Animal welfare lawyer honoured for outstanding work supporting animals in Ukraine

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A dedicated Ukrainian animal welfare lawyer who has helped drive the investigation and prosecution of animal cruelty cases across the country has been recognised with a prestigious Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin.

Maryna Surkova, President of the Association of Animal Protection Organisations of Ukraine (AZOU), received the award in Kyiv on 9 June 2026 in recognition of her years of work strengthening animal protection laws, supporting police investigations and ensuring offenders are held accountable for crimes against animals.

Presented by Naturewatch Foundation Campaign Manager Natalie Sorokpud at the annual Zoo-Conscious (Zoosvidomi) Forum, the award recognises individuals who make an exceptional contribution to animal welfare. The conference brought together animal welfare organisations, shelter representatives, veterinarians, businesses, policymakers and international partners from across Ukraine to discuss current challenges and opportunities in animal protection.

Maryna has become one of Ukraine's most respected animal welfare advocates and legal experts. Working closely with law enforcement agencies and animal welfare organisations, she has played a key role in helping animal cruelty offences be treated with greater seriousness and ensuring legislation is translated into meaningful action.

She has also been a longstanding partner of Naturewatch Foundation, supporting police training programmes and promoting stronger enforcement of animal welfare laws across Ukraine. Her expertise, persistence and commitment have helped ensure that crimes against animals are taken seriously and that those responsible are held accountable.

Maryna Surkova said:

“Our organisations have worked together for many years, and during that time we have implemented a number of important initiatives to improve animal welfare in Ukraine, including training police officers to investigate crimes against animals and supporting local animal welfare organisations. It is especially meaningful to receive this recognition from colleagues who understand how challenging, yet important, this work is. I would like to thank Naturewatch Foundation for its longstanding partnership and support for Ukraine.”

Sarah Carr, CEO of Naturewatch Foundation, said:

“Naturewatch Foundation award our Challenge Coin to celebrate the remarkable work of people working determinedly to improve animal welfare and tackle animal cruelty. A Challenge Coin is a treasured sought-after award. My thanks to Maryna for her important work and unwavering commitment to animal welfare and my congratulations for being a recipient of one of our Challenge Coins!”

Natalie Sorokpoud, Campaign Manager at Naturewatch Foundation, said:

“I have known Maryna and worked alongside her for many years, and I cannot think of a more deserving recipient of this award. Through her determination, professionalism and deep compassion for animals, she has helped transform the way animal cruelty cases are viewed and investigated in Ukraine. Her work has inspired countless animal welfare advocates and has created lasting change that will benefit animals for years to come. It was a privilege to present Maryna with a Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin in recognition of her exceptional contribution to animal welfare.”

Recognising outstanding achievements

The Naturewatch Foundation Challenge Coin is presented to individuals whose work goes above and beyond to support and promote the charity’s mission and values. A maximum of four awards are made each year. These coins are a symbol of respect, recognising work that contributes to ‘advancing animal welfare’ and are highly treasured within the animal welfare community.

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Notes to Editors

Naturewatch Foundation has been at the forefront of animal welfare in Eastern Europe since 1994, with a strong focus on Ukraine animal rescue and long-term improvements in stray animal management.

Our work in Ukraine, prior to and during the ongoing war with Russia, has included:

- Implementing humane stray animal management solutions
- Delivering humane education and police training
- Campaigning for stronger animal welfare legislation in Ukraine
- Supporting local animal shelters and rescue groups

About Naturewatch Foundation
Naturewatch Foundation is a UK-based animal welfare charity dedicated to ending cruelty and improving the lives of animals through campaigning, education and advocacy. For over 30 years, the charity has led initiatives to raise animal welfare standards around the world. By working with policymakers, law enforcement agencies, the public, and in partnership with animal sanctuaries, Naturewatch Foundation strives to make the world a kinder place for animals.

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