Illegal animal sales continue in L.A.'s Fashion District

by Lindsay Barnett

Despite the efforts of the LAPD and the Business Improvement District to eradicate illegal animal vendors from downtown L.A.'s Fashion District, the practice of selling live animals on the street -- unweaned baby rabbits, turtles and birds, among others -- continues.

On Easter Sunday -- perhaps a poetically appropriate day for a bunny rescue -- Los Angeles police officer Matthew Shafer, while completing routine rounds, happened upon a man rustling plastic in a van parked in a Wall Street garage. Suspicious, Shafer went to investigate -- and found that the van contained a whopping 118 turtles. In the van parked next to the one with the turtles, Shafer discovered 23 underage rabbits.

The situation is hardly an unusual one; illegal animal sales are a long-running problem in the area. Worse still, many of the animals sold there are babies too young to be taken from their mothers; others are sick or malnourished. Our colleague Carla Hall reports:

When animal services officials can certify that animals are in bad condition, their vendors can be charged with animal cruelty -- as was Raymundo Hernandez, the man Shafer arrested in the parking garage.

The confiscated rabbits were turned over to Lejla Hadzimuratovic of L.A.-based rescue group the Bunny World Foundation.

Hadzimuratovic and a group of Bunny World volunteers will attempt to nurse the babies back to health. (On the menu: a mixture of kitten formula, goat milk and colostrum pills. Despite the TLC they'll receive from the dedicated team, it's unlikely that they'll all survive.)

The group has also put out a call for volunteers to provide foster care for rabbits confiscated from Santee Alley and to help socialize them so they can be adopted into new homes. Also on its wish list: donations of baby-bunny necessities like towels and blankets, heating pads and incubators.

Learn more about the effort to stop illegal animal sales in Santee Alley in The Times' local news blog, L.A. Now, and check out a photo gallery for images of rescued animals.