

The Humane Society of the United States investigates grisly wildlife killing contests in Wytheville, Dugspur and Lovingston, Virginia

Undercover investigations expose cash-and-prizes games targeting coyotes and foxes



Undercover at the Eastern U.S. Predator Calling Championship

Over a 44-hour period, participants in the largest wildlife killing contest east of the Mississippi River gunned down 590 coyotes and an untold number of foxes for the chance at champion belt buckles, trophies and \$25,600 in prize money. Undercover investigators with the Humane Society of the United States witnessed the aftermath of the killing at the weigh-in located at the Apex Arena in Wytheville, which took place on Jan. 9, 2022. Prize categories included killing the most, the smallest and the heaviest coyote; the heaviest and smallest fox; and the most combined of the two. First place for “most coyotes killed” went to a three-man team that gunned down 38 coyotes. In total, 128 teams competed in the event. Organizers call the contest a “family friendly event” and the “premier predator hunting event in the Eastern United States.”

More than [60 killing contests that target coyotes, foxes and bobcats for cash and prizes have taken place in Virginia since 2015](#), with at least 11 or 12 contests held every year for the last three years. The competitions take place across the Commonwealth. Fire departments, sporting goods stores, fairgrounds and even churches have hosted or organized these events in Virginia.

Competitors achieve high kill numbers with the use of unsporting tactics including night vision, thermal imaging, and electronic calling devices, which mimic the sounds of

dependent young in distress to lure animals in for an easy kill. The animals are then gunned down with high-powered rifles—including AR-15s—which rip holes in the fur, rendering the pelts useless. The animals are typically dumped like trash after the event is over.

In 2021, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources [stated that](#) “[there is a] misconception that predator killing contests provide benefits to the public and other wildlife species.” The DWR noted that killing contests do not effectively manage coyote numbers, prevent livestock attacks or boost populations of game species. During DWR’s recent public comment period about killing contests, [78% of Virginia respondents](#) were in favor of a rule to ban them.

The investigator also observed that:

- Bloodied animals were piled into trucks outside the arena. License plates and stickers on the vehicles read “KLN YOTES,” “COYOTE HEARSE” and “DAWG DWN.”
- Trucks filled with dead animals entered the arena in an assembly line for event organizers to weigh and count the bodies as children played around bloodied animals lined up on the dirt floor.
- A stench of rotting flesh was noticeable in the arena.
- The “smallest fox” shot during the event weighed just 6.8 pounds—smaller than the average house cat.

For more information, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.

All photos by the HSUS.

Undercover at the Kanawha Valley Predator Calling Championship

Over a 45-hour period, from Jan. 15-17, 2021, competitors in a killing contest in Dugspur, Virginia, slaughtered approximately 315 coyotes and foxes for the chance at cash prizes. At the weigh-in located at the Kanawha Valley Arena Resort on Jan. 17, HSUS undercover investigators documented participants dragging bloody coyotes and foxes from their trucks to the weigh station. Judges awarded cash prizes to the teams that killed the most animals, and there were side pots for biggest coyote and biggest fox killed. First place went to a two-man team who killed 52 animals. At least 65 teams took part in the event.

The investigator also observed that:

- Piles of bloodied animals were packed into crates attached to trucks bearing stickers and license plates reading “COYOTE TAXI,” “YOTE H8R,” and “COYOTE HEARSE.”
- Men dragged animals who had been ripped apart by bullets to a scale, where they were hung upside down for weighing in front of the crowd.
- A team of participants wearing matching “Nightlife Assassins” sweatshirts congratulated each other as they stood next to their pile of dead animals.
- Dead animals in line for weighing were strewn about on the ground with their mouths closed shut by zip-ties.
- Young children played and watched as ripped-up, dead animals were weighed.



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All photos by the HSUS.

Undercover at the 2nd Annual Fall Predator Tournament

Undercover investigators with the HSUS witnessed the disturbing aftermath of a wildlife killing contest in Lovington, Virginia, on Nov. 8, 2020. Over a 42-hour period, contest participants shot dozens of coyotes and foxes for the chance to win thousands of dollars in prize money. At the weigh-in, located at the Lovington Volunteer Fire Department, investigators watched as contestants lined up the dead animals in rows as firefighters helped weigh and count the bodies, which were rotting and swarming with flies in the fall heat. Teams paid \$150 each to enter the contest. Rules allowed participants to kill animals in any state east of the Mississippi River. A contest flyer listed Guaranteed Minimum Payouts of \$2,000 for the first-place winner (most coyotes killed), \$1,000 for second place and \$500 for third place winners.



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