

Maryland's gruesome wildlife killing contests exposed

Investigators with the Humane Society of the United States capture wanton slaughter of Maryland's wildlife, stressing the need for state legislation to ban these cruel events.



The Maryland Department of Natural Resources reports that red fox populations are declining in some areas, but this species is still being slaughtered for fun and cash prizes throughout the state.

In January and February 2020, undercover investigators from the Humane Society of the United States recorded the aftermath of two wildlife killing contests in which participants competed to kill the most, and the heaviest foxes, coyotes and raccoons for cash and prizes.

For both contests, participants used digital devices that play animal distress calls to lure animals to their deaths.

"Predator Hunters of Maryland," Unionville, Maryland

On Jan. 19, 2020, at the weigh-in station located at a small community hall (Linganore Grange #410), investigators witnessed and documented the aftermath of the Predator Hunters of Maryland contest, including:



- 200 or so animals piled up for counting and, in some cases, weighing.
- Children playing among piles of dead animals.
- Contestants unloading bloody animals from their pickup trucks. Some of the animals had gruesome injuries and had been ripped apart by bullets.
- Celebrations and prizes being handed out.

The HSUS investigators learned that:

- The contest winner killed 38 foxes.
- The tournament was open to participants in the entire state of Maryland.
- Five points were given for each coyote kill, three points per fox, and one point for each raccoon.
- Contestants paid entry fees of \$50 for a two-person team and \$25 for individuals.
- Entry fees were used mostly for cash prizes.
- The first-place prize was around \$400.
- Prizes were also awarded for the heaviest coyote, the heaviest fox and the heaviest raccoon killed.



Participants told HSUS investigators that killing contests create balance in nature because "...people aren't wearing fur anymore and the fox population gets out of control," but in fact the opposite is true. Foxes provide balance in nature as they control rodent populations, and, like all wild carnivores, they regulate their own numbers according to available habitat and prey.

HSUS investigators also clearly heard contestants discussing their plans to dump their dead animals at a landfill after the contest.

"Southern Maryland Predator Hunt," Waldorf, Maryland

On Feb. 2, 2020, HSUS investigators attended the weigh-in of a killing contest open to participants in Charles, Calvert, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties. The weigh-in was held at the Fred's Outdoors store in Waldorf, where investigators witnessed pickup trucks loaded with dead red and grey foxes. Investigators learned:

- The winning team brought in 27 foxes during the approximately 16-hour allowable "hunting" window.
- Dozens of two- to three-person teams participated in the killing contest.
- All of the entry fee money (about \$2,000 according to an observer) went to the winners.
- Participants used digital calling devices manufactured by FoxPro—a frequent sponsor of wildlife killing contests nationwide—to lure foxes to their deaths.



A contest participant also attempted to justify the killing by explaining that foxes kill turkeys. However, the National Wild Turkey Federation advises that the random removal of wild carnivores will not result in more turkeys for hunters, and that turkeys have evolved to cope with natural predation. It instead recommends that hunters cultivate good habitat that allows turkeys to thrive.*

Maryland legislation introduced

HB 683, sponsored by Del. Dana Stein, has been introduced to prohibit these wildlife killing contests in the state of Maryland.



For more information, contact HSUS Maryland State Director Emily Hovermale at ehovermale@humanenesociety.org.

Photos by: The HSUS

*The National Wild Turkey Federation: "Coexist with predators" at nwtf.org/conservation/article/coexist-predators.