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American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)

ORGANIZATION

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Background

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has something it doesn't want you to know. Raising over \$100 million a year from those weepy Sarah McLachlan commercials, the ASPCA spends little of that money on sheltering pets across America. Instead of supporting animal welfare, the ASPCA is quickly converting to the largest PETA-like animal "liberation" group in the United States. (And the Humane Society of the United States, which runs similar ads, is even worse. **Read this to learn why** (<https://www.activistfacts.com/organizations/136-humane-society-of-the-united-states/>).

Animal Welfare vs. Animal Rights

Founded in the 1800's, the ASPCA had a noble beginning as the first "humane" group in America. But the apple has fallen far from the tree. Consider the following:

1. **The ASPCA is not your local pet shelter.** Despite its name the ASPCA is not affiliated with local SPCAs and gives little of its money to them. In 2013, the ASPCA only gave \$4.9 million to support animal shelters, a mere 4% of its \$129 million budget. However, many Americans confuse the ASPCA with their local SPCA. However, the ASPCA is

not related to local SPCAs, despite the similar names, and money given to the ASPCA will not necessarily go to a donor's local shelter. In 2011, the State Humane Association of California (SHAC) **filed a complaint with the California Attorney General about the ASPCA's fundraising**

(http://www.humanewatch.org/california_spcas_snarl_at_name_confusion/). SHAC argued that “**ASPCA's unfair and deceptive fundraising practices harm local humane societies and SPCAs** (<http://www.californiastatehumane.org/spca.htm>) by capitalizing on and reinforcing the widely-held mistaken belief that the ASPCA is a parent or umbrella organization to the thousands of humane societies and SPCAs across the country.”

2. **The ASPCA kills animals.** It's one thing for a local pet shelter to put down dogs and cats due to overcrowding and limited resources. It's tragic, but most people understand. However, it's harder to justify for a group as wealthy and influential as the ASPCA.

In one case, the ASPCA **put down**

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/14/nyregion/14oreo.html>) a dog known as “Oreo.” The ASPCA claimed the dog was a danger to the public, but rescue groups had offered to take in and rehabilitate the animal. The ASPCA chose to kill him—one of over 100 animals it killed that year. (That's still an improvement over the previous body counts of the A—100,000 per year at the turn of the 20th Century, to **250,000 per year** (<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/03/4/tsg.time4.03.html>) in the 1960s.)

The ASPCA also “most likely” **killed dogs** (<http://johnsibley.com/2012/09/14/aspca-rescue-by-killing/>) in 2012 after rescuing them, according to animal welfare commentator John Sibley, something he attributed to the ASPCA not wanting to spend the money to rehabilitate the animals.

Starting in the 1890s, the ASPCA entered into a century-long contract with New York City to run an animal control and sheltering program. The ASPCA decided not to renew its contract, and services ended in 1994. At the time, the ASPCA had a kill rate that exceeded 50%. According to Harold Guither, an expert on the animal rights movement, in 1993 the ASPCA took in 60,000 animals into its two shelters (the ASPCA closed three shelters in early 80s) and killed nearly 35,000 of them. (Guither also wrote, “ASPCA has become increasingly abolitionist over the past decade”—referring to the extreme animal liberation philosophy that wants to abolish all human uses of animals.)

3. **It's about the money, not the animals.** The independent watchdog CharityWatch finds that ASPCA spends up to 35 percent of its budget on overhead, and 38 cents to raise every dollar, giving the organization a middling “C+” rating. Charity Navigator calculates that ASPCA spent a whopping \$52 million on fundraising in 2012. CEO

Edwin Sayres was getting nearly \$600,000 in compensation annually when he left in 2013.

Bob Baker, a former ASPCA investigator, told *The New York Times*, “show one picture of a mistreated dog and the funds would pour in... [I]t got to the point where animal welfare was not the priority, fund-raising was. It felt as though the animals were being used for fundraising, rather than using funds raised to help the animals.”

