

ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Refuge owner recalled for zeal, compassion

By LOIS STEVENSON

To say a final farewell is always difficult, and this one is especially so. We speak for all people involved in animal rights and welfare who mourn the passing of Cavit Buyukmihci, a gentle and compassionate man with great strength of character and courage.

"Cavit always loved animals," observes his wife, Hope. "When he was a little boy in Turkey, he used to rescue stray dogs and make little pens for them, then take bread from his mother to feed the dogs. His mother would ask why he was eating so much, and he would say he was hungry. His mother was very kind too, but they were poor, and probably she would not have wanted to share their food with the dogs."

Hope and Cavit met at Cornell University, where he was studying metallurgical engineering. Because his studies were funded by the Turkish government, he was obligated to return and work in his native country.

Hope had absorbed a deep compassion toward animals from her father, Edmund J. Sawyer, a naturalist and well-known painter of birds. When she and Cavit were married and moved to Turkey, she suffered a great deal of mental anguish at the way donkeys and other animals were treated there.

But Cavit had been reared with the Eastern religion which accepts everything as unchangeable fate, and he resisted her attempts to protest the cruelties she saw.

"After five years in Turkey, we returned to the United States. Cavit became more influenced by my feelings, and then our three children influenced both of us because they were kind to animals, and if they wanted to rescue a stray, we would help them.

"Our son and I were vegetarians because of our concern for animals; but Cavit was not, until one day when he stopped his car so a mother deer with her fawn could cross the road in front of him. He said the deer turned around and looked at him, and he felt she was saying thank you. He came home that

night and said he wouldn't eat meat any more because of his fellow feeling for animals."

In their desire to acquire land on which the resident animals could live free from harassment and fear, Cavit and Hope bought 85 acres of swampland in South Jersey and founded Unexpected Wildlife Refuge (named after a nearby road) in 1961. They incorporated in 1968 as a nonprofit organization.

"It was at the refuge that Cavit became more and more aware of wild animals and their ways of life so appropriate to their environment. He became strongly opposed to the cruelties of hunting and trapping, and began to take an active part in supporting legislation to control them," Hope recalls.

In 1978, Cavit founded the New Jersey Congress for Animals, a statewide coalition of animal welfare groups. He served as president and guiding spirit for many years, leading the organization in the fight to ban the leghold trap and the decompression chamber as well as many other legislative achievements.

Unexpected Wildlife Refuge now encompasses 400 acres, and aside from mowing one field for bluebird habitat and making necessary paths, they have let the animals live without disturbing them. This has necessitated patrolling the refuge every hunting season and accepting the taunts and threats of hunters who want to trespass on the land.

Although neither Hope nor Cavit would carry a weapon, both have had shots deliberately fired over their heads, with some coming dangerously close. On one occasion, Cavit was dragged from his car and beaten so badly he was hospitalized.

Hope intends to continue living in their home at the refuge and caring for the animal sanctuary as she always has. As in the past while Cavit was at work, young volunteers will help her patrol the borders.

The couple's compassion has been reflected in their two daughters, Linda and Nermin, and their son, Nedim, a



The late Cavit Buyukmihci, former president of the New Jersey Congress for Animals, right, discussing anti-trapping legislation with the bill's sponsor, Assemblyman D. Bennett Mazur (D-Bergen)

graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's veterinary school. Since 1979, Nedim has been an associate professor at the University of California's veterinary school and more recently he founded the nationwide Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights.

This column speaks for thousands of people throughout New Jersey and indeed throughout the country who will miss Cavit's strong but always courteous support for animal rights and who offer their condolences to Cavit's family.

Some questions are arising about the use of a new flea and tick spray called Blockade which came on the market early this year.

A pattern of symptoms similar to those of pesticide poisoning appears to be emerging in some animals, especially cats, after the application of the spray. Symptoms include tremors, vomiting, excessive salivation and convulsions, often culminating in death. Some pets have been put to sleep to end their suffering.

Blockade is a product of Hartz Mountain Corp., which strongly denies that the spray can be implicated in the pet deaths. A spokesman for Hartz says every pesticide has a potential for allergy in some pets. He says Hartz spent

more than 10 years testing Blockade and the company has sold more than five million cans of the product.

Since the product came on the market, the Poison Information Center in Illinois has received nearly 200 reports of pets dying or becoming severely ill after being sprayed with Blockade.

The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Pesticides and Toxic Substances has indicated it will ask Hartz for additional details on the testing that was done before Blockade went on sale.