covering more than they had initially calculated and that loss of funding would create a crisis for the organization. In other cases, contracts were cancelled.

When the San Francisco SPCA (SF SPCA) gave notice that it would no longer be contracting with the city and county of San Francisco to provide animal care and control services, the municipality was faced with several problems. It had no shelter of its own in which to house stray and homeless animals, and it did not have a general animal control program. The SF SPCA had given the city and county enough notice and cooperation to make the transition work, and some staff of the SF SPCA went to work for the new San Francisco Animal Care and Control agency to smooth the transition.

The situation in New York City was quite different. The five shelters operated by the New York City Center for Animal Care and Control were originally owned and operated by the ASPCA, which gave the shelters to the city. The city created a new nonprofit organization to run them and most of the ASPCA staff who had worked in the shelters became part of the staff of the New York City Center (Fekety 1998).

# Sterilization Programs and Breeding Moratoriums

As companion animal populations grew in all parts of the United States, the number of animals entering animal shelters grew as well. Registrations of purebred dogs through the American Kennel Club grew from 442,875 per year in 1960 to 1,111,799,000 in 1980. For every purebred dog born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was estimated that there was also one mixed-breed puppy born.

Sterilization of companion animals, and particularly of dogs, was usually not undertaken until the female animal's estrus cycles became a nuisance for the human family members. Sterilization surgery was quite costly, considered unnecessary, and often discouraged by the family's veterinarian until the female dog had given birth to at least one litter or had experienced several estruses. To do otherwise was considered unhealthy for the animal. Neutering of male dogs was almost never undertaken except in cases of severe health problems.

As the costs for caring for the unplanned offspring of both purebreds and mixed breeds grew, national animal protection groups rallied to halt or reverse the burgeoning growth in the number of homeless animals. Phyllis Wright, The HSUS's first vice president for companion animal issues, believed that the impediments to reducing the number of unplanned births of dogs and cats stemmed from pet owners' ignorance of canine and feline estrus cycles; from the high costs—whether real or perceived—of having the sterilization surgery performed on pets; and from the lack of motivation on the part of owners to have pets sterilized until *after* the unplanned puppies or kittens had arrived. In the 1970s Wright's mantra to communities having to

deal with homeless animals was "You can do more for animals by doing L.E.S.—Legislation, Education, and Sterilization."

The HSUS, through Wright and her staff, laid out a plan to attack pet overpopulation in communities across the United States. Through the passage of laws and ordinances such as differential licensing, The HSUS believed that those who were not motivated to spay or neuter their pets for population-control reasons would realize that the savings from lower licensing fees for sterilized animals could cover the cost of sterilization over the animal's life. Education programs that explained the health and behavioral benefits of sterilizing a pet were juxtaposed with the consequence of overpopulation in shelter—death. Lower fees for sterilization were urged to encourage those pet owners who were interested in having their pets altered to have the surgery performed. In the 1970s several cities experimented with opening low-cost sterilization (as opposed to full-service) clinics. The City of Los Angeles' clinic, which opened in 1971, resulted in a sea change in the attitudes of private practitioners to surgical sterilization. Boston's municipally owned and operated clinic failed quickly. All such clinics were vehemently opposed by veterinary organizations, many of which believed that government had no place in the veterinary field (Dalmadge 1972).

Despite such setbacks, additional campaigns appeared in the 1980s. The HSUS launched "Be A P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter" month. Friends of Animals expanded its program of issuing sterilization certificates that could be used at local participating veterinary clinics. Several local humane societies opened their own spay/neuter clinics to sterilize pets adopted from the shelter, as well as to serve low-income pet owners. The Doris Day Animal League (DDAL) started Spay Day USA in 1995 and publicized the event heavily through other national, as well as local, groups. It failed, however, to obtain AVMA endorsement of the campaign.

As the veterinary field changed to reflect the focus on animal-keeping, the tensions between the two communities on the issue of sterilization began to diminish. The veterinary student population shifted from being predominantly male to being predominantly female. The "feminization" of the veterinary profession, combined with the increase in pet-keeping (which traditionally involves the women in the home as primary pet caregivers), has brought about increased cooperation between the veterinary and animal protection communities.

