

Cruelty cases win legal aid

as people certainly expect tougher sentences for cruelty and animal cases."

RSPCA OLD ASSISTANT CHIEF INSPECTOR TRACEY JACKSON

FEW CRIMES ARE AS HEINOUS, DISTRESSING AND GUT-WRENCHING AS THOSE INVOLVING THE ABUSE, TORTURE OR NEGLECT OF HELPLESS ANIMALS. DESPITE WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY DISGUST, INDICATIONS FROM THE RSPCA ARE THAT INSTANCES OF PREMEDITATED HARM ARE ON THE RISE. FORTUNATELY, SO TOO ARE PROSECUTIONS OF SUCH OFFENCES - BUT ARE THE SENTENCES ADEQUATE?



CHANGE AGENT: BLEATS founder Tracey-Lynne Geyers.

A DOG found dead after being shot with an arrow. A puppy found with its eyes glued shut, chickens killed after being stomped on, bodies of kittens, a pup and parts thereof - washed up on riverbanks. These heartbreaking, sickening and incomprehensible acts are by no means an exhaustive list, simply a foul taste of what RSPCA Queensland's assistant chief inspector Tracey Jackson and her team have responded to in recent months.

Many acts are systematic, premeditated and for the animal owner's benefit, psychological or financial. Also on the rise are the so-called puppy mills, spurred by the burgeoning markets for "designer dogs".

"The RSPCA has launched a campaign against puppy factories," says the society spokeswoman. "The industry says are inhumane and unacceptable, producing puppies for profit, with little or no consideration given to the welfare of the animals. RSPCA Queensland has investigated 12 dog puppy factories and more than 750 dogs. Most puppy factories have been operating outside state and local laws and do not meet a minimum standard of care.

Often dogs are not exercised, socialised, groomed or vaccinated, and causing psychological, physical and behavioural problems. Many of the incidents being reported, investigated and pursued through the legal system are "sadistic" acts done solely for the perpetrator's own amusement.

"It absolutely feels as though it's getting worse," Jackson, an inspector of three years, says. "It's possible that maybe more are being reported than getting worse."

"I don't have an answer for that; perhaps it's a combination of both. What we're noticing is that we're receiving more graphic, horrific cases. Perhaps even more disturbing is the role Ms Jackson says technology is playing with the proliferation of video recording and shared dissemination of cruel acts.

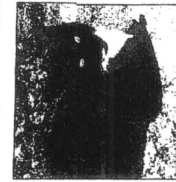


TOUGH BRIEF: RSPCA senior inspectors Tracey Jackson and Daniel Young are dealing with more shocking animal cruelty cases.

ing and Advocating Tougher Sentences. After forming in 2007, BLEATS now has four senior counsels - Graeme Page, Gary Long, Stephen Kain and Jean Dalton - as well as Queen's counsels Tony Morris and Michael Byrne plus 65 support personnel including students, RSPCA experts and university lecturers and recently, a psychologist.

Leading BLEATS is its founder, the animated, straight-talking cat owner, Tracey-Lynne Geyers. When Geyers met the principal of ILC in her Ann St office, clear in her mind was a recent case pursued by BLEATS and the RSPCA, which had been resolved with mixed success.

It involved Russell Hudson, 47, who received a two-month jail sentence for what Magistrate Sheryl Cornack found to be a premeditated and callous act of animal cruelty. Hudson applied for, and was granted, bail the same day his case was heard. He is appealing against the sentence. "We were looking for a year in jail for this guy. I can't think of anything, yes, worse, but so evil," Geyers stated and so did. "The thing that gave me confidence on that day was that, when the judge was putting him into custody, she



OUT ON BAIL: Russell Hudson (right) is appealing against his sentence after killing Sox (left).

swinging backwards and forwards, struggling wildly before he died. Hudson is then seen to come in to the footage with a hand-written sign saying, "YOU KIRRY". Sox's owner, who had used the word "kirry" to describe his autistic children, said the sentence "would not bring Sox back but I hope it sends a message to people that cruelty to animals is not OK."

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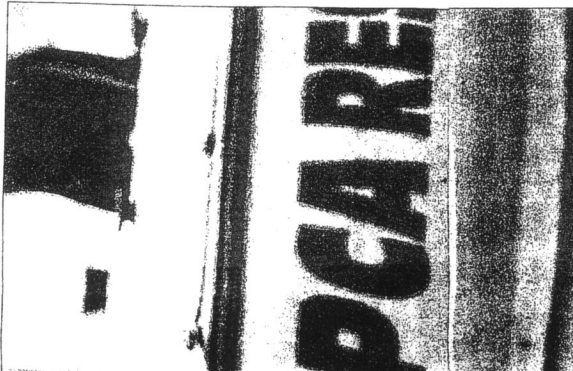


OUT ON BAIL: Russell Hudson (right) is appealing against his sentence after killing Sox (left).

early after an appeal - results outcomes will be below average. The community certainly not happy with the penalties, but they are getting better. "The courts are just following other decisions and we don't understand, but apparently I'm told they don't like kids that have abused animals. The ones who have mistreated animals are second on the list. If they do it anyway, they're not spending much time in jail."

Under the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001, the maximum penalty for animal cruelty is two years' imprisonment plus a \$100,000 fine. Both BLEATS and the RSPCA signalled their disappointment at the sentence. "We're still short of higher courts reaffirming tough decisions," says a family lawyer, Cameron Dick. A spokesman for Attorney-General, Michael McCormack, said a comment on the adequacy of the sentences

RSPCA rate on a townsville puppy factory in cucus found it to be crawling with rats and mice being bred as pet food. Nearly 1,000 rats and mice, 11 birds and one cat. What followed were months of veterinary and dental examinations, medical treatments, surgeries, and grooming to remove clumps of matted hair. The operators were found guilty of 453 counts of animal neglect and ordered to pay \$50,000 to the RSPCA, despite costs exceeding \$260,000.



the barristers are either in awe of me or in fear of me."

Ms Geyer says in just a few days she has heard about a dog who was hit by a car and the wound was badly infected. The two-month old wound had received no veterinary treatment. "We're not asking them to do such onerous things," Ms Geyer says. "We're asking them to ensure that the RSPCA has such a big profile."

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SNAPSHOT: Brisbane's shame file: Last month, a rare male monkey found dead after it was stolen from Alma Park Zoo, was kicked to death by a pregnant partner. Last month, pet chickens were missing from their locked hutch in Ashgrove. One was found in a nearby possum was found emaciated with its claws removed in September. A three-to four-year-old female chihuahua (cross) was drowned in Lake in Cleveland in July. A woman was fined \$3000 and banned from owning animals for three years after finding a boxer cross was found emaciated and lactating in May. A koala (pety and its mother were found shot on a property at Mosely. Earlier this year, a Redbank, a large tan male cattle dog cross was found with what appeared to be an old operation scar about 20cm long on its left hind leg. The dog was apart and the wound was badly infected. The two-month old wound had received no veterinary treatment. We're not asking them to do such onerous things. We're asking them to ensure that the RSPCA has such a big profile. We're not asking them to do such onerous things. We're asking them to ensure that the RSPCA has such a big profile.

How adequate do you think are the courts' responses to disturbing animal cruelty cases? Please email your answer to: roy@questnews.com.au

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