

Case studies shared by the RSPCA

Cases where sentencing reached the ceiling under the Animal Welfare Act 2006

Case 1 (18 November 2020) A dead dog was found hidden under a tyre at the bottom of a garden with five sharp trauma wounds to his neck, shoulder, and left leg. These wounds were believed to have been caused by a knife and the vet who examined him stated that it could have taken the animal hours to die as the wounds missed the main arteries. The man convicted of causing unnecessary suffering first claimed he had no memory of the incident, then claimed someone else had killed the dog.

Sentencing: He was sentenced to 26 weeks imprisonment.

Case 2 (18 November 2020) A man was found guilty of twelve charges; eight under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and four under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 of causing unnecessary suffering to two dogs and badger baiting. It was the opinion of an expert vet that the man had caused his dogs to suffer unnecessarily on multiple occasions by allowing and encouraging them to fight with wild mammals including badgers causing them to sustain injuries which led to their unnecessary suffering by a failure to seek appropriate and timely veterinary intervention.

Sentencing: He was sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment and disqualified him from keeping dogs for eight years. A deprivation order was also issued with regard to the two dogs.

Case 3 (3 November 2020) A man who tortured a hedgehog by cutting off its limbs and covering its face with candle wax was jailed for 26 weeks. He caused unnecessary suffering to a hedgehog by cutting its legs, by burning/singeing the animal and covering the hedgehog's head and eyes with molten candle wax. He was also charged with a second offence under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

Sentencing: The District Judge sentenced him to the maximum 26 weeks imprisonment, disqualified him from keeping all animals for 10 years and ordered him to pay £122 victim surcharge.

Case 4 (7 September 2020) A man who burned a cat in a hot oven, tried to flush her down the toilet, attempted to strangle her and threw her against the wall was given a suspended prison sentence. He was given the cat, Sweetie, by his sister as she thought it would be good for him but the defendant said the cat disobeyed him and he heard the voice of a wrestler who told him to attack the cat. The cat was taken to the vet and found to have third degree burns and loss of skin. The owner admitted putting her in the oven for up to five minutes. The magistrate called him "extremely dangerous and she "would have liked to put him in prison for as long as she could".

Sentencing: He was sentenced to 18 weeks suspended for two years, banned from keeping pets for ten years, pay £440 costs and ordered to undertake six months mental health treatment.

Case 5 (12 January 2020) Two brothers were convicted for mistreating animals after one repeatedly stabbed a deer and the other let a bay horse starve to death. One was found guilty of causing unnecessary suffering to two dogs just a month after a gruesome video emerged of him knifing the deer. His brother was sentenced in the same court after he let a bay horse starve to death.

A third man was convicted following the seizure of three horses in March, just two months after RSPCA officials rescued a mare and its foal. He had been previously convicted last year of causing

unnecessary suffering to a foal which was seen hauling a cart of people at a horse fair. Four of the horses were emaciated and the foal had breathing problems, fleas and was described as "very thin." A Shetland Pony was also found with a deep cut across the nose.

Sentencing: The first brother was jailed for seven and a half months and will spend half that time in custody. He was also banned from keeping dogs for five years and ordered to pay £5,115. The second brother was given a 12 month community order, will have to do 150 hours unpaid work and pay £1,585.

The third man was also convicted alongside the two brothers, after four of his horses were found emaciated in the same RSPCA raid. He was jailed for 26 weeks after previously pleading not guilty to five counts of causing unnecessary suffering to horses. He was also banned from owning horses for five years and fined £5,000.

Case 6 (20 December 2019) A man kicked his pet dog to death in a "cowardly and vicious" attack after drinking. The Staffordshire bull terrier, Diesel, was called by the man into the kitchen where the dog was kicked six of seven times. Sentencing: He pled guilty and was jailed for 17 weeks and banned from keeping animals for life.

Case 7 (29 November 2019) A man admitted causing suffering after beating his 11 month old German Shepherd puppy to death. The puppy was punched to death before her body was dumped near some trees.

Sentencing: He was jailed for four months and banned from keeping animals for the rest of his life.