Current discussions between the humane community and veterinary organizations to reduce pet populations are focusing on early-age (or pre-pubescent) sterilization (EAS) and development of nonsurgical means of sterilization, particularly for feral or unsocialized populations of cats and dogs. Some of the concerns with EAS have been the impact of sterilizing an animal at eight weeks of age on long-bone growth, behavior, and incontinence. Research to date has revealed no deleterious effects.

Early experiments in nonsurgical alternatives to sterilization failed to provide promising results. But new research being undertaken looks more hopeful. Neutersol, a zinc-arginine drug injected into the testicles of male dogs for sterilization purposes, is being tested at various sites and will probably receive acceptance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the near future. Several researchers are experimenting with a porcine zona pellucida (PZP) injection for sterilizing female dogs (see "Fertility Control in Animals" in this volume). Recombinant zona pellucida proteins synthetically produced in laboratories were to be tested in 2000–2001.

Although the homeless dog population in the United States is decreasing, the cat population is increasing. This should not surprise those municipal officials and others responsible for animal control who have resisted attempts to regulate cat populations in the past. Many have turned a deaf

ear to repeated warnings from animal-protection advocates and now have to reconfigure housing and revamp laws and policies to accommodate more felines than canines.

Breeding moratoriums, or outright bans, are one such attempt proposed by animal advocates to lower pet populations. In 1990 the Peninsula Humane Society in San Mateo, California, fired the opening round in the local overpopulation debate with a controversial advertisement carried in the Sunday edition of the area newspaper, reaching over 80,000 homes (Maggitti 1992). The four-page insert carried the headline “This is One Hell of a Job...” and opened to show barrels overflowing with the bodies of dead animals, with the tagline “...And We Couldn’t Do It Without You.” The ad called upon San Mateo County to pass legislation that would prohibit the breeding of dogs and cats until the number of animals entering the shelter and the number of those euthanized were substantially reduced.

Although the resulting legislation was substantially watered-down before being passed, the concept of limiting deliberate breeding of animals jump-started the debate on whether laws could reduce pet overpopulation. In 1992 The HSUS advocated a voluntary breeding moratorium (Handy 1993). Other national humane organizations, as well as dog- and cat-fancy groups, championed other ways of raising awareness about pet overpopulation. Several studies undertaken by or on behalf of the NCPPSP have added to the understanding of the breadth of the problem of homeless pets. But some of the more surprising items discovered by the NCPPSP were the low numbers of shelters keeping accurate data and the absence of a definitive and accurate listing of U.S. shelters (NCPSP 2000).

## Euthanasia: From “How To” to “Should We?”

Early methods of animal destruction were crude and rarely met the criteria of “euthanasia,” from the Greek *euthantos*, meaning “good death.” Death by gunshot, carbon monoxide exhaust gas, and drowning were not uncommon in the United States in the 1950s and unfortunately still exist in some parts of the country fifty years later.

Moves by national humane organizations to develop and implement more humane methods of destruction began in the early 1970s. AHA worked with U.S. Air Force personnel and engineers to develop a chamber that would euthanize animals through hypoxia. Similar to the chambers used by Air Force pilots when testing the effects of rapid decompression on the human body, the Euthanaire™ chamber was to accelerate the simulated “ascent rate” within the chamber from the 1,000 feet per minute used with humans to 1,000 feet per second. The Euthanaire was designed to hold four to eight medium- to small-sized animals and would cause their death in around fifteen minutes.

The HSUS opposed the decompression chamber method of destruction and was not supportive of any mechanical means of killing animals. It felt the most humane method of destruction was through the injection of an overdose of a barbiturate, preferably sodium pentobarbital. It pushed to change laws that prohibited trained lay personnel from administering barbiturates and also advocated for laws that would allow shelters to be licensed to purchase sodium pentobarbital.

AHA believed that killing animals was an emotionally difficult and sometimes dangerous job and that shelter workers charged with the task should be as physically removed from the actual killing as possible. The use of chambers, according to AHA, provided the worker with physical and

emotional distance from the animals. The HSUS felt that the further the technician was away from the animal during euthanasia, the greater the potential for error. The potential for callousness, overcrowding of chambers, and increased distress on the part of the animals was increased when a worker could load a machine, flip a switch, and walk away.

