

STOP Wildlife Killing Contests

THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES®



The Hard Truth

WHILE BLOOD SPORTS such as dogfighting and cockfighting have been condemned as barbaric and cruel, a little known blood sport, the wildlife killing contest, is increasing in popularity. These body count contests award prizes, usually cash, based on the number and category of wild animals killed. Such contests target coyotes, prairie dogs, foxes, mountain lions, pigeons, and many other species that have suffered persecution for years because they have been perceived as pests. Money and bragging rights attract contest participants, as does the frequent gambling that occurs in conjunction with the events.

Despite growing knowledge about ecology and the roles that all species play in healthy ecosystems, some people are still willing to pay to kill these animals or to profit from those who do. For the most part, state wildlife agencies turn a blind eye to the carnage.

Coyote Killing Sprees

WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS take various forms. Some require shooters to hunt their victims in the field, as is the case with many coyote killing contests. In Rawlins, Wyoming, where the annual National Coyote “Calling” Competition is held, teams of two shooters each disperse on public and private lands. Using mouth-blown or electronic distress calls to simulate an injured animal, the teams attract and kill coyotes. Paying \$150 each to enter the two-day event, shooters compete for thousands of dollars in prize money as well as recognition from other coyote killers. Even more money exchanges hands in “calcuttas”—gambling events during which participants place sizable bets on which team will win.

While rules for some events are established (e.g., no night hunting, use of live lures, shooting from the roadway, or submission of captive-raised coyotes), prize money creates a powerful incentive to ignore them. Furthermore, it is impossible for law enforcement agents to enforce the rules. On average, more than 200 coyotes are killed in this event each year, with prizes given for the most coyotes killed, smallest coyote killed, and largest female coyote killed. In Utah, one contest lasted for months.

“Now You See Them, Now You Don’t”

IN PRAIRIE DOG KILLING CONTESTS, hunters use high-powered precision rifles to take aim at the animals when they emerge from their burrows. The events are used to judge shooting skills and present the challenge of killing one or more animals with a single shot. Spectators clamor for direct hits and specialty shots, such as the “flipper,” in which the impact from the bullet catapults a prairie dog backward, and the “red mist” or “varmint vapor,” in which the prairie dog’s body explodes in a bloody spray. These, along with the “triple” and the “four, five, and six pup club” shots—which result in a corresponding number of prairie dogs being killed by a single shot—are used as criteria for prizes. Countless wounded and maimed animals are left to suffer slow, agonizing deaths.

Members of this subculture gleefully describe and document their exploits in videos such as *Exploding Varmints*. An advertisement for the video declares “500 confirmed kills” and “Now You See Them, Now

You Don't" to tantalize hunters to relive the bloodthirstiness associated with "dog popping."

In a *Time* magazine article, a 16-year-old who was one of 2,000 hunters at the annual convention of the Varmint Hunters Association described prairie dog shooting: "It's relaxing. I like seeing how high they fly. We have little contests where we go out and see who can get the longest hang time on a prairie dog."

A Low-Profile Subculture

CONTEST ORGANIZERS and participants attempt to keep a low profile to avoid negative publicity. Many of the contests are advertised by word-of-mouth within hunting ranks or in special magazines such as *Varmint Hunter*. It is virtually impossible to know how many of these events occur throughout the West each year and how many animals are killed, maimed, and orphaned because of them. When unwelcome publicity does arise, organizers insist they are performing a community service by eradicating coyotes, prairie dogs, and other "varmints" before they prey on or harm domestic livestock and wildlife. Yet science concludes that such events do little, if anything, to address concerns about alleged predation or forage competition problems.

Carnage Cleanup

WILDLIFE OFFICIALS and some hunters are finally recognizing that practices such as wildlife killing contests can only further harm the image of hunting. The Colorado Wildlife Commission passed a rule limiting the number of animals who could be killed in these contests to five per contestant. While not a categorical ban on killing contests, it severely reduced the number of animals killed, as well as the incentive to hold these events. The Arizona Fish and Game Commission approved a regulation prohibiting all wildlife killing contests. Despite overwhelming support for the ban by Arizonans, the governor's Regulatory Review Council rejected the regulation twice. The rejection of a proposed regulation is rare, and pressure by the hunting constituency influenced the decision.

What You Can Do

THERE IS SIMPLY no biological, ecological, or ethical justification for wildlife killing contests. You can take several steps to help end the contests in your state:

- **Contact your state wildlife agency** to learn about regulations in your state. If wildlife killing contests occur in your state, express your outrage to state wildlife officials and to your governor.
- **Write letters to the editors** of state newspapers and contact the media to investigate.
- **Attend state wildlife commission meetings** and demand that steps be taken to prohibit the contests.
- **Contact your state legislators** and ask them to introduce legislation to ban these events.
- **For more information on this topic**, visit www.hsus.org/wildlife.

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