Case 8 (14 November 2019) A man deliberately set his dog on a pet cat, which was mauled to death. This incident was caught on CCTV and his actions caused outrage on social media after the video footage was released in a bid to identify him.

The owner of the cat made a victim impact statement which was read to the Court and said that "The attack has affected my sleep. My cat Cleo would always be there in the morning but now she is not. "I don't want to go home because I know Cleo is not there. I feel as if a big part of my life is missing."

Sentencing: He was jailed for 18 weeks after admitting causing cruelty and was also banned from keeping animals for life. He was also ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £122 and £250 in compensation to the cat's owner.

Passing sentence, chairman of the bench Brian Benton told the defendant: "This court is restricted to a maximum sentence of 26 weeks for the offence to which you have pleaded. "Due to your guilty plea, you are entitled to a reduction of one-third, to 18 weeks. However, due to the circumstances, we would if we were actually permitted to do so have imposed a far greater custodial sentence."

Case 9 (13 September 2019) A dog breeder who was breeding dogs but struggling to sell them. Her house was full of over 100 dogs in poor conditions, including some with injuries and disease, many living in cages and none having access to clean fresh water. Some were so suffering so much they had to be euthanised.

Sentencing: The defendant was found guilty of 16 charges of cruelty and neglect. She was given a 21 week prison sentence, disqualified from keeping or breeding animals for at least 15 years and ordered to pay £50,000 in costs.

Case 10 (17 August 2019) Two people fed their dog anti-freeze then beat her with a metal pole to death and stabbed her. Their crimes came to light when an RSPCA inspector was contacted by environmental health officers.

Sentencing: The defendants admitted two counts of causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal, one count of poisoning and one count of failing to see an animal receive proper medical attention. The judge jailed the pair for ten weeks and banned them from keeping animals for life. They can appeal after a 10-year period.

Case 11 (1 May 2019) A man from Fulham was jailed and banned from keeping animals for life after he was found guilty of kicking his four-month-old puppy to death. A post-mortem examination of the dog's body revealed that there were also three historical injuries of blunt force trauma to the dog's body which occurred between May and June before the final incident which led to her death.

Sentencing: The defendant was found guilty of four offences for causing unnecessary suffering to a Staffordshire bull terrier by the infliction of physical abuse, namely blunt force trauma. Sentenced to an immediate 26-week custodial sentence in total for the four charges and banned from keeping all animals for life and ordered to pay £1,000 in costs.

Case 12 (4 December 2018) The RSPCA joined Lancashire police to execute a warrant after intelligence suggested the person was involved in wildlife crimes with his two dogs. The RSPCA obtained videos of him setting his dogs on a pet cat and a fox and images of a dog being encouraged to attack a gerbil and still images of the fox attack which showed the animal being baited by the dog.

Sentencing: The defendant pleaded guilty to four offences under the Animal Welfare Act in relation to encouraging his two dogs to attack a cat and a fox, as well as failing to provide veterinary attention for the dogs themselves. The person was jailed for 22 weeks and disqualified from keeping animals for life. He was also ordered to pay £375 in costs and £115 victim surcharge.

Other cases referenced during the Bill's passage (taken from Hansard)

Case 1

Last year the RSPCA was called to a property in Wales, and inspectors found 35 ponies trapped in dilapidated barns, outbuildings and overgrown paddocks. During the inspection, three other ponies were discovered trapped underneath a fallen metal roof, pinned to the ground by its weight. The trapped ponies could not move and were found with lacerations and injuries across their bodies. Elsewhere on the property, starving ponies were found in tiny paddocks, and all had overgrown hooves and various injuries. Six of the ponies were lame, and another horse was found dumped on a rubbish heap. It is just horrendous.

Sentencing: In that case, the owners were sentenced to 16 weeks and 12 weeks respectively, suspended for one year. It seems that the courts are not taking animal cruelty offences most seriously, and we need to change that in Parliament. As has been said, we must also ensure that we enforce these regulations, not just bring them in.

Case 2

In November 2019, a man admitted to beating his 11-month-old German Shepherd puppy to death.