By the end of the 1980s, the Euthanaire Company had gone out of business, thirty states had passed legislation prohibiting the use of decompression chambers, and AHA was supporting the use of sodium pentobarbital as the most humane method of destroying animals. AHA, The HSUS, and AVMA were by 2000 united in their preference for injection of sodium pentobarbital as the means of providing an animal with the most humane death.

In the early 1990s, the debate changed from *how to* to *should we* when the subject was the euthanasia of homeless shelter animals. Although no-kill shelters had been around for decades, the SF SPCA and its leader, Richard Avanzino, brought the issue to national attention. Avanzino, who was known for his controversial and often groundbreaking stances on dog and cat issues, informed the city and county of San Francisco in 1989 that, after one hundred years of contracting for animal control services, the SF SPCA was “getting out of the killing business” and would no longer destroy—by any means—the city’s unwanted animals. The city and county were given three years’ notice to develop their own program to do so. San Francisco Animal Care and Control was the result.

Taking the life of any animal is difficult to explain to the public, and, given a choice, it is assumed that most animal lovers would rather give their financial support to a shelter that does not euthanize animals than to one that does. Regardless of the level of financial support given a shelter by its municipality, that support rarely covers the costs of implementing progressive animal care and control programs. The loss of charitable

dollars from donors who find euthanasia an unacceptable tool in battling pet overpopulation is a threat that a growing number of humane society boards of directors have not been willing to challenge.

In 1995 Avanzino extended the SF SPCA's no-kill philosophy to the entire city and county of San Francisco. He worked with the board of supervisors to pass the Adoption Pact, which called for San Francisco County Animal Care and Control to relinquish all unclaimed "adoptable" animals to the SF SPCA, where they would live until they were adopted. In 1997 Avanzino declared the Pact to be a complete success and declared San Francisco to be the United States' first "no-kill" city.

Since then, other cities have passed resolutions or statements declaring their intention to follow in San Francisco's footsteps. Austin, Texas, the County of San Diego (California), and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, among others, have declared their goal of becoming no-kill jurisdictions. Several cities have been served notice by their local humane societies that their contracts to provide animal control services will not be renewed. Some have given a few years' notice of their intentions, but others have withdrawn with little, if any, notice. In New York, Ulster County SPCA abruptly severed its agreement with the county and left animal control officers with no place to take stray animals.

The debate over no-kill (or "limited-admission") shelters versus "open admission" shelters has pitted animal advocates against each other. Charges of manipulating statistics and shifting definitions of "adoptable," "treatable," and "non-rehabilitatable" animals have been flung back and forth by groups attempting to seize the high ground in a debate over a difficult, thankless task.

In 1999 David Duffield, founder of the PeopleSoft company, donated \$200 million to create Maddie's Fund, which was to distribute the money throughout the United States to help every community become a no-kill community. *Philanthropy* magazine quoted

Claire Rappaport, a human welfare advocate, as questioning the appropriateness of such a large donation for homeless animals when human suffering and homelessness still exists in San Francisco (Richardson 2000).

Journalist Todd Foster investigated no-kill shelters for *Readers Digest* and concluded that a number did not function humanely and often neglected the care of the animals they were trying to "save," overcrowding them in cages or turning away animals when the shelters were full, only to have other shelters euthanize them due to lack of space (Foster 2000).

The controversy over no-kill facilities has had some positive results. It has caused many shelter boards of directors and executive directors to reexamine their mission, goals, and roles in the community. It has empowered some humane societies in their negotiations with tight-fisted municipalities, which feared that, if they did not provide adequate financial support, they would face the unwelcome prospect of providing all the services residents had come to demand.

The debate has encouraged humane organizations to be more innovative and assertive in solving pet overpopulation and pet relinquishment problems. Sterilization prices have been lowered and spay/neuter clinics put on the road to serve a wider pet-owning community. "Open admission" shelters are doing more to keep animals in their original homes by providing training classes, behavior helplines, and leads on pet-friendly housing to help remove barriers from owners and pets in building lifelong bonds.

## From "Property" to "Individual"

Companion animals, like most non-human animals, have had legal rights or status under the law only as property. Basic anticruelty statutes, including the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Bodies of Freedoms, which prohibits the abuse of animals, were promulgated to protect the animal owner's interest rather than to protect the animal. Massachusetts's anticruelty statutes, for example, make killing or beating one's own animal a misdemeanor, but killing or abusing an animal of another—destroying his property—is a felony.

