

The Well-Equipped Animal Control Officer

In one of her famous “just Wright” columns printed in the early editions of this magazine, former HSUS Vice President Phyllis Wright advised animal control officers and others in the field to be choosy in their selection of equipment. “When new products are brought to your attention, always evaluate them from the animals’ point of view,” she wrote. And around the country, animal-minded ACOs like Officer Jones of Study County have been doing just that for decades now—trying to get inside the brains of the species they shelter and protect.

— ILLUSTRATION AND TEXT BY CARRIE ALLAN

LEFT BRAIN holds knowledge from many sessions of professional training from The HSUS, the ASPCA, NACA, American Humane, and state animal control associations and federations. While those holding the purse strings often complain about the costs of training staff, animal control directors know that the costs of not training them are much higher.

Highly-developed **RIGHT BRAIN** is designed to come up with creative strategies for coaxing cats out of trees, snakes out of eaves, and the public out of their ignorance.

NAMETAG and BADGE show the public who Officer Jones is, and help them remember the identity of the great agency that employs this local hero.

The modern ACO is loaded down with **PAPER**: license applications, business cards, bite reports, door notices, sample lost and found fliers, animal control laws, summonses, doghouse blueprints, citations, brochures about agency services, maps of the area, mileage log forms, contact information for the public, behavior tip sheets, and copies of the Henneke body condition scoring system for horses and the Tufts Animal Care and Condition scoring system for dogs. Officer Jones hands out more education than citations.

Officer Jones keeps a **CAMERA** nearby at all times—for taking pictures to use as evidence in cruelty or neglect cases. A digital or Polaroid camera can provide instant proof of a dog’s lack of shelter or a horse’s overgrown hooves. Many officers also use the camera for a happier task: photographing adoptable animals to post on their agencies’ websites.

OFFICER JONES of Study County Animal Services is male, but women are now so well-represented in the field that nearly half of the current board of the National Animal Control Association are women—including the president.

His friendly **SMILE** makes it clear he’s on your side, whether you’re a dog or a cat or a pet owner who just needs a nudge in the right direction.

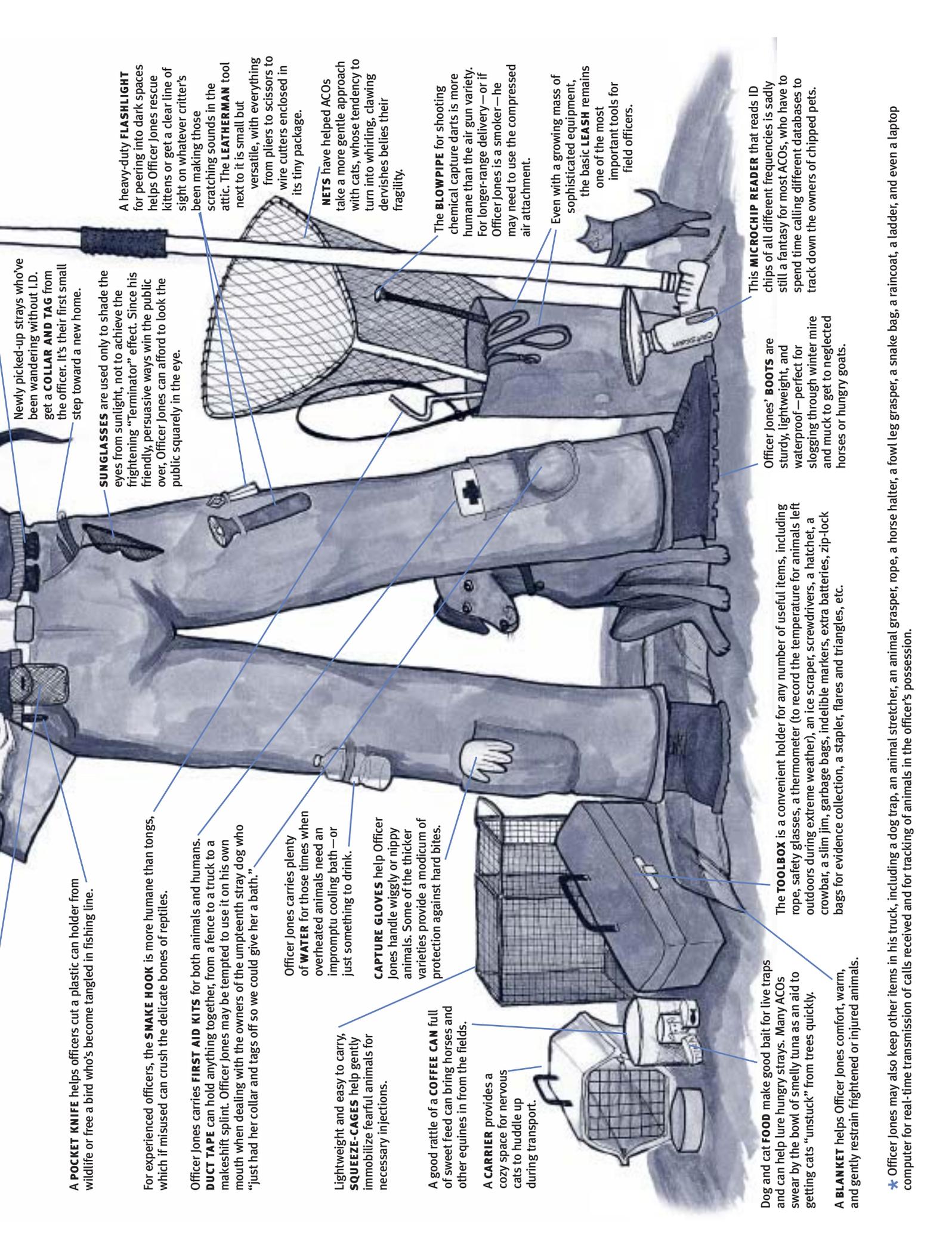
A PEN AND PAD allow Officer Jones to make quick notes of his observations when out on calls.