Sentencing: He was sent to prison for four months.

Case 3

In 2018, there was the Northampton cat killer, a man who killed and mutilated seven family pets before leaving them outside their homes for their owners to find them.

Sentencing: That case was horrific, but he was sentenced to just three months in prison.

Case 4

In 2019 in Wellingborough, a man stabbed a miniature horse over 20 times with a kitchen knife. He also cut the wings off three chickens. All those animals had to be put down.

Sentence: He received just a two-month sentence and, in fact, a longer sentence for carrying the knife, which is obviously a serious offence as well. I do not think anyone would consider two or three-month sentences at all appropriate in both those cases.

Case 5

A bulldog called Baby, was lifted above her owner's head and thrown down the stairs repeatedly. Not content with simply abusing Baby, the two young men video-recorded their actions for further entertainment and thank goodness they did or perhaps they would have never faced justice. The RSPCA investigated the case of Baby and took forward a private prosecution after a secure digital card was found in a supermarket some three years after the original incident, which had the video evidence filmed by one of the abusers. The RSPCA inspector Gemma Lynch described the clip for the court, saying that Baby was "totally submissive throughout, not even making a noise when she lands on the stairs, bouncing to the foot of them where there is a baby gate which she crashes into before hitting the ground." She described how a second clip showed Baby's abuser "stamping on her neck repeatedly at the bottom of the stairs, then picking her up and throwing her to the ground with force over and over again...Another clip shows him standing on Baby's chest...before jumping up and down on her. This is the only time you hear her make a noise, and she is crying throughout." During the RSPCA's investigation, it discovered that Baby had to be put down three months following the incident, after losing the use of her hindlegs.

Sentencing: The two men pleaded guilty to animal cruelty and were sentenced to 21 weeks in prison, suspended for two years, given a six-month tagged evening curfew, and ordered to pay £300 in costs. They were also banned from keeping animals for life, with no appeal for 20 years.

Case 6

A little terrier called Scamp was found buried alive with a nail hammered in his head in a shallow grave in Redcar. Scamp was discovered by a walker who heard grunting from a mound in Kirkleatham woods and took the animal to a vet. The vet who examined the terrier described the abusers' actions as the worst case of animal cruelty that he had ever seen.

Sentencing: The two men who admitted the charges and pled guilty to the offence relating to the dog's death were jailed for just four months, the maximum that they could have received owing to their guilty pleas, and banned from keeping animals for life.

Case 7

In one case, a cat was left in a washing machine for hours before it ultimately died.

Sentencing: The perpetrator received only a disqualification from keeping animals for five years.

Case 8

4 1/2yrs ago, Jimmy was a cross-breed dog who had been mistreated for some time. Eventually, his owner had strung him up in the garden, taken a hammer and an air rifle to him, and then left him to experience what must have been a truly horrific and painful death. When we got into court, we were presented with photographs and mobile phone footage recovered by the RSPCA, which was bringing the prosecution. It was one of the most harrowing, deliberate and gratuitous attempts to cause suffering to an animal that I could ever imagine. The deliberate and prolonged nature of it, alongside what had obviously been neglect as a result of malnutrition for some time, was truly harrowing for everyone in the court. Jimmy the dog died a painful, slow and deliberate death as a result of a barbaric and irrational act by a 23-year-old man.

Sentencing: The individual on trial pleaded guilty at the first opportunity and was being convicted for a first offence. The sentence he received after mitigation was nowhere near the level that any one of us may have wanted to award, even within the current guidelines.

Case 9

Archie, a dog who was so badly beaten, almost literally to a pulp, that only the whites of his eyes and his fast breathing could be seen. He suffered severe swelling on the left of his face, his neck, his left eye, the left side of his jaw and the base of his skull. An X-ray showed that Archie had a fractured spine and blood was also found in his urine. If someone had done that to a human being, they would meet the full force of law.

Sentencing: The man who had beaten Archie and put him in that life-threatening state, who was his former owner, his carer and the man responsible for his wellbeing, was sentenced to just 18 weeks' imprisonment—18 weeks for all that—and ordered to pay £500 in costs.

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