

2 Feb 09

RSPCA accused of dirty tricks in Scotland



The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, one of Britain's richest charities, was accused yesterday of dirty tricks by a fellow charity, including deliberately fundraising in areas outside its remit.

In an unprecedented turf war within the charitable world, the equivalent Scottish welfare society claimed the RSPCA poached donations and legacies intended to help animals in Scotland.

The RSPCA, which denies the accusations, operates only in England and Wales. The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA), which is a completely separate organisation, challenged the RSPCA "to stop stealing food from the mouths of Scotland's defenceless animals and tell the truth to the Scottish public".

The Scottish charity, less than a tenth of the size of the RSPCA, accuses the English organisation of TV advertising in Scotland; a membership drive in Scottish supermarkets; and adverts on Scottish radio stations. It also believes the RSPCA are guilty of accepting legacies dedicated to "RSPCA Scotland" or "Scottish RSPCA".

The Scottish SPCA challenged the English organisation to admit that it cannot save "a single animal" in Scotland. Stuart Earley, chief executive of the SSPCA, said, "Many people do not know that the RSPCA does not rescue or rehome any animals in Scotland and by advertising here it has been intentionally adding to the confusion to make money. "The RSPCA is in breach of Institute of Fundraising guidelines it helped draw up which require charities to be explicitly clear about where they work. Occasionally using small print to tell the Scottish public it is registered in England and Wales is in no way explicit.

"We are a completely separate charity and have asked the RSPCA to make it clear it does not save animals in Scotland so people can make an informed choice about who to donate to. However, after six months of talks we are no further forward. "This has been increasing the huge pressure on our resources for many years and enough is enough. It's time the RSPCA told the truth."

The issue of recognition is a long running bone of contention with the SSPCA, which in 2007 had an income of £10.1 million and an expenditure of the same amount. "We are desperate for every penny we can get," said an insider. "The RSPCA spent £17m on marketing in 2007 - that's 170 per cent of what it costs us to run." By contrast, the RSPCA was ranked the seventh top charity in Britain by the consultancy Intangible Business, with an income in 2007 of £114m, of which £63.1m was from legacies. Its expenditure was £111m. The RSPCA also has reserves in the order of £150m.

Both charities have a venerable history. The RSPCA was founded in 1824, the first national animal protection in the world. It was granted royal approval in 1840. It now has 172 branches in England and Wales. The Scottish SPCA was founded in 1839 and now has 10 animal rescue and rehoming centres across Scotland, plus two wildlife rescue units in Fife and Shetland. However, the SSPCA said research had demonstrated that 70 per cent of the Scottish public believed the RSPCA saved animals in Scotland. "The RSPCA seems determined to portray itself as a UK charity, even if it is at the expense of animal welfare in Scotland," said Mr Earley. "We are therefore calling for the RSPCA to be clear in its advertising that it does not rescue or rehome animals in Scotland. "This could be by explicitly stating where it works or even describing itself as the 'RSPCA for England and Wales'. Either would clear up the confusion almost immediately. "It is impossible to quantify how much we have lost to the RSPCA but any loss is damaging because we receive no government or lottery funding and rely on public support."

A merger between the two charities is ruled out because the Scottish SPCA fulfil a semi-judicial status. The charity has a similar status to the police in Scotland in that it is a reporting agency to the Crown Office, a status greater than that afforded to the RSPCA. In a statement, the RSPCA said it did not deliberately advertise in Scotland and in fact went "to great lengths" to ensure wherever possible that adverts are not distributed outside of England and Wales. "Every piece of printed literature, television advertising and internet banner advertising always features the wording "The RSPCA is a charity registered in England and Wales". We always make every effort to exclude advertising messages reaching Scottish consumers. All Scottish donors, who contact us via RSPCA fundraising campaigns, are directed to the Scottish SPCA so that they can donate to them if they so wish. "We do not send direct mail or door drops as these can be controlled by postal codes. With television advertising, if a station is able to restrict Scottish coverage, we only buy English and Welsh airtime. However, many satellite channels only enable us to purchase UK wide.

"The RSPCA is fully aware of the difficulties arising from cross-border fundraising and was party to the creation of the Institute of Fundraising code. The Society fully supports the open and honest approach that the code promotes."