Under the jacket beats a **BIG HEART**, capable of empathizing with both pets and people. Successful animal control officers learn to balance compassion with reason, mastering the art of dealing with difficult people in a professional manner while also humely handling frightened or injured animals.

His **CELL PHONE** keeps him accessible to constituents and colleagues. And when he needs to have his hands free, the radio mike attached to his collar allows him to stay connected to home base.

BINOCULARS can help the officer spot nearby strays, get the exact position of a treed cat, and sight pet budgies who’ve gone AWOL.





Newly picked-up strays who've been wandering without I.D. get a **COLLAR AND TAG** from the officer. It's their first small step toward a new home.

SUNGLASSES are used only to shade the eyes from sunlight, not to achieve the frightening "Terminator" effect. Since his friendly, persuasive ways win the public over, Officer Jones can afford to look the public squarely in the eye.

A heavy-duty **FLASHLIGHT** for peering into dark spaces helps Officer Jones rescue kittens or get a clear line of sight on whatever critter's been making those scratching sounds in the attic. The **LEATHERMAN** tool next to it is small but versatile, with everything from pliers to scissors to wire cutters enclosed in its tiny package.

NETS have helped ACOs take a more gentle approach with cats, whose tendency to turn into whirling, clawing dervishes belies their fragility.

The **BLOWPIPE** for shooting chemical capture darts is more humane than the air gun variety. For longer-range delivery—or if Officer Jones is a smoker—he may need to use the compressed air attachment.

Even with a growing mass of sophisticated equipment, the basic **LEASH** remains one of the most important tools for field officers.

This **MICROCHIP READER** that reads ID chips of all different frequencies is sadly still a fantasy for most ACOs, who have to spend time calling different databases to track down the owners of chipped pets.

A **POCKET KNIFE** helps officers cut a plastic can holder from wildlife or free a bird who's become tangled in fishing line.

For experienced officers, the **SNAKE HOOK** is more humane than tongs, which if misused can crush the delicate bones of reptiles.

Officer Jones carries **FIRST AID KITS** for both animals and humans. **DUCT TAPE** can hold anything together, from a fence to a truck to a makeshift splint. Officer Jones may be tempted to use it on his own mouth when dealing with the owners of the umpteenth stray dog who "just had her collar and tags off so we could give her a bath."

Officer Jones carries plenty of **WATER** for those times when overheated animals need an impromptu cooling bath—or just something to drink.

CAPTURE GLOVES help Officer Jones handle wiggly or nippy animals. Some of the thicker varieties provide a modicum of protection against hard bites.

Lightweight and easy to carry, **SQUEEZE-CAGES** help gently immobilize fearful animals for necessary injections.

A good rattle of a **COFFEE CAN** full of sweet feed can bring horses and other equines in from the fields.

A **CARRIER** provides a cozy space for nervous cats to huddle up during transport.

Dog and cat **FOOD** make good bait for live traps and can help lure hungry strays. Many ACOs swear by the bowl of smelly tuna as an aid to getting cats "unstuck" from trees quickly.

A **BLANKET** helps Officer Jones comfort, warm, and gently restrain frightened or injured animals.

Officer Jones' **BOOTS** are sturdy, lightweight, and waterproof—perfect for slogging through winter mire and muck to get to neglected horses or hungry goats.

The **TOOLBOX** is a convenient holder for any number of useful items, including rope, safety glasses, a thermometer (to record the temperature for animals left outdoors during extreme weather), an ice scraper, screwdrivers, a hatchet, a crowbar, a slim jim, garbage bags, indelible markers, extra batteries, zip-lock bags for evidence collection, a stapler, flares and triangles, etc.

★ Officer Jones may also keep other items in his truck, including a dog trap, an animal stretcher, an animal grasper, rope, a horse halter, a fowl leg grasper, a snake bag, a raincoat, a ladder, and even a laptop computer for real-time transmission of calls received and for tracking of animals in the officer's possession.