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Whether you want to believe it or not: organised crime targeting animals exists! The first example that comes to mind is syndicated dogfighting, while other covert offences of cruelty against animals include sexual abuse. These offences do not necessarily happen in the open which is why there is a need for a specialised unit to research, investigate and combat crimes of this nature.



The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) of the National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) is a team of qualified individuals who specialise in investigating crimes relating to animal fighting, animal sexual abuse cases and premeditated animal cruelty. The Unit's breakthroughs and successes, especially with regard to dogfighting and the sexual abuse of animals, have led to the rescue, veterinary treatment and rehabilitation of many animals, periods of incarceration, or both.

What is bestiality?

Bestiality is an act in which a person has any form of sexual encounter with an animal. This includes masturbation and/or any penetration whatsoever of the genital organs, mouth or anus of the animal or vice versa. **Bestiality is ILLEGAL in South Africa** in terms of section 13 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 and section 2 of the Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962. Studies consistently support the significant correlation between sexually abusing animals (bestiality) and sexual offences against humans.

Bestiality is considered to be a paraphilia disorder. Paraphilia is described as the "abnormal love" or sexual deviation marked by abnormal fantasies, feelings and behaviours that lead to sexual arousal. We refer to a paraphilia disorder when these behaviours typically involve non-human objects, children or other non-consenting persons and may require the suffering or humiliation of the subject in order to attain sexual gratification. Zoophilia is the term which is used when the paraphilia involves an animal as the sexual object. The act or fantasy of engaging in sexual activity with animals is repeatedly preferred or the exclusive method of achieving sexual excitement and gratification.

Why should we be concerned?

Individuals convicted of sexual offences with animals have been identified to be the most indiscriminate and deviant sexual offenders, showing the highest degree of cross-over rate for deviant sexual offending. Sexual abuse of animals has also been recognised as one of the early warning signs of psychological

dysfunction and mental disorders, including conduct disorder in children and adolescents, and antisocial personality disorder in adults.

Studies show that bestiality is associated with other psychological disorders that include heightened aggressive behaviour towards humans and is found most commonly among violent offenders and sexual offenders. Individuals who sexually abuse animals have the potential to become more extreme over time. A large percentage of bestiality perpetrators report that they find this act attractive as there is no need for interpersonal interaction or negotiation.

There is a higher rate or likelihood that perpetrators of bestiality (especially when perpetrators are children) have been victims of abuse or neglect themselves.

Animal sexual abuse is rarely an isolated paraphilia. Most perpetrators planned, targeted and created situations for abusing both animals and human victims alike. An interspecies imbalance of power makes sexual contact with an animal coercive - the animals are neither able to consent to nor report such an episode. Any form of bestiality is nothing less than animal abuse.

Why does it occur?

It is not possible to specifically point out a sole reason as to why people partake in bestiality. There are a number of disturbing factors that contribute to

committing this illegal activity. Following extensive research, evidence has shown how most of the people who have sexually abused an animal did so because animals are easy victims. They are easy to be manhandled, and they cannot tell anyone what has happened to them.

What are the signs?

All animals are potential victims of bestiality. The NSPCA have investigated cases where animals such as cows, sheep, cats, chickens, dogs, donkeys and goats have been victims of bestiality. There are several warning signs to look out for, and evidence could include photos or videos of bestiality being kept, the use of animal tranquilisers and restraints for animals. The NSPCA strongly believes that animal sexual abuse is not an isolated incident and has found that the perpetrators of bestiality are often also guilty of other serious crimes.

Animals who may be victims of bestiality usually display the following signs:

- Vaginal and/or anal trauma, haemorrhage, wounds, tears, scarring, swelling and/or dilation;
- injuries to other parts of the body from grabbing/holding/shaking or restraining the animal, especially to areas such as ears, tail and neck and the ventral area of the hind legs; and
- extremely reserved behaviour around specific people.

TIPS for VETERINARIANS

Human fluids and DNA

The perpetrator's DNA may be present in the vagina or anorectal region:

- A human Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit contains step-by-step

instructions, sterile swabs, gloves, envelopes and boxes, bags and labels to collect additional evidence such as hair samples, condoms, clothes or blankets.

- A special consideration in sexual assault cases is the time and the condition of any recovered sperm. The sperm remains motile in live victims up to six hours and less often up to between 12 and 24 hours.
- The sperm survival in deceased victims is shorter because the sperm are destroyed by decomposition.
- During examination the animal's fur can be combed through to look for embedded trace evidence, such as pubic hair or fibres.
- In dogs and cats, the opening of urethra is inside the vagina, therefore the perpetrator's sperm may travel from the vaginal area to the bladder. A urine sample should be obtained in female victims.
- Faecal sample in anal assault.

Course of action

Identifying offenders who commit acts of bestiality is important, not only for the sake of the animal victim but because these individuals may be at an increased risk of committing a variety of other sexual and nonsexual violent acts against humans. Bestiality is a serious offence and should be treated as such for the sake of the animal, the person and the community.

All bestiality cases must be investigated. When investigating an alleged bestiality case, it is of utmost importance that the investigating officer works closely with the SPCA. According to a memorandum issued by Maj-Gen M D Mokgabundi, the then Head of Specific Crime Investigations at the SAPS Head Office, on 15 September 2011, the following procedures must be followed when investigating bestiality cases:

- The case must be investigated by a member of the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Unit.
- The same investigation procedure as for the investigation of a rape case must be applied, including medical examination of the animal by a veterinarian; medical examination of the perpetrator by a medical doctor; a visit to the crime scene; and the seizure and confiscation of exhibits.
- The SAPS member to whom the alleged crime has been reported must obtain a detailed statement from the complainant and register the case docket on the CAS.
- The FCS member on standby duty must immediately be informed about the matter in order to conduct the preliminary investigation.
- The animal must be taken to a veterinarian for a medical examination and the SAPS must supply and utilise the prescribed Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit (adult or children). Please note that the SAPS is responsible for the remuneration/payment of the veterinarian fees, and not the SPCA.

It is further recommended that the assistance of the SPCA is requested/utilised to identify competent and suitable veterinarians to conduct the medical examination. The investigation officer from the FCS must submit a written factual report of the crime to the local SPCA and provide regular written progress reports to the SPCA until the case is finalised. A final written report with the outcome of the investigation must also be submitted to the local SPCA. Copies of these reports must be filed under the "B" section of the case docket. All members of the SAPS must fully cooperate and assist personnel of the SPCA with all cases reported to the SAPS by personnel of the SPCA.

Investigating officers who require more information can contact the National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) by sending an e-mail to: specialinvestigations@nspca.co.za or phoning: tel: (011) 907 3590/1/2.

NSPCA case example

In March 2022, the NSPCA was alerted to the sexual abuse of a sheep in the North West Province. The accused is a minor, aged only 13, who was caught in the act of raping a sheep. NSPCA officials worked through the night to remove the sheep, provide the animal with the urgent veterinary attention and tests required, as well as to open a case against the perpetrator. Given the age of the child, there is a chance that this case will be handled outside of normal criminal court proceedings.

Bestiality may be an uncomfortable topic, however, it is necessary to address it in order to prevent more such cases. **The link between the sexual abuse of animals and human cruelty is real and important and the NSPCA encourages communities to give this sexual crime a voice.**