



End wildlife killing contests

Cruel, pointless, and unsporting

While blood sports such as dogfighting and cockfighting have been condemned in the U.S. as barbaric and cruel, a little-known blood sport—the wildlife killing contest—still happens regularly in almost all states.

Killing contests are organized events in which participants compete for prizes—typically cash or hunting equipment—to see who can slaughter the most or the largest animals within a specified time period.

Killing sprees

Thousands of animals—including coyotes, foxes, bobcats, prairie dogs, crows, squirrels, even wolves and mountain lions—are killed in these contests every year across the U.S. At the high-stakes West Texas Big Bobcat Contest in 2016, teams paid \$200 to compete to kill the heaviest bobcat for the grand prize. At least 47 bobcats were killed during the 23-hour contest and a total of \$105,000 in prize money was awarded. During the 2016 National Coyote Calling Championship in Wyoming, two-person teams killed 299 coyotes over a day and a half. A 2018 bounty contest in Michigan killed almost 400 coyotes, and participants in a 2019 Maryland contest killed 236 red and gray foxes, coyotes, and raccoons.

A low-profile subculture

Killing contests, like dogfighting, are the province of a small subculture that is rarely glimpsed by the general public. The public's ire toward wildlife killing contests has led many organizers to keep their events low-profile. Nevertheless, these contests have made efforts to expand their reach, now advertising for children as young as ten years old to participate.

Persecuted and discarded

Deemed by some to be “pests,” most animals killed during these events are targeted because there are almost no laws protecting them. They often can be killed in unlimited numbers, all year long, and using almost any method. Participants often dump the bodies, having no need for them after the prizes are awarded.

It is impossible to know how many animals are killed in these contests every year. Organizers generally do not need to obtain a permit from the state wildlife agency and participants aren't required to report their kills. While some general hunting rules apply—for example, laws that prohibit shooting from a roadway—the prospect of prize money creates a powerful incentive to ignore them.



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Callous and unsporting

Wildlife killing contests remove any notion of fair chase—the fundamental hunting ethic that dictates that the hunter should not gain an unfair advantage over the hunted. Participants often use high-tech equipment and may prepare for months.

One of the most chilling features of wildlife killing contests is the use of electronic calling devices to attract coyotes into rifle range with sounds that imitate the cry of a coyote in distress. Coyotes, like humans, feel a strong bond to other members of their species, and when they hear this cry for help, they come to investigate. Manipulating animals' natural compassion to lure them in for an easy kill is a reprehensible practice condemned by hunters and non-hunters alike.

Dependent young may also be orphaned during these events, left to die from starvation, predation, or exposure.

Myths to justify the bloodshed

Wildlife killing contest participants may piously claim to be helping to rid the environment of “varmints.” But there is a general misunderstanding and fear of some

species—especially coyotes, the most common victim of killing contests.

Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten livestock, and diminish populations of game animals that “belong” to hunters are greatly exaggerated and out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes and other native carnivores.

Despite the excuses used to justify the killing, these contests are simply a bloodbath for entertainment.

Not sound wildlife management

All species—especially native carnivores—play a vital role in healthy ecosystems. Coyotes, for example, provide a number of free, natural ecological services: helping to control disease transmission, cleaning up carrion (animal carcasses), keeping rodent populations in check, increasing biodiversity, removing sick animals from the gene pool, and protecting crops.

Indiscriminate killing of native carnivores like coyotes may reduce their populations temporarily, but the best available science demonstrates that these species will

respond with an increase in numbers. Killing contests create instability and chaos in the family structures of animals who are killed. In the case of coyotes, this disruption allows more coyotes to reproduce and can increase conflicts with livestock.

A recent Ohio State University study found that Americans' attitudes toward historically stigmatized species such as coyotes have improved significantly in recent decades. Between 1978 and 2014, positive public attitudes toward coyotes grew by 47 percent.*

No noble purpose

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters and state wildlife management agencies a black eye. Before banning wildlife killing contests statewide in 2019, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated, “To the extent these contests reflect on the overall hunting community, public outrage with these events has the potential to threaten hunting as a legitimate wildlife management function.”

California, Vermont, New Mexico, and Massachusetts have also now outlawed killing contests for coyotes and other species, and several other states are considering similar action.

Americans will no longer tolerate activities that are viewed as unfair, inhumane, or unsustainable. There is simply no place for wildlife killing contests in modern society.

“Killing large numbers of predators as part of an organized contest or competition is inconsistent with sound, science-based wildlife management and antithetical to the concepts of sportsmanship and fair chase.”

Mike Finley, former Chair of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

Find out more at [humanesociety.org/news/better-alive](https://www.humanesociety.org/news/better-alive). To receive our free toolkit “Wildlife Killing Contests: A Guide to Ending the Blood Sport in Your Community,” contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.

*George, Slagle, Wilson, Moeller, and Bruskotter: “Changes in attitudes toward animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014.” In *Biological Conservation*, September 2016.