Several attempts have been made in recent years to change the status of companion animals under the law. One of the earliest cases involved a San Francisco pet owner's right to determine the disposition of her animals after her death. Sido's owner had established in her will that upon the owner's death any animals living with her would be euthanized. Expecting to live a long life and thinking that her pets would be similarly advanced in age, the pet owner did not want her pets to languish in a shelter waiting to be adopted, nor did she want them to go through the trauma of trying to adjust to new home at the end of their lives. The pet owner did not provide for an alternative in case she died prematurely while her pets were quite young, which is precisely what occurred.

Richard Avanzino felt that Sido should not be euthanized simply because his owner had suffered a premature death. So Avanzino and others went to court to challenge the terms of the will as it pertained to the pets and to petition to be awarded custody of Sido for the term of his life. The court ruled in favor of saving Sido's life. The dog lived out his years at the SF SPCA, in Avanzino's office with free access to the rest of the shelter.

When pet owners have sued veterinarians in wrongful death or malpractice cases in which the negligence or

misdiagnosis and treatment of a pet has resulted in the pet's death, courts traditionally have awarded little or no money to the grieving pet owner. Any damages awarded were based on the value of the animal as determined by the amount the owner had paid to purchase the animal. Therefore, a "free to good home" pet, a stray that had been taken in, or an animal adopted from a shelter, in the court's view, had little or no monetary value. The owner who tried to establish emotional value and therefore recover for pain and suffering at the loss of his pet was laughed out of court.

But that, too, is changing. Several cases concerning the death of pets in the care of veterinarians, groomers, boarding kennel owners, and transporting airlines have awarded pet owners large sums of money for the owner's emotional suffering.

Animal shelters have been put in a difficult position in the debate over the position of companion animals as property. In many instances, the stray dog or cat turned in to a shelter benefits from being considered property. If his original owner does not claim the animal in the prescribed period of time established by law, the animal is deemed "abandoned property" and becomes the property of the shelter. The shelter then has the right to dispose of its property as it sees fit. For responsible, caring shelters, this means the animal will be evaluated and then either placed in a new home or euthanized.

In an effort to change the status quo of animals as property, several humane societies and animal protection organizations have in their adoption contracts, newsletters, and policy statements begun to refer to the keepers of dogs and cats as "guardians" rather than "owners." Other communities have changed the terminology in their local ordinances to better reflect the relationship that companion animals and their caregivers enjoy. San Francisco and Boulder, Colorado, have both considered amending their statutes to remove all references to "owner" as it applies to companion animals and to substitute

"guardian" instead. In Boulder owners are now guardians.

As animal rights evolve, and particularly as the role of companion animals in the lives of humans is studied and evaluated, the status of dogs and cats will continue to be elevated. Their days of being thought of as simply property are truly numbered.

## The Status of Cats

The APPMA has commissioned surveys of pet owners every two years since the late 1970s. These surveys are used by APPMA's membership to forecast trends in pet ownership to better prepare for the pet owners' needs for pet food, collars, leashes, cat litter, and toys. In 1978, when 31.7 million households owned dogs and 16.2 million households owned cats, APPMA profiled the typical dog owner: a large family with children and with an average annual income of \$12,000–\$25,000. The APPMA considered cat ownership so insignificant that a profile was not even established (APPMA 1978). Twenty years later, APPMA did profile the typical cat owner: a single woman living in the city with an income lower than that of the dog-owning family.

The fact that in 2000 the United States was a nation of cat owners should surprise no one who has followed other U.S. social trends. In 1958 37 percent of adult women worked outside the home. In 1998 60 percent of adult women did so. More than 50 percent of households in the United States in the 1990s were headed by single mothers. The woman in one- or two-adult household is the primary person responsible for the family pet's veterinary care, feeding, exercising, and grooming and is the primary decision maker when choosing the species of the family pet.

The profile of the typical U.S. family has changed—from having 2.3 kids and living in detached houses with large backyards for the dog to having one child and living in townhouses on postage-stamp lots with a cat and a

membership at a health club. Cats, often thought of as low-maintenance pets, are now the pets of choice for busy working women.

