

# The Watchdog



*The Watchdog monitors fundraising, spending, and political activity in the name of animal and habitat protection—both pro and con. His empty bowl stands for all the bowls left empty when some take more than they need.*

## Reform begins at one of India's oldest humane societies

**KAKINADA**—The 102-year-old Kakinada SPCA, among the oldest western-style humane societies in India, has “had its working committee abolished by district collector and ex-officio president Gopalakrishna Dwivedi, owing to detection of irregularities in its functioning,” *The Hindu* reported on December 3, 2008.

Founded with a gift of 98 acres by the Maharajah of Pithapuram, the Kakinada SPCA was expected to support itself by making use of the land, but only two acres remain.

Part of the role of a “district collector” in India is ensuring that nonprofit organizations fulfill their public trust. Any humane society calling itself a Society for the Protection of Animals is now required to include the local district collector as ex-officio president. The dissolution of the Kakinada SPCA working committee is among the first reported consequences of the newly mandated board structure.

District collector Dwivedi acted upon allegations forwarded by the Animal Welfare Board of India. “The charges framed against SPCA secretary S.S.R. Guru Prasad, treasurer K.G. Lunani, and other members of the core committee included negligence in taking care of animals, misusing funds, and using almost half” of the present Kakinada SPCA campus “for purposes other than animal welfare,” *The Hindu* elaborated. “Guru Prasad had his own house constructed in a corner of the premises where animals were supposed to be sheltered, and embarked on building a commercial complex” on the site, *The Hindu* said.

In addition, *The Hindu* reported, “a python and a peacock were illegally kept in cages on the SPCA premises and were subsequently left out in the jungle days before the inquiry was instituted, instead of handing them over to wildlife officials. Criminal cases were booked against the accused persons.”

Confirmed Blue Cross of India chief executive Chinny Krishna, “Sadly, the report seems to be correct. Guru Prasad is a former member of the Animal Welfare Board of India, and he and his son have been accused of misusing the funds of the SPCA. The person who has really been responsible for bringing all this to light is Lisa Warden.”

Wrote Warden to the Animal Welfare Board on October 30, 2008, “I arrived in Kakinada on October 2, 2008 to join my husband, who is in India on a three-year contract. As an animal lover, I was happy to see the SPCA sign on the main road. I looked forward to visiting the place and was hoping to register to help as a volunteer.”

During the next month Warden documented severe neglect of animals on the premises, numerous animal deaths, a federally funded Animal Birth Control program that was not actually sterilizing dogs, and a water fountain for animals touted in Kakinada SPCA brochures that has no water in it.

Warden and her husband fed the animals and tried to encourage improvements in the operation. But push came to shove after Guru Prasad balked for three days before finally euthanizing a cow who was in severe pain from a broken ankle.

Detailing her findings about the Kakinada SPCA to the Animal Welfare Board on October 28, 2008, Warden noted that “The plaque commemorating the construction of the commercial center” built on about half of the remaining SPCA property “bears the names of the president of the SPCA, who is Kakinada’s district collector, and the SPCA vice-president, who is the Revenue department divisional officer.”

That brought swift attention to Warden’s complaints.

“Unfortunately,” Warden told **ANIMAL PEOPLE** on December 3, “the drama is far from resolved and many animals continue to suffer at the Kakinada SPCA, even though the Collector has finally kicked out the bad guys. Guru Prasad and Gopal Surabathula, the father/son duo who were running the place, are very well connected. They are doing everything in their power to sabotage the attempt to clean up the SPCA by, for example, having the police confiscate hundreds of cattle and dump them on the site. In the past week,” Warden said, “376 confiscated cattle and buffalo have been dumped at the site by the police. Five of them have died and more are almost dead

from starvation, as the goondas left the coffers dry, and there were no resources with which to care for them. The Kakinada SPCA has never received animals in these numbers,” Warden charged. “It is clearly an orchestrated attempt to make the clean-up efforts turn into a disaster.”

But People for Animals founder and former federal minister for animal welfare Maneka Gandhi was skeptical of the claimed plot. “350 animals coming into the shelter at one time is certainly not new,” Mrs. Gandhi told **ANIMAL PEOPLE**. “Kakinada is on the main smuggling area to Kerala and to Al Kabeer near Hyderabad. The police catch trucks regularly and send the animals to the SPCA. The only difference is that Guruprasad used to sell the animals immediately to butchers.”

Current Revenue department divisional officer G.C. Kishore Kumar and Agriculture & Animal Husbandry Department staff formed a committee to build a proper shelter for the animals on the premises, mostly cattle. “Meanwhile,” *The Hindu* reported, “the ground is being prepared to initiate criminal proceedings against all those responsible for the pitiable plight of the cattle, most of whom were being smuggled to abattoirs.”

“Local people have been submitting complaints about the Kakinada SPCA to the authorities for quite a few years,” Warden told **ANIMAL PEOPLE**. Unfortunately, the authorities, for whatever reason, chose to do nothing.”

Among the complainants was Visakha SPCA founder Pradeep Kumar Nath, who received 11 dogs and a kitten from the Kakinada SPCA via Warden while her letter was en route to the Animal Welfare Board, and is now “trying to coordinate with the Animal Welfare Board” to reconstitute the Kakinada SPCA, Nath said.

“Ironically, the VSPCA owes its present status to information from Guru Prasad that an animal welfare conference would be held at Delhi in January 1997,” Nath recalled. “It does sadden me greatly that Guru Prasad joined with his son Gopal in indulging alleged criminal activities in the name of animals. It is very disheartening to read the many types of ways that they were making money in the name of animals.”

Nath developed suspicion about the integrity of the Kakinada SPCA after observing that a “structure of just a roof, sponsored by the Royal SPCA” appeared to cost much less than the value of the grant that paid for it.”

Nath also heard rumors that the Kakinada SPCA was selling “rescued” cattle to slaughter, and that burglaries of the premises were inside jobs. But Nath was particularly perturbed when he learned that Guru Prasad had won a nationally recog-



Peacock and plaque led to reforming the Kakinada SPCA. (Lisa Warden)

nized humane award for achievements purportedly including founding the Visakha SPCA.

“I believe that the situation was my fault for not having had my antenna up,” said Mrs. Gandhi. “Guru Prasad’s Gopal Surabathula went around as the People for Animals head there. Just one day before Lisa Warden sent me her letter and photos, he wrote to me saying that he had signed a memorandum of understanding with the local administration to do the Animal Birth Control program, and that I should ask them to release the money to him immediately—which I would have done if Lisa had not happened along.

“The odd part,” Mrs. Gandhi added, “is that now that I look at Guru Prasad’s accounts, they were always rubbish. To a trained eye like mine, they should have stood out. But I simply did not see them for so many years, nor did anyone else. He didn’t get caught fudging accounts. He got caught by the physical and photographic evidence provided by Lisa and the snake and peacock—for which I had him raided by the wildlife department.”

Speaking at the Kakinada SPCA centenary celebration in January 2005, member of Parliament Mutha Gopalakrishna announced that the city would soon have a six-acre “street dog park.” Perhaps he meant that street dogs would roam the business park now occupying much of the Maharajah of Pithapuram’s legacy. —Merritt Clifton

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