Financial Waste

Despite having \$115 million in contributions in 2013, the ASPCA only found homes for 3,400 dogs and cats, according to its annual report. **That’s a cost of \$34,000 per animal adopted.**

The New York Times reported on an instance of fiscal irresponsibility that irked board members. In 2006, the ASPCA had budgeted \$125,000 to work with a consultant and his firm. However, the ASPCA ended up paying \$771,000 in total to both, including \$400,000 for a fundraising dog walk—an event that netted just \$14,000. A former ASPCA board chair called it “a washout,” while the board’s then-treasurer deemed it “an inappropriate expenditure” and was incensed by “failure of management disclosure to the board.”

Questions about finances aren’t just recent. The ASPCA **fired 4 officials in 1994** (<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/22/nyregion/aspca-dismisses-4-over-money.html>), including a senior vice president and a vice president, after it was discovered that some workers earned up to \$131,000 a year in overtime. Further, the Manhattan District Attorney opened an investigation after the ASPCA’s new shelter at the time had design flaws that endangered hundreds of animals. The animal-rights newspaper *Animal People* **noted** (<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/94/6/editorial.html>) that this was just the latest in a series of *faux pas* for the organization:

The blame for the ASPCA fiasco can be cut many ways we’ve been told by people who should know that some senior staff never even looked at the blueprints [for the shelter] but it isn’t coincidental that a variety of ASPCA board problems are almost legendary, including the presence of members who have flouted ethical policies by openly wearing fur and participating in captive bird shoots; who have had themselves sworn in as deputy humane officers in order to carry weapons without a license; and in five cases hold lifetime posts reserved to particular families through a quirk in the ASPCA charter. Lawsuits have challenged the legitimacy of the ASPCA board at least four times in the past 45 years.

There was a time when the ASPCA was more about providing care for animals. In 1982, half of the ASPCA's budget came from pet license fees and its contract with New York City to provide animal care. But in that same year, the ASPCA shuttered 3 of its 5 shelters in the city.

Things didn't trend any better. The ASPCA **ended its animal-care contract with the city** (http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/95/1/animal_control.html) in the mid-1990s, and its shelters were taken over by another animal group.

Animal Welfare, or Animal “Liberation”?

Traditionally the ASPCA has been more focused on animal welfare—making sure animals are treated well—than the recent fringe ideological movements to “liberate” animals from being used by people, as advocated by groups like **PETA** (<https://www.petakillsanimals.com>) and **the Humane Society of the United States** (www.humanewatch.org)(HSUS). But that may be changing.

In 2013, the ASPCA launched a campaign billed as “The Truth About Chicken.” The campaign is apparently being managed by Suzanne McMillan, ASPCA's farm animal campaign director. McMillan is a vegan activist formerly with Compassion Over Killing, an extremist group founded by HSUS vice president Paul Shapiro. McMillan **has written** (<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-83550865.html>) that animal agriculture and farmers represent “horrible violence and bloodshed.”

Other subtle changes to ASPCA policy also raise questions about whether the organization is going off the rails.

The ASPCA today advocates for a ban of foie gras, or French-style duck or goose liver. However, it wasn't always so. In 1998 an ASPCA inspector **told NPR** (<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/98/6/veg.html>) after inspecting an upstate New York duck farm that “We didn't find any cruelty in the way that the animals were kept. We didn't find any cruelty in the way that the animals were force-fed.” The ASPCA also **stated** (<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/05/9/avmaRefuses9.05.htm>) after a visit to a foie gras farm in 1995 that it appeared to be “clean and well run.”

The ASPCA website used to say: “The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) believes that whether or not to consume animals, and animal products such as milk and eggs, is a personal and private determination that must be left to each individual.” The ASPCA believed, however, that animals used for food should be treated humanely. As do most Americans.

But that policy was at some point quietly taken off the website. Now the ASPCA says, “Farm animal suffering can be reduced through more humane farming methods and through welfare-conscious and reduced animal product consumption.” That reads similarly to the official “Reduce, Refine, Replace” position of HSUS, which is a group with the goal of “replacing” meat and dairy products entirely.