Cats now pose the greatest challenge to animal shelters, humane societies, veterinarians, and other animal-related organizations. Most state and local laws do not include cats in their animal control statutes. The sheltering community failed to predict and plan for the increased numbers of both owned and unowned cats. Shelters constructed in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s still allotted more runs and kennels for dogs than cages for cats. Policies that required sterilization of dogs and puppies adopted from the shelter often failed to mention cats. Holding periods for stray cats, whether mandated by law or through shelter policy, were rarely as lengthy as those for stray dogs.

Some communities tried licensing programs. One of the first was Charlotte/Mecklenberg County, North Carolina, in 1980. While initially criticized by the media and by cat owners, the program slowly began to gain credibility. Twenty years later, Charlotte was licensing more than 39,000 cats and had increased its cat-return-to-owner rate by 2.4 percent. But the battle to increase responsibility among cat owners through licensing laws was far from over.

It is estimated that there may be as many as one feral cat for every owned cat in the United States. To curb the growth of unowned, unsocialized, or feral cats within a community, most municipalities have relied on trap-and-euthanize programs, typically carried out by frustrated homeowners. Attempting to trap and euthanize all of a community's unwanted cats has been a failure. The traps end up being sabotaged by well-meaning people. Most communities are still conducive to ferals (providing a ready supply of food from restaurant trash bins or feral cat caregivers and a modicum of safety from cars, weather, and dogs) so "trapping out" one colony just leaves room for a new one.

In San Mateo County, California, a feral cat pact was established between

the humane society, which contracted with the county and several cities for animal control, and feral cat caregivers. In the first three years of the program, more than 200 colonies were registered, representing a total of just under 2,000 feral cats. Over this time period, the number of feral cats was reduced by 29 percent, primarily by the identification, removal, and adoption of socialized animals. The humane society sterilized more than 1,400 of the remaining ferals and reached an agreement to manage a feral cat colony within the a local nature park.

Hawaiian Humane Society (HHS), in conjunction with the City and County of Honolulu, passed a comprehensive Cat Protection Act in 1995 to curb the island of Oahu's burgeoning stray cat population. With a combination of resources from municipal and private funds, HHS worked with local veterinarians to offer low-cost or free sterilization to cat owners and caregivers. As of June 1999, the program had sterilized more than 11,828 cats.

## Challenges, Conflicts, and Victories

"Unwanted litter" or "unplanned pregnancy" are rarely the reasons given for surrendering an animal to a shelter. Human lifestyle issues, such as "no time," "allergy," or "moving," or animal behavior problems are the new challenges to shelters trying to keep animals in their original homes.

According to studies conducted in the late 1990s by the NCPPSP and other researchers, behavior issues are a major factor in a pet owner's decision to remove a pet from the home. Although the pet owner may list such other reasons as moving to a new home or allergies of family members, as the primary motivation for relinquishment, further investigation of the animal's life in the home often reveals a different cause for surrendering the animal. Lack of basic training

and increased frustration with house-soiling or other preventable problems cause the pet owner to make the decision to remove the animal from his home. Some shelters, seeing increased numbers of "teenage" animals enter their facilities, as well as more pets who have already been spayed or neutered, have decided that spay/neuter programs alone will no longer provide the answer to ending pet overpopulation. To attack the new reasons for companion animal homelessness, programs beyond low-cost sterilization had to be created.

Veterinary student Alexa Dowdichuk and co-researcher John Wenstrup found that many shelters had not carefully analyzed the true causes for relinquishment of young, healthy animals to their facilities and were investing all of their time and resources into traditional overpopulation solutions of sterilization and education on spaying and neutering. Dowdichuk concluded that if those same resources were redirected toward behavior counseling, dog training, and other programs that assist pet owners with integrating a new pet into the home, fewer animals would be relinquished or returned to shelters (HSUS 2000).

To test the theory that behavior assistance programs readily available to pet owners can change the future for animals whose owners are on the verge of relinquishing them because of "curable" behavior problems, The HSUS contracted with a research firm to conduct focus groups around the country. Pet owners who were experiencing or had experienced behavior problems with a pet were asked about their pets' offending behaviors, steps they had taken to address those behaviors, sources or individuals to whom they had turned for advice, and the outcomes of their efforts. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported frustration at receiving inaccurate or incomplete advice or failure in finding sources for advice on their pets' particular behavioral problems.

