

Depraved Illinois wildlife killing contest exposed

An investigator with the Humane Society of the United States captured the results of reckless slaughter of coyotes, underscoring the need for a state ban



FROM FEB. 3 to 5, 2023, participants took part in the “Nuggets Night Vision Coyote Hunt” contest in Illinois and gunned down more than 400 coyotes for the chance at cash and prizes. An undercover investigator with the Humane Society of the United States attended the contest weigh-in at The Store Room in Mendon, where teams brought in the dead animals to be judged for prizes for killing the most, the heaviest and the smallest coyotes. The winning three-man team killed 49 coyotes, with second place bringing in 27 coyotes. Competitors took photos of the bodies and posted them on social media. In similar killing contests, participants often dump the animals like trash after the contest is over.

Coyotes, foxes, raccoons and crows have fallen victim in at least 28 killing contests in Illinois in 2022, including in Mendon, Elmwood, La Harpe, Fulton, Knoxville, Wamac, Maestown, Marine, Taylorville, Macomb, Sherrard, Mount Vernon, Warsaw, Mason City, Cordova, Hecker, Manito, Cedar Point, Stronghurst, Oblong, Toledo, Champaign, Prairie du Rocher, Durand, Pearl City, Marion, Carbondale, East Brooklyn, Carrollton, Alexis, Port Byron and Quincy.

Wildlife killing contests are cruel, violate traditional hunting ethics and are counterproductive to sound wildlife management. They serve no legitimate wildlife management function—they do not reduce coyote

numbers, prevent conflicts with farm animals or boost populations of game species such as deer or turkey. Participants frequently use powerful custom-made assault rifles including AR-15s fitted with night vision and thermal scopes, along with digital calling devices, to lure animals in for an easy shot. The contests can also orphan dependent young, who are left to die from starvation, predation or exposure. Fire departments, 4-H clubs, farm bureaus, chambers of commerce, veterans’ organizations and even high schools and churches have hosted or organized these events across the country.

Coyotes are native to Illinois, and as a top carnivore they provide vital ecosystem balance. According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, “Coyotes are valuable members of the wildlife community and do more good than harm where humans are concerned.” Left alone, coyotes regulate their own numbers based on available habitat and food sources, and conflicts can be avoided using [nonlethal](#) deterrence techniques.

Hunters and wildlife management professionals from across the country have [condemned killing contests](#) as unsporting, unscientific and a threat to the reputation of hunters and the future of hunting.

Key investigative findings:

- A total of 405 coyotes were killed and brought to the weigh-in station.
- Teams of two or three participants paid \$300 to register. They competed for \$15,000 in total prize money, and raffle prizes included a thermal imaging scope.
- Trucks backed up to a weighing station where coyote bodies were unloaded and hung upside down on a scale. The ground was covered in blood.
- A young child helped load and unload the bodies, while other young children watched.
- The animals' bodies were ripped apart by bullets, and the investigator reported a stench of decay.
- After weighing, competitors threw the coyotes into trucks or piles on the ground.
- Coyotes as small as 17 pounds were killed.
- One participant told the investigator that in noncompetitive hunts, he shoots coyotes and leaves them to rot where they fall. He said coyote bodies aren't worth anything and are thrown away.
- Teams brought dead coyotes across state lines from Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas and Wisconsin. At least one coyote from Kansas appeared to have severe mange. The bodies were not checked for disease, and diseased animals were not disqualified from being entered into the event.
- Nuggets Night Vision—a manufacturer of night vision and thermal imaging devices often used in killing contests—posted on Facebook prior to the event that participants must videotape themselves conducting a “flop test” (shaking the coyote to ensure it’s a fresh kill).
- On social media, members of the winning team label themselves as employees of Nuggets Night Vision with the job title “Killer.”

Known 2023 Illinois wildlife killing contests include:

- [1st Annual Coons for Cancer](#), Elmwood, Feb. 10-11
- [Deepshaft Outdoors 4th Annual Coyote Tournament](#), Fulton, Jan. 21-23
- [24 Hour Coyote Hunt Tournament](#), Wamac, Jan. 28-29
- [Coyotes for Kids Hunting Tournament](#), Manito, Jan. 27-28

Illinois residents can contact the Department of Natural Resources at DNR.wildliferecep@illinois.gov and urge it to ban cruel, unsporting and ecologically destructive wildlife killing contests. Visit [our website](#) for more information.