President John Kullberg did take a stance against eating meat in the early 1990's and the ASPCA published "The Animal Rights Handbook," which sold over 400,000 copies. In PETA-like fashion, Kullberg remarked "'Factory farm animals are treated more like machine parts on an assembly line than sentient creatures who feel and suffer pain"—a comment that would irk every livestock farmer who has gotten up at 4 a.m. in the cold of winter to care for his animals.

Kullberg **"lost his job within weeks**

(http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/07/6/editorialmoralmeat6_07.html)" of taking an anti-meat stand (he also had a strained relationship with the Teamsters Union, which represented ASPCA shelter workers), going to work for the PETA-like **Humane Society of the United States** (<http://www.humanewatch.org/>) running its anti-hunting land trust. But these days, animal-rights extremism appears to be more tolerated at ASPCA.

Carriage Horse Crock

The ASPCA has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars toward banning horse-drawn carriages in New York City, killing many jobs in the process. Between 2008 and 2012 the ASPCA sent hundreds of thousands to NYCLASS, a group advocating for such a ban. Then-ASPCA president and CEO Ed Sayres was a co-founder and co-president of NYCLASS. The A claimed it was wrong to have horses working in a city with cars and buses. (As the NY Post **noted** (<https://nypost.com/2014/02/13/save-the-humans/>), there were a mere 7 accidents involving carriage horses between 2011 and 2014—and 4,100 accidents involving a vehicle hitting a bicycle.)

Even Mayor Michael Bloomberg—the guy who's so nosy he wants to ban Big Gulps and mandate sodium restrictions—wasn't in favor of banning horse-drawn carriages. So when Bloomberg's rein came to an end, the ASPCA and other activists saw their opportunity. Current Mayor Bill de Blasio promised to end horse carriages as soon as he took office (he didn't), while candidate Christine Quinn opposed the ban. Carriage-horse advocates **filed a complaint with the state attorney general** (<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/carriage-horse-drivers-accuse-aspca-anti-quinn-moves-article-1.1411251>) after NYCLASS began attacking Quinn, arguing that the ASPCA was violating its nonprofit status (501(c)(3) organizations are not allowed to electioneer). Meanwhile, the New York Daily News reported that **the FBI opened an investigation** (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/exclusive-fbi-investigating-nyclass-donations-de-blasio-supporters-anti-quinn-campaign-article-1.1778613>) into donations made to and by NYCLASS and **threats against Quinn** (<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/fbi-probes-alleged-threats-christine-quinn-refusing-ban-buggy-article-1.1768376>).

The self-righteous campaign to save the carriage horses from their well-caring trainers and well-furnished housing has an ignoble history. In 2011, ASPCA received egg on its face over the death of a carriage horse. "We are very concerned that Charlie was forced to work in

spite of painful maladies,” stated the ASPCA’s chief veterinarian in a press release following the death of the animal. The only problem? **It appears it was a lie** (<https://nypost.com/2011/11/09/the-aspcas-dead-horse/>).

“There was no evidence of cruelty or neglect,” the vet explained in a letter of retraction sent to the city’s health department. “I was under a lot of pressure during the writing of that press release.”

Further casting a shadow on the ASPCA’s campaign against horses is a claim published in the New York Post from an ASPCA as an enforcement agent and former NYPD officer. He claims that the ASPCA commissioned an independent study on carriage horses in 2007 that found the horses were well cared for—but that **the ASPCA buried the report** (<https://nypost.com/2011/12/04/horse-senseless/>) because it didn’t fit the group’s agenda. The agent said that in his nine years with the ASPCA, he never witnessed cruelty to carriage horses.

Sayres’ and ASPCA’s campaign against carriage horses looks ironic in another light: The A’s support of horse jumping. After Sayres resigned from the ASPCA, the New York Post’s Page Six reported that it was “told Sayres was pushed out following a series of missteps including the ASPCA campaign against horses and carriages while supporting the Hampton Classic jumping horse show.”

The ASPCA was also accused in 2000 of **exploiting carriage horses to raise money** (<https://nypost.com/2000/08/29/aspcas-cashing-in-on-ponies-plight/>). The A had launched a public campaign claiming the horses were forced to work too long and in harsh conditions. But “while there is always the exception, these horses are very well treated,” commented upstate animal welfare Sara Whalen, who took in retired carriage horses on her farm.