Based on this research, as well as other data, The HSUS launched the Pets for Life project, a broad-based

campaign which incorporated several existing campaigns, such as promotion of pet sterilization, with new programs that focused on eliminating bond-breakers or barriers that prevent people from developing and building lifelong bonds with their new pets. The campaign concentrates on five major areas: housing issues (policies which restrict or prohibit pets), human health issues (pets and human allergies, zoonotic diseases and immuno-compromised pet owners, and cats and pregnant women), lifetime commitment (educating pet owners on the costs of pet care and the life span of dogs and cats), animal health (preventive health care, including sterilization) and behavior (house-soiling, scratching/clawing digging, vocalizing, etc).

Additional programs will work on a national basis to eliminate other bond barriers by educating housing managers on responsible pet ownership guidelines and human health care providers on protecting patient health while keeping the pet in the home.

## Spaying and Neutering

Although the number of animals entering animal shelters continues to decrease, animal protection organizations can not afford to decrease their emphasis on and commitment to sterilization.

Pediatric, prepubescent, or the previously mentioned early age sterilization (EAS)—the spaying or neutering of animals at eight weeks of age or at two pounds—was introduced by Dr. Leo Lieberman in 1987. Research conducted by Lieberman and others found that young animals could be successfully and safely sterilized under controlled conditions and recover from the surgery in shorter time periods than animals six months of age or older (Lieberman 1998). Subsequent research by The University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine and Texas A&M University, which examined such issues as long-bone growth, urinary incontinence,

and behavioral changes, revealed little or no increase in occurrence in the animal sterilized at eight weeks of age as compared to those who underwent surgery at the traditional age of six months (Howe 1999).

The AVMA initially expressed reluctance in accepting prepubescent sterilization, citing a lack of empirical data indicating few or no adverse long-term effects on animals. It adopted a resolution of support for EAS for shelter animals in 1998. Eventually, at the urging of its animal welfare committee, the AVMA's executive board removed the shelter qualifier from its support of early-age sterilization. With the blessing of the AVMA, humane organizations and animal care and control agencies are hoping that sterilization-at-adoption will become standard practice at shelters across the country.

New York City hoped to take early-age sterilization of newly acquired animals a step further. Under an ordinance passed in 2000 and backed by the New York City Center for Animal Care and Control and other humane organizations, city pet stores and animal shelters were required to spay or neuter all animals purchased or adopted from them. The new law spurred other communities to consider proposing similar laws, although it is being challenged in court by the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council.

While many breeders had relied on spay/neuter contracts that required proof of surgery before sending the new owner American Kennel Club registration papers for pet-quality puppies, some breeders found that compliance was spotty. Some of these breeders are now having their puppies spayed or neutered at eight weeks of age before the puppies are placed in new homes.

Shelters have found that sterilization at adoption greatly reduces their paperwork and staff time for adoption compliance follow-up. Sterilizing the animal before he leaves the shelter does not satisfy all of the adoption contract provisions, nor does it assure the animal of a life-long home, but it does assure that the adopted animal

won't be contributing to the community's pet overpopulation problem.

The acceptance of sterilization as an important aspect of owning a pet increased dramatically throughout the United States from 1975 to 2000. APPMA and AVMA surveys showed that most pet owners didn't want an intact animal in their home (NCPSP 2000). Data showing that intact male dogs are more likely to bite than neutered dogs drove many reluctant pet owners to castrate their dog for that reason alone.

Surgical sterilization will most likely continue to be the method of choice for controlling breeding in the United States and wherever veterinary care is readily available. In developing countries, less invasive methods that can be delivered by non-veterinarians hold the key to solving animal control and pet overpopulation problems. Research is progressing on several nonsurgical methods for permanently sterilizing dogs and cats.

## **Future Challenges**

### **Puppy Mills, Humane Organizations, and the American Kennel Club**

Humane organizations have fought for years to improve enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and to force a shake-up within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS) to ensure that caring, competent staff will take seriously the agency's congressional mandate to protect animals, including dogs in puppy mill operations. During the Reagan administration (1980-88) the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requested zero funding for enforcement of the AWA provisions, reflecting the Reagan Administration's philosophy that enforcement would be better carried out by local humane societies. OMB overlooked the fact

that most local humane societies had no law enforcement powers and that no local humane organizations have interstate legal powers. The result would have been zero enforcement to accompany zero funding. (Congress restored the funding but never increased it despite the fact that additional licences were granted annually.)

