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## Cockfighting bust nets 70 arrests

70 people arrested after cops bust alleged cockfight operation

By TAMARA CHERRY, SUN MEDIA

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EAST GWILLIMBURY -- On a hill off Hwy. 48, several cages sit outside a small brown barn where police found 80 roosters -- six of them already dead -- in what poice say is a snapshot of Ontario's clandestine cockfighting culture.

In a small house next to the barn, Danilo Patawaran, 52, refused to comment yesterday on the allegations against him and his wife that they kept a cockpit and betting house where more than 60 people brought their roosters for death matches in a small, bloodied ring.

The story began on Valentine's Day with an anonymous call to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

When police and OSPCA officers arrived at the Patawaran property, they found dozens of people crowded in the barn.

The alleged cockpit was about six metres in diameter, surrounded by hay bails, York Regional Police Det.-Sgt. Dieter Boenheim said.

"There's no escaping that pit," he said. "The people are crowded around it and they're all cheering on the roosters, watching the fight."

The birds' feet were outfitted with metal spurs, sharp enough to cut paper, OSPCA spokesman Kristin Williams said.

They had been bred for fighting, genetically selected for their aggression, many of them hopped up on steroids, Williams said.

The six birds already dead had been incinerated, she said.

"They are basically cutting each other into pieces while they're in this fight," Boenheim said of the "blood sport tournament."

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"In 25 years of policing, I've never come across this. I've never seen it," he said. "But I was also absolutely disgusted by it."

Two years ago, Vincente Estampador, of Port Hope, pleaded guilty to causing unnecessary pain and suffering to birds, keeping a cockpit and running an illegal gaming operation after 198 roosters were removed from his property.

In 2002, an anonymous tip led police to an alleged cockfighting ring at a Southgate barn where 46 roosters were found.

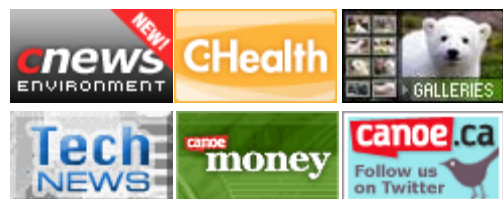
"We've seen probably a dozen cases in the last decade either involving roosters or dogs that are bred to fight," Williams said, comparing the wounds inflicted to the likes of car accidents. "Even the winner, the bird that actually survives, they might receive such severe injuries that they might die from exhaustion, they might bleed to death, they might die from shock."

The 74 live roosters found on the Patawaran property were euthanized by court order Sunday.

In addition to the Patawarans -- Danilo, 52, and Deanna, 46 -- 68 others from across Ontario and Quebec were charged with causing unnecessary suffering and with being found in a common betting house.

"Our investigation is only starting," Boeheim said. "There's no place in our society for these events to take place."

Anyone with information about similar incidents is asked to contact Boeheim at 1-866-876-5423, ext. 7066, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477tips, 1800222tips.com, or by texting TIPYORK and your message to 274637. Animal cruelty can be reported to the OSPCA at 1-888-668-7722 or ontariospca.ca.



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