The A’s current stance wasn’t always the case. In the 1980’s the A called for restrictions on working conditions if it would be too strenuous to the horses. But perhaps the organization realized there’s money to be made in a new desperate crisis that it could fundraise off of.

Wealthy ASPCA’s Animal Cruelty Department “Underfunded”

In 2013, the ASPCA announced that it would no longer run the anti-animal-cruelty division that it had founded nearly 150 years before, instead turning over responsibility of handling animal abuse complaints to the NYPD. The ASPCA claimed that it couldn’t handle the call volume.

But the transition wasn’t so smooth. In January 2014 the New York Post reported that animal cruelty cases were “**being brushed aside** (<https://nypost.com/2014/01/20/animal-cruelty-cases-get-brushed-aside-after-nypd-given-task/>)” and that the NYPD “has not yet rolled out the program or trained cops — and says it may never do so.” In the meantime, the

ASPCA had laid off its investigators the previous month. Some police sources **growled** (<https://nypost.com/2014/01/30/bratton-orders-nypd-to-take-over-animal-abuse-cases/>) about the situation to the press.

Commentator John Sibley called the ASPCA's animal cruelty investigation department “understaffed, underfunded, and overwhelmed. Few complaints are even investigated and even fewer prosecuted.” He continued:

*Few complaints are even investigated and even fewer prosecuted. A **New York Times investigation in 2007** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/23/nyregion/23aspca.html>) found that over 50,000 cruelty tips in one year resulted in fewer than 10% being followed up on at all and eventually just 103 arrests. The ASPCA has generally only shown interest in fulfilling their law enforcement duties when it results in positive PR for them – and even then they have a history of **killing the victims** (<http://johnsibley.com/2012/09/14/aspca-rescue-by-killing/>) of cruelty.*

The *Times* found that between 1997 and 2005, the investigations unit remained a small part of the ASPCA's budget. But in light of the ASPCA's \$200 million in assets and the amount of money it spends on overhead, the organization could have done a better job instead of simply closing shop and passing the buck.

Bribery Settlement

In December 2012, the ASPCA settled a federal RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act lawsuit **using \$9.3 million in donor money** (http://www.humanewatch.org/aspca_settlement/). The ASPCA was sued by Feld Entertainment, owner of the Ringling Bros. circus, after the A and other animal rights activists sued Feld, alleging that the circus unlawfully abused elephants. That lawsuit was dismissed in stunning fashion in 2009, with the judge finding that the ASPCA and others had paid the key witness, who had lied under oath, at least \$190,000.

Ironically, the ASPCA in 2002 had conducted an inspection of Ringling's elephant when the circus came to perform at Madison Square Garden. The ASPCA veterinarian **stated** (<http://www.ringlingbrostrialinfo.com/uploadedFiles/Evidence%20Packet%20No.%201.pdf>), “No injuries found on any elephants and ample food + water provided.”

ASPCA Charged With Animal Cruelty

In 1993, the ASPCA was **charged with eight counts of animal cruelty** (<http://www.shelterreform.org/1993PickBone.html>)—by its own vice president Herman Cohen, the organization's chief enforcement officer. Cohen **claimed that the ASPCA's new**

animal shelter, which had opened the previous year, was deficient

(<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/94/8/aspca.html>). The charges were conditionally dismissed after the ASPCA said it would make shelter repairs a priority.

Separately, under Cohen's brief tenure as CEO, ASPCA board members were reportedly deputized as humane officers, which allowed them to carry firearms without a permit.

Cohen **reportedly** (<http://www.animalpeoplenews.org/94/7/aspca.html>) also deputized an ASPCA board member's wife. Cohen was dismissed from the A in 1994.

