# Illegal cockfighting operation shut down in Lincolnshire



A significant illegal cockfighting operation has been shut down by Lincolnshire Police and the RSPCA following a raid on a residential site in Beckingham, Lincolnshire, where cruel conditions for the birds were uncovered. The operation saw two men, Hugh Steele, 53, and Douglas Price, 34, sentenced at Lincoln Magistrates' Court for their involvement in training cockerels for fighting.

The raid took place in May 2024 and revealed a disturbing scene: dozens of cockerels, hens, and chicks were found in inadequate conditions within wooden pens, enclosures, and incubators. Investigators discovered both a treadmill designed to enhance the birds' strength and a portable cockfighting pit on the premises, alongside other cockfighting paraphernalia. The RSPCA’s Special Operations Unit noted that the treadmill had a cylindrical shape resembling a Ferris wheel.

Conditions in the enclosures were reported to be severely lacking, with many birds having little or no access to food and water, while others were found in dark, cramped, and unsanitary spaces. At least two dead chicks were also identified among a group of day-old birds wandering within one of the sheds. A veterinary examination revealed that out of the birds checked, only 41 had food available and merely 40 had access to clean water. Furthermore, ten of the 92 enclosures were deemed too small, and 46 were too dark.

Hugh Steele was found to have admitted to three offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006; these included being present at a cockfight and failing to seek veterinary treatment for injured birds. Douglas Price accepted responsibility for two offences, namely keeping cockerels for the purpose of fighting and neglecting to provide adequate care for the birds under his supervision. The court also took into account previous offences by Price involving training a cockerel for fighting and possessing metal fighting spurs intended to injure rival birds.

Both men received suspended prison sentences of ten weeks, which are in effect for 12 months. They were also ordered to pay £1,000 in costs and carry out 150 hours of unpaid community work. Additionally, both have been banned from keeping chickens, cockerels, and wild birds for life.

A spokesperson for the RSPCA indicated that it was a relief to remove the birds from such unsuitable circumstances and noted that many of the animals had suffered due to the conditions they were kept in. They highlighted that cockfighting has been illegal in England and Wales since 1835, and there has been a noted increase in this illicit activity since 2017.

In the aftermath of the investigation and sentencing, the RSPCA emphasised their commitment to tackling such cruel practices and removed a significant amount of cockfighting paraphernalia from the site, among other evidences. The authorities continue to urge vigilance against not only cockfighting but animal cruelty in general.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.lincs.police.uk/news/lincolnshire/news/20252/mar/cockerel-fighting-men-sentenced-following-operation-fauna/> - This URL supports the claim about two men being sentenced for their involvement in an illegal cockfighting operation in Lincolnshire. It mentions the sentencing of Hugh Steele and another individual following an RSPCA investigation.
* <https://www.lincs.police.uk/news/lincolnshire/news/> - This URL provides general information about news from Lincolnshire Police, which could include updates on operations like the one against cockfighting.
* <https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/news/animals-seized-and-three-men-arrested-on-suspicion-of-organi-9367743/> - This URL supports the claim about arrests related to animal fighting in the area, though it does not specifically mention the cockfighting operation described.
* <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/law/animalwelfareact> - This URL provides information about the Animal Welfare Act 2006, under which the men were charged for their involvement in cockfighting.
* <https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/campaigns/cockfighting> - This URL supports the claim about the RSPCA's efforts to combat cockfighting, highlighting its illegality and the organization's commitment to stopping such practices.
* <https://www.gov.uk/animal-welfare/animal-cruelty> - This URL provides general information about animal welfare laws in the UK, including those related to animal cruelty and fighting.