Criticism of the American Kennel Club's role in puppy mill proliferation has centered around the income it receives from large commercial breeding establishments (Derr 1990). Many breeders feel that it should do more to ensure that only the best quality animals carry an American Kennel Club registration and should do more to force the puppy mills out of business. The American Kennel Club maintains that it is not a quality-assurance organization and can therefore not guarantee the health or quality of animals that carry the Club's registration.

Focus groups conducted by Jacobs Jenner and Kent for The HSUS in 1997 found that people who purchase puppies from pet stores were fully aware of puppy mills' existence, but the majority had convinced themselves that their new dog didn't come from a puppy mill. It is likely that the vast majority of the 500,000 puppies sold in pet stores (Patronek and Rowan 1995) originate in large commercial dog-breeding establishments, or puppy mills.

New appointments and reorganization of USDA APHIS in 2000 improved the situation for some animals in puppy mills. Increased training, more intensive scrutiny of licensed dealers, and a stronger commitment on the part of the USDA hierarchy to cast out the bad apples resulted in many areas of change, including hefty fines and penalties and the closing of some of the worst puppy mills. Thousands of animals, however, still languished in puppy mills.

## Lions, Tigers, Bears, (and Iguanas)

At the turn of the millennium, a new wave of exotic pets pushed many shelters to the edge in terms of resources and staffing. Pet stores and want-ads had long offered more than just dogs and cats to anyone with enough cash to buy an animal, but the new exotic pet posed multiple challenges to animal care and control facilities and humane organizations.

U.S. shelters were trying to find ways to care for and offer for adoption, when justified, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, sugar gliders (flying squirrels), hedgehogs, and reptiles and amphibians that ranged from tiny lizards and turtles to giant pythons and boa constrictors.

Shelters found themselves playing host to lions, tigers, leopards, bobcats, and jaguars when the animals had become too much for their owners to care for or had been confiscated by police. Some had to add staff and space to accommodate a never-ending stream of large exotic cats. Weak laws regarding the keeping of wild exotic animals put a tremendous burden on shelters, which were never intended to house and care for these species. Questions of jurisdiction over these animals when it came to confiscating, caring for, and disposing of them made it imperative that communities clearly define parameters for keeping wildlife.

In 2000 the USDA issued a statement urging states to pass laws to prohibit the keeping of large exotic cats, citing multiple cases of human injuries and instances of animals being poorly and/or cruelly treated.

In 1999 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released data showing a marked increase in salmonellosis in young children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2000). This increase was directly correlated to the increased incidence of keeping iguanas as pets. All reptiles carry the salmonella bacterium, and children under eight are particularly susceptible to salmonella infection.

Although most state laws require pet stores to put warnings on reptile displays to advise parents of the risks of salmonellosis transmission from reptiles to children, most warnings go unheeded. As a result, some shelters refuse to place reptiles, particularly iguanas, in homes with children under twelve years of age.

## Into the Future

Among the most pressing challenges in the twenty-first century for advocates of companion animals will be to continue the progress made in reducing the uncontrolled breeding of dogs and to translate that success to the feline population. Creative solutions to cat control that include all stakeholders—animal control, feral cat caregivers, breeders, wildlife advocates, veterinarians, and municipal officials—will have to be developed to ensure that success is long-term and supported by the majority.

More veterinarians are entering the field of animal behavior and are anxious to work with dog trainers and shelters to resolve behavior problems. Shelters will realize that the best way to cut euthanasia rates and increase successful adoptions is to work with animal behaviorists, veterinarians, and dog trainers to ameliorate the effects of animal behavior before the pet owner's frustration becomes insurmountable.

Other barriers to building and maintaining a strong bond with companion animals will fall by the wayside. Landlords and housing managers are already finding out that blanket no-pet policies rarely work and that responsible pet owners are good tenants. Obstetricians, allergists, oncologists, and gerontologists who dispense faulty or outdated information about pets and disease transmission and injury will have to rethink their advice if they want to keep patients who are convinced that life is worth living with a pet.

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