Legal Trouble

Along with Ringling's racketeering lawsuit against the ASPCA, the A has found itself the target of other complaints. An ASPCA veterinarian was **accused of kicking** (<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/employees-aspca-vet-john-morehead-kick-rottweiler-died-heartbroken-owner-files-suit-article-1.459304>) a Rottweiler at the organization's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital, resulting in a lawsuit from the dead dog's owner. The star of the series "Animal Precinct," about ASPCA animal cruelty enforcement, was a defendant in a lawsuit that **claimed her unit performed illegal searches and seizures** (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/annemarie-lucas-aspca-tv-star-animal-precinct-forced-job-eyed-suit-article-1.165888>). In 1992, a Columbia University professor sued the ASPCA for \$4 million after the organization arrested her for animal cruelty. The suit was **settled** (<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/28/nyregion/squab-control-squabble-ends-in-settlement-of-a-lawsuit.html>) for an undisclosed amount in 1997.

Board Trouble

At least three board members **left in 2013** (<https://pagesix.com/2013/05/29/yankees-boss-randy-levine-quits-aspca/>) after "they believe[d] some in the organization are 'more focused on social standing than the animals.'" *The New York Times* **noted** (https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/30/fashion/angst-at-the-aspca.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), "over the last seven years, the A.S.P.C.A. has occupied one of the most fractious places in New York City philanthropy, with more than 15 members of the roughly 20-person board resigning and being replaced."

But the history of board issues goes back decades. Despite its reputation as an animal welfare organization, board members used to hunt, wear fur, and participate in "canned hunts." Additionally, some board members were deputized as humane law enforcement, allowing them to carry firearms without a permit.

Key Personnel

Matthew Bershadker, President and CEO. Bershadker was an internal promotion to President and CEO in 2013 following the departure of Ed Sayres. He was previously vice president for development.

Suzanne McMillan, farm animal campaign director. McMillan is a vegan activist formerly with Compassion Over Killing (an extremist group founded by Humane Society of the United States VP Paul Shapiro). McMillan has written that animal ag and circuses represent “horrible violence and bloodshed.”

Nancy Perry, Senior Vice President, Government Relations. Perry is married to Jonathan Lovvorn, Humane Society of the United States SVP for litigation (and who settled **the aforementioned federal racketeering lawsuit** (http://www.humanewatch.org/rico_lawsuit/)), and was a vice president at HSUS until she moved to ASPCA in 2010. Since this HSUS alumna arrived, the ASPCA has become more aggressive in lobbying and anti-agriculture activities.

\$ FINANCES

YEAR	ASSETS	REVENUE	EXPENSES	LIABILITIES	TAX FORM
2015	\$247,028,147	\$206,926,309	\$190,082,947	\$32,973,212	FORM 990 (HTTP
2014	\$233,141,070	\$190,806,070	\$175,940,199	\$26,526,052	FORM 990 (HTTP
2013	\$224,598,048	\$171,665,749	\$173,064,741	\$26,686,328	FORM 990 (HTTP
2012	\$213,492,255	\$163,615,458	\$168,616,519	\$28,041,118	FORM 990 (HTTP
2011	\$213,706,112	\$148,247,629	\$145,507,016	\$30,794,533	FORM 990 (HTTP
2010					FORM 990 (HTTP
2009					FORM 990 (HTTP
2008					FORM 990 (HTTP
2007					FORM 990 (HTTP
2006					FORM 990 (HTTP
2005					FORM 990 (HTTP

YEAR	ASSETS	REVENUE	EXPENSES	LIABILITIES	TAX FORM
2004					FORM 990 (HTTP
2003					FORM 990 (HTTP
2002					FORM 990 (HTTP
2001				m	FORM 990 (HTTP

NOTABLE QUOTES

“We fight for rats, mice, and cockroaches, too.” – Former ASPCA executive vice president Herman Cohen

INFORMATION

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)
424 E 92nd St
New York NY 10128-6804

Year	Assets	Revenue
2015	\$247,028,147	\$206,926,309
2014	\$233,141,070	\$190,806,070
2013	\$224,598,048	\$171,665,749
2012	\$213,492,255	\$163,615,458
2011	\$213,706,112	\$148,247,629

MORE FINANCIAL INFORMATION

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