MORE THAN A MILLION DEAD BIRDS, RAMPANT ILLEGAL GAMBLING REVEALED IN TAIWANESE PIGEON RACING EXPOSÉ

Friday 30 May, 2014

ETA US Files Complaint With Taiwanese Government Over Violations of Gambling and Animal-Protection Laws After Investigators Discover Bloodbath of Birds From Sea Races

London – PETA US' five-month undercover investigation into Taiwanese pigeon racing, released today, reveals an illegal gambling industry worth more than a billion pounds, a gruelling system of ocean races and the highest racing death rates in the world. Pigeons less than a year old are shipped out to sea and forced to try to fly back to their home lofts over a series of seven weekly races. Loss rates of 99 per cent or more per series are common – most birds drown during the trials or are killed by their owners if they don't return within qualifying time.

PETA US investigators recorded top officials at the Zhong Zheng club in Kaohsiung – the largest racing club in Taiwan – admitting to sponsoring illegal gambling and misrepresenting the amount of money at stake. A top racer provided evidence of concealed profits and confirmed the involvement of top government officials. Investigators also attended and filmed major races of birds released from ships hundreds of kilometres out to sea, for which participants pay entrance fees to the club and wager millions more. PETA US documented efforts to prevent cheating through meticulous identification of each bird, as the vast sums at stake have prompted thefts of birds, extortion and doping.

"There can be no winners in a race in which so many of the participants go missing – most presumed dead", says PETA UK's Mimi Bekhechi. "Like other forms of animal exploitation, the nasty little 'sport' of pigeon racing is driven by money, and greed is sending millions of birds crashing into an early grave."

Like the UK's cross-Channel races that PETA US exposed last year, over-water races often prove fatal for the pigeons. Investigators captured video footage of a single race in Taiwan in which tens of thousands of these highly intelligent birds likely died in a matter of hours in typhoon-strength winds. Taiwan imports champion and pedigreed birds for breeding from all over the world. Britain's Royal Pigeon Racing Association has reportedly "commissioned a report to look into ways to tap further into the Far East market" and is heavily promoting sales of British birds to Taiwan.

PETA US has filed a complaint with the Taiwanese government asking for an immediate investigation into the apparent violations of gambling and animal-protection laws. Previous government raids to collect taxes from clubs on unpaid earnings from races have not resulted in substantive reform.

Broadcast-quality video footage from the investigation is available here.

PETA US' complaint and photos from the investigation are available on request.

For more information on deadly pigeon races, please click here or visit PETA.org.uk.

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