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70 charged in alleged cockfighting ring

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SUNNY FREEMAN
STAFF REPORTER

York police arrested 70 people after breaking up an alleged cockfighting ring in an East Gwillimbury barn Saturday.

"We caught people right in the middle of the action. They were literally crowded around a cockpit as two birds were fighting," said York police Det. Sgt. Dieter Boeheim.

Police believe the fight was part of a ring that attracted participants from Toronto, across southern Ontario, and at least one person from Quebec.

The bust occurred after the Ontario SPCA received an anonymous call reporting animal cruelty at a home on Hwy. 48. The residents, Danilo Patawaran, 52, and Deanna Patawaran, 46, were identified as being the organizers of the event. The pair face numerous charges including keeping a cockpit and keeping a betting house.

They are scheduled to appear in a Newmarket court on March 18.

The remaining 68 people were charged with causing unnecessary suffering and being found in a common betting house. The maximum penalty upon conviction for animal cruelty charges is 5 years in jail.

When investigators searched the property early Sunday morning, they found 74 live roosters and six dead.

"We have no indication of how long it was going on for, but there is evidence that there were previous fights this group attended," said Boeheim.

The SPCA seized the roosters and had the birds euthanized by a vet Sunday, said Kristin Williams, spokesperson for the OSPCA.

Williams said roosters used in cockfighting are often selected because of their breeding and aggression and enhanced with steroids.

She believes police arrived in the early stages of what may have been a daylong or weekend-long event.

Blood sport, using dogs or roosters for fighting, is fairly common, Williams said, adding it's not geographically specific and happens across the province.

"What's startling to many about this case is that it happened in their backyard, it's not a very rural community, just north on Highway 48."

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