



WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

KILLING OF WILD ANIMALS FOR CASH AND PRIZES

WILDLIFE KILLING CONTESTS

While blood sports such as dogfighting and cockfighting have been condemned as barbaric and cruel, a little known blood sport—the wildlife killing contest—still happens in Minnesota every year. Killing contests are organized events in which participants compete for prizes—typically cash or weapons—to see who can kill the most animals or the largest or smallest animals within a specified time period.

Competitive killing sprees

Thousands of animals—primarily coyotes and foxes in Minnesota—are killed in these contests every year across the United States. At the high-stakes annual Save the Birds Coyote Hunting Tournament in Marshall, more than \$1,500 in prizes is up for grabs for the teams that kill the most coyotes, the smallest coyote, and the largest coyote. During the two-day event in January 2017, 44 coyotes were killed. Participants gathered at a bar after the event to weigh and count the animals, and to celebrate. At the annual West Metro Coyote Tournament held in Watertown, participants compete to kill coyotes and foxes.

A low-profile subculture

Killing contests are the province of a small subculture that is rarely glimpsed by the general public. The public's ire toward killing contests has led many organizers to keep their events low-profile. Nevertheless, organizers are trying to expand their reach—now advertising for children to participate.

Baseless myths

Shooters claim to be helping society by ridding the environment of “pests” or “saving birds.” But there is a general misunderstanding and fear of our native carnivores—especially coyotes, the most common victim of killing contests. In fact, coyotes increase biodiversity and benefit ground and song bird populations by reducing meso-carnivores who prey on birds and eggs. Claims that coyotes attack children and pets, threaten livestock, and diminish populations of game animals that belong to hunters are typically exaggerated and out of step with modern scientific understanding of the importance of coyotes.

The indiscriminate killing that occurs during killing contests is reminiscent of bounties. The Minnesota DNR has spoken out against bounties—noting that, historically, bounties





are ineffective at managing wildlife and controlling depredation of livestock. Nonlethal methods, such as fencing, and lethal control of specific problem coyotes are more effective.

Despite the excuses used to justify the killing, there is no science supporting these unethical and cruel contests.

**Persecuted and discarded
Coyotes are a common victim of killing contests in Minnesota because there are almost no laws protecting them.**

They are classified in law as 'unprotected wild animals' and as such, coyotes can be killed without a hunting license, in unlimited numbers, and all year long. There is also no limit on the number of foxes who may be killed.

It's impossible to know how many animals are killed in these contests every year. Organizers do not need to obtain a permit from the DNR and participants aren't required to report their kills.

Callous and unsporting

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 coyote 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.**



Counterproductive to 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 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 produce and can increase conflicts with livestock and people.

No noble purpose for killing contests

Allowing this blood sport to continue gives hunters a black eye. Minnesotans will not tolerate activities that are viewed as unfair, inhumane, or unsustainable.

In Minnesota, legislators should make it illegal to organize, sponsor, conduct, promote, or participate in any contest or competition with the objective of taking or hunting wildlife for prizes or other inducement, or for entertainment.

"Awarding prizes for wildlife killing contests is both unethical and inconsistent with our current understanding of natural systems. Such contests are an anachronism and have no place in modern wildlife management."

- Michael Sutton, Former President of California Fish & Game Commission, on California banning killing contests in 2014