

CUSTODIAL SENTENCE FOR CRUELTY PAIR

We are pleased to report that as a result of a Hillside investigation, two men have been sent to prison following their conviction on ten counts of cruelty to animals.

Michael Hawkswell (26) from Ripon in North Yorkshire and Isap Lakha (67) from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, admitted the charges of cruelly slaughtering goats illegally after being snared by Hillside investigators.

Our investigation spanned several months after we received an initial tip-off about Hawkswell's barbaric activities. Our informant told us that Hawkswell was slaughtering large amounts of goats and sheep in a shed at the height of the foot and mouth crisis. He claimed that the sheep were often ill, emaciated and diseased. Hawkswell hacked at their throats to kill them and then sold the meat to ethnic restaurants.

After researching into Hawkswell's past we discovered that just two years earlier he had been sent to prison for animal cruelty after a lorry load of turkeys he had abandoned on the A1 actually froze to death.

Our investigators decided to pose as 'dodgy' meat dealers to see if Hawkswell would talk to us about his business. We first met him at Haswell market in Durham where he was very keen to offload his meat to us.

Following several meetings over a number of weeks, he started to open up to us and describe his illicit business in intimate and alarming detail. Totally unaware that he was being filmed by hidden cameras, Hawkswell boasted how he could supply cows, lambs, goats, deer, pigeons and even peacocks. He then gloated that most of the animals were stolen from farms late at night, and took great pleasure in pointing out to us his favourite farms for rustling. He proudly told us of another sideline he operated – breeding cockerels for fighting. Another highly illegal and cruel practice!

Hawkswell told our investigators: "My customers don't care where the meat is from as long as they get it cheap. I sell to ethnic restaurants mainly – they take all I have to offer and cover it in sauce. They don't care and neither do I." He shrugged off the risks of BSE and other diseases saying: "That's not my problem."

Then Hawkswell invited us to see how he killed the animals and prepared the meat for his customers. We went along to Hawkswell's ramshackled dirty shed in Londonderry, North Yorkshire on January 14th 2002 and were introduced to Isap Lakha and a man called Mr Patel for whom Hawkswell was to slaughter ten goats that day.

Lakha selected ten goats from the herd and the brutal slaughter began. Lakha frequently sent one of the investigators outside to check for the police, so he clearly knew that his 'activities' were illegal.

Using blunt knives, Lakha hacked at the animals' throats before Hawkswell joined in and continued sawing at their throats with a knife. The pair had been attempting to imitate the Halal ritual slaughter but their methods were utterly cruel, brutal and inhumane.

We had teamed up with The People newspaper, and a group of photographers and reporters were waiting outside the slaughterhouse ready to follow Lakha back to his house.

Vets who viewed the video of the slaughtering said it was **'abhorrently cruel and completely illegal.'** We handed our case file and video evidence over to the appropriate authorities who prosecuted both Hawkswell and Lakha.

Prosecutor Tony Kelbrick told the court: "Their method of killing was inept, clumsy, cruel and caused unnecessary pain and suffering to the goats."

The pair first pleaded not guilty but after seeing the mass of evidence against them, they changed their plea to guilty.

At Harrogate Magistrates' Court on 3rd February 2003, District Judge Roy Anderson jailed Lakha for two months and Hawkswell for four months. He also banned them from keeping animals for the next ten years. The judge told them their method of killing was **"inept, callous, squalid and cruel."** Sentencing the pair the judge said: **"The degree of distress inflicted on these animals was considerable and these offences are so serious that only a custodial sentence can be justified."**

Here at Hillside we are encouraged that these two men have been sent to prison as very few people receive custodial sentences following convictions for cruelty to animals. However, after seeing for ourselves the degree of unnecessary pain and suffering endured by these goats we can't help feeling that they got off very lightly.

We just hope that once they leave prison they are reformed characters and will not re-offend.



Caught in the act - Hawkswell and Lakha skinning the cruelly and illegally slaughtered goats. (This picture is taken from our video evidence which was presented in court. The rest is too horrific to print here.)

If you would like to help fund our **Animal Investigation Appeal** please visit our [donation page](#)



As featured in our October newsletter, these are four of the six nanny goats we managed to save from the same fate as those reported above. Through our investigations, we know that every week, thousands of sheep and goats are illegally slaughtered in the UK in this appalling manner. Belinda, Gilly, Geraldine, Sybil, Goldie and Michou are now safe from harm in the Sanctuary.

