



Willie & Waylon
Canada

The Story of the Texas Tumbleweeds

In December, 2009, an exotic animal import company known as U.S. Global Exotics was raided by the Texas SPCA and the City of Arlington, Texas. They took possession of some 29,000 exotic animals that were dead, dying, or in critical condition. Sloths, coatamundi, kinkajous, wallabies, hamsters, prairie dogs, iguanas, snakes, frogs, spiders, chinchillas, ferrets, hedgehogs and other animals were being tended for by only three employees. The smell of death and neglect was in the air. This was the largest animal seizure to date in U.S. history.

Leading veterinarian and hedgehog expert, Dr. Susan Brown, was among the first rescuers in the door. She had been in communication with Dawn Wrobel, animal communicator and long-time friend of the animal community. She asked for Dawn's help in organizing the animal community's rescue groups as soon as the raid could be made public. Dawn, with a severely broken leg, was unable to go to Texas and help first-hand. Instead, she readied her phone and computer.

One of the first groups she reached out to was The Hedgehog Welfare Society. As a long time member and friend of the HWS, she knew that our Rescue Committee was ready for the challenge of placing these hedgehogs in forever homes. But first, the City of Arlington and the Texas SPCA had to win custody of the animals and then turn them over to the HWS. We gladly accepted the challenge and were soon on our phones and computers trying to come up with homes for what was originally thought to be 800 hedgehogs. Members of the International Hedgehog Association were also active in the pursuit of homes.

The Texas SPCA, through Dawn, reached out to the HWS with court approval for helping care for the hedgehogs. The hedgies were devouring more than 50 pounds of kibble, several hundred cans of soft food, and 10 cubic feet of shavings each day. The HWS sent out a letter to its membership and chat group. Our amazing members, members of the IHA, and friends of friends began making contributions. Soon, the Texas SPCA received the court's permission to have someone from the HWS come in and help care for the hedgehogs. First to the rescue site was Board member and founding member, Jennifer Plombon. An RN, she was also trained in wildlife rehab at The Big Cat Center, The Wildlife Rehab Center and The Raptor Center near



Abilene
Deming NM



Hank
Beecher IL



Arlington
Milwaukee WI



Rosanne
Divide CO



Arlene
Divide CO



Diana
Blaine WA



Gromit
Naperville IL



Snowberry
Beach Park IL

her Minnesota home. She was a natural choice for the project. Board members Anne Traylor, Vicki McLean, and Kristen Zorbini-Bongard also joined Jennifer for a time in the trenches. Former Board member, Judie Peters, also volunteered. Local members Nellie Hill, Nikki Wilbarger, Elaine Becker-Fischer, Ashley Festa and Kari Howard turned out for food delivery, then for work inside the SPCA.

Soon it looked like the court was going to favor on the side of the animals. The HWS had to begin thinking about how to transport these hedgies to their new homes across the U.S. and into Canada. Once again, the membership and friends of the HWS pulled together, and more than enough hedgehogs were sewn and donated to provide at least two bags per hedgehog for travel. IHA members volunteered to help transport hedgehogs, particularly in the crucial north-western U.S., and provided loving foster and forever homes. Behind the scenes the HWS Board worked together to make sure everything was in place for a successful rescue operation.

On January 30, 2010, the animals were declared the property of the City of Arlington. We won! What a joyous day! The City of Arlington signed the animals over to the Texas SPCA, and the animals were, from there, delegated to various zoos and rescue groups. All of the hedgehogs were signed over to the HWS on February 2, 2010. Over the next two weeks, drivers came and went from the Texas SPCA warehouse where the animals had been kept until the last hedgie was on his/her way to their forever home.

Incredibly, some of the female hedgies had been living as a colony with babies. It was impossible to sort out who belonged to whom. To give them the best shot at survival, they were moved to Board member Anne Traylor's home nearby. She cared for them as they were weaned, treating for mites as necessary, and continuing with a heavy workload. A few weeks later, healthy and well-adjusted, they left Texas, too.

This was an unprecedented feat in the history of the HWS. All together, the hedgehogs numbered just over 700. We, along with the IHA, found homes for every last one. A few are still in foster care, but they are being well cared for until just the right home comes along. Sadly, a few have crossed over the Rainbow Bridge, but they went there knowing love, kindness and compassion.

We couldn't have done it without the women who were willing to get down and dirty on the front lines, the drivers who braved winter storms and lonely roads, without our generous members for their financial and moral support, but most of all those who opened their homes and hearts to the little Tumbleweeds.

If you would like to hear more about this rescue, you can go to:

<http://features.peta.org/pettrade/default.asp?p=pocketPets>

<http://www.wfaa.com/news/local/Thousands-of-exotic-animals-seized-in-Arlington-79323622.html>

<http://crimeblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2009/12/seizure-of-exotic-animals-in-a.html>

<http://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Thousands-of-Exotic-Animals-Seized--79361527.html>