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## **Humane Society of Berks County Seeks Information In Case of Ritual Animal Killings**

The Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County's leader in animal welfare, announced today that it is asking the public for information or leads relating to a large number of ritually killed and mutilated animals found in Reading on September 18, 2006. The animals, which included goats, chickens, and doves, were found following a call from a Route 12, Reading, business that had found the bodies in their dumpster. "It quickly became apparent that this was not an ordinary situation," said Humane Society executive director, Karel I. Minor. "These animals were slaughtered in very specific ways before being dumped. We need to discover the circumstances of the killings as soon as possible."

The condition of the bodies makes it very unlikely that these animals were slaughtered simply for human consumption. The bodies were decapitated, items inserted within the body cavities, and some had been skinned. This is consistent with some elements of Afro-Caribbean religions like Santeria, Voodoo, and Obeah. Doves, white doves in particular, are used in cleansing rituals in which the doves are rubbed on the body of the individual to be cleansed, and are then often killed, having supposedly absorbed the evil from the person. The roosters, goats, and other food present are also consistent with offerings to the saints, another Santero practice in which a person's patron saint is "fed" his favorite food. The placement of vegetable matter in the cavities of the decapitated birds is another practice associated with these religions.

Because of Reading's high concentration of residents with Caribbean roots, it is possible that these animals were killed as part of a religious ceremony. Although the courts have

upheld many of these religious practices, the Humane Society believes that it is important to determine the exact circumstances of the killings and determine if any laws have been broken. “We need to know what happened before we can decide if this was a crime or a protected religious practice,” said Minor. “Certainly the method of disposing of the animals was neither acceptable nor legal.”

The Humane Society is asking anyone with information to contact the agency at 610-921-2348. Reports can be made confidentially.

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities, sheltering nearly 7,000 animals each year. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society of Berks County is located at 1801 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Reading. More information is available at [www.berkshumane.org](http://www.berkshumane.org).

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