

The NSPCA: Border wars

Information and photos provided by the NSPCA
Compiled by Kotie Geldenhuys

South Africa shares its borders with six countries and has more than 2700 km of coastline, which includes five major shipping ports and four international airports, all of which have the potential to be used for the transport of animals - both legally and illegally. Because the NSPCA has a limited number of NSPCA inspectors and such a vast area to respond to, and because our country is fast becoming a port of preference among animal traders, it was recognised that a new approach to deal with this issue is urgently required. This led the NSPCA to embarking on an awareness and training campaign aimed at developing the skills of our law enforcement entities in the identification of cross-border animal crime and animal welfare concerns.

Trade in animals - wild, domestic and farm

The trade in animals is a massive industry which is growing exponentially. With the growing demand for exotic pets and the commercialisation of animal breeding industries, more and more animals are transported across our borders. While some of these trades are perfectly legal and the animals are moved along with the correct permits, in well-constructed transportation vehicles and with the necessary care and consideration, a large portion of animals that move across our borders are not as lucky. Animals poached from the wild and smuggled into captivity are often transported in horrific conditions. After being placed in terribly overcrowded cages or other storage facilities, with no access to food or water, many do not survive the journey (see **SERVAMUS**: May 2014).

Wild animals are not the only ones that suffer. Many farm animals are subjected to journeys that stretch for days on end with no access to food or water. A staggering amount of mass-bred puppies and unwanted adult dogs also end up being moved across our borders and into far-flung places in Africa, often ending up in horrific conditions where there is no regard for their welfare and no welfare organisations that fight against cruelty. Too many South Africans are willing to breed and sell puppies to whomever will buy them and



are readily giving up pets as "free to a good home". This results in an easy and constant source of untraceable animals.

With this in mind, the NSPCA set off on a campaign to teach skills and bring motivation to border enforcement officials, both from South Africa as well as from neighbouring countries, in the art of identifying, intercepting and actioning animal cruelty and crime. By creating awareness about the Animals Protection Act 71 of

1962 and its application, animal welfare and the many creative methods of committing animal crime, the NSPCA instilled not only a passion for fighting crimes against animals but also an understanding of the wider impact that these crimes have on communities and on the country as a whole. The workshops resulted in better coordination, communication, efficiency, and a better working knowledge of the laws pertaining to animals in South Africa, and it forged some excellent

cross-disciplinary networks. The campaign was met with tremendous enthusiasm and the passionate cooperation of many of the border post individuals. As mentioned in previous **SERVAMUS** articles, some dedicated border posts had highly applauded successes in intercepting illegal animal shipments or rescuing animals in cruel transport conditions and bringing the perpetrators to book with the NSPCA's guidance. Successes include the case of two Namibian nationals who were both found guilty under the Animals Protection Act. They were fined and received suspended prison sentences, as well as denial of ownership and care of any animals for a five year period, as a result of their attempt to smuggle eight puppies across the border under the seat of their vehicle. This was followed by the sentencing of two Botswana nationals who received a R10 000 fine or prison sentence for the cruel and illegal act of attempting to smuggle two lion cubs in feed sacks across the border.

In a country that is battling serious and often violent crime against people, crimes against animals may seem unimportant. However, the trade and transportation of animals do not only pose significant welfare concerns for the animals themselves but also contribute to the destruction of natural ecosystems and the spread of diseases and invasive species that could affect South Africa's ecosystems and agricultural industries.

Cross-border animal crime is also often linked to organised criminal syndicates that are involved in other criminal activities.

Airports

NSPCA inspectors conduct routine inspections at the OR Tambo International Airport and Cape Town International Airport, as well as smaller airports around the country. In addition to these inspections, NSPCA inspectors respond to complaints of cruelty, tip-offs, instances of abandonment, delays, inadequate crating, misdirected animal shipments, smuggling and special cases.

The ongoing interaction with the cargo handling industry at OR Tambo International Airport in particular has drastically improved the crating conditions in which animals are permitted to travel and sparked awareness among industry role-players about animal trade and about how to put the brakes on illegal activities.

Land ports

NSPCA inspectors regularly visit South African land ports to ensure that the welfare of animals is not being



compromised. Road transport presents its own animal welfare problems, which include long-distance travel, overcrowding and associated injuries as well as long delays at border posts. Long distance transport by road has severe animal welfare implications, including, but not limited to, stress, deprivation of feed and water, handling, road and vehicle conditions, and often, adverse weather conditions.

The NSPCA continues to provide regular advice and support to the industry on animal welfare, animal trade and illegal activities involving animals at the airports and ports of entry around the country.

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Thanks to the NSPCA's campaign and the continued efforts of all those involved, South Africa is taking decisive steps, not only towards securing our borders against illicit animal traders but also towards addressing the cruelty so often associated with cross-border animal transportation. With the continued support of impassioned border enforcement, it is now possible to police multiple border posts and provide the ports of entry and exit with a support system that speaks out for those who can't. The NSPCA applauds the dedication of the border enforcement staff with whom they have worked and feels positive about the future of South Africa's borders and the animals that travel across these borders.