

## Exotic Birds, Now Missing, Among Hundreds Of Animals Found On Missouri Property

### Humane Society will try to rescue birds if they're located

By Katie Ingmire

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More than three dozen exotic birds of various bird species were among the hundreds of animals recently found in deplorable conditions on a southwest Missouri property. Investigators located the approximately 40 birds during an initial search of the property, but the birds were gone when team members from the Humane Society of Missouri and Polk County Sheriff's Department came back.

"When we returned with the seizure warrant, the owners had either removed [the exotic birds] from the property or turned them loose into the wild," said Jeff McRoy, statewide investigator for the Humane Society of Missouri. "We searched for them, but they were not found on the 80-acre property."

The Humane Society of Missouri, working in cooperation with the Polk County Sheriff's Department, rescued more than 360 animals from the property on Aug. 12, 2008. Property owner Virginia Gambriel was arrested and faces charges of child endangerment, as authorities also found six children living in filthy conditions on the property.

Attempts to reach Gambriel were unsuccessful.

"Most of the animals that we could see were in very poor medical condition with obvious skin problems, injuries and appeared emaciated," McRoy said.

Authorities found the birds during an initial search of the property, McRoy said. Residents had complained to the Polk County Sheriff's Department about numerous animals on the property in poor body condition. The department then enlisted the help of the Humane Society of Missouri. Only ducks and chickens were rescued, however, said Jeane Jae, director of communications for the state's Humane Society and its Longmeadow Rescue Ranch.

McRoy and other investigators did locate four peacocks and four homing pigeons roosting on treetops. Though the authorities attempted to capture the birds, they flew into a wooded area and couldn't be relocated. McRoy said if the Humane Society locates the birds, they will try to rescue them.

A number of small critters, including rabbits, guinea pigs and kangaroo rats, were also found on the property living in what McRoy describes as "horrible" conditions.

"[There were] several inches of feces, dead carcasses, moldy rotten foods, very old dirty water," McRoy said.

The critters, along with the dogs and cats rescued, are being housed at the Humane Society of Missouri's St. Louis headquarters. Farm animals are currently at the society's Longmeadow Rescue Ranch southwest of St. Louis.

McRoy said all the rescued animals are currently being held as evidence. On Sept. 2, 2008, a disposition hearing will take place in Polk County to determine custody of the animals.

"If custody is awarded to the Humane Society of Missouri," McRoy said, "treatment will be continued and the animals made available for adoption as soon as they are well enough."

For more information on the case and the condition of the animals, visit the Humane Society of Missouri's website at [www.hsmo.org](http://www.hsmo.org).