HSUS investigates the slaughter of wildlife in Texas killing contest

Undercover investigation exposes cash-and-prizes game targeting bobcats, coyotes, foxes and raccoons, underscoring need for a statewide ban on these cruel events

OVER A 21-HOUR PERIOD, from Jan. 23-24, 2021, participants in a wildlife killing contest in De Leon, Texas, gunned down approximately 60 animals for the chance at cash and prizes. Undercover investigators with the Humane Society of the United States witnessed the aftermath of the killing at the weigh-in located in a pharmacy parking lot. Participants in the De Leon Pharmacy and Sporting Goods’ Varmint Hunt #1 event arrived and dragged bloody bobcats, coyotes, gray foxes and raccoons from their trucks to the weigh station. Judges awarded cash prizes for a “stringer hunt”—meaning one coyote, one fox, one bobcat and one raccoon—with the heaviest combined weight of the four animals winning first place. The $200 entry fee for each team determined the payout for first prize. Other cash prizes were given for the heaviest coyote, heaviest bobcat, heaviest fox and heaviest raccoon.

Texas is thought to have more wildlife killing contests than any state in the country. At least 155 of these events have been held in the state since 2015, though this number is likely a gross underestimate. The events—which take place across Texas—target bobcats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, badgers, jack rabbits, mountain lions, ringtails, opossums and other species. One of the nation’s largest killing contests, the West Texas Big Bobcat Contest, occurs in San Angelo every year. During the January leg of the 2021 contest, 644 teams competed for $148,000 in prize money. The winning two-man team that killed the biggest bobcat raked in $45,080, while another team collected $6,440 for killing 81 foxes in 23 hours.

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. Wildlife killing contests are cruel and violate traditional hunting ethics. They can orphan dependent young, who are left to die from starvation, predation or exposure, and serve no legitimate wildlife management function. Killing contests do not reduce coyote numbers, prevent conflicts with farm animals or boost populations of game species.

Key investigative findings:
- A team of three men, calling themselves “Dead-On,” won the De Leon event, killing five coyotes, two bobcats, a raccoon and a fox. The team laid the animals’ bodies out in front of them for a photograph.
- Contest organizers handed out more than $3,000 in cash prizes.

For more information, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org

All photos by the HSUS
- Participants unloaded dead coyotes from their pickup trucks in the parking lot of the pharmacy. An investigator noted, “Animals had gun shots in their heads and torsos, with their organs spilling out and faces partially destroyed.”
- Contestants told investigators they used AR-15 and other rifles to kill the animals. The guns were custom-made, some equipped with silencers and thermal and night vision scopes, which give participants an outsized advantage over the animals. The weapons destroy animals’ fur, rendering their pelts useless.
- One participant told an investigator, as he pointed to a row of bloody animals he had killed, “I wouldn’t use something like that if you wanna save the fur.” He used high-end, custom-built equipment (specifically, a custom-built rifle chambered in .22 Creedmoor), telling the investigator “they’re like a .22-250 on steroids,” explaining that the guns “are not very fur-friendly.” To illustrate his point, he showed the investigator a coyote, stating, “I shot this one up here in the throat from high up and it blew out the whole bottom of his chest.”
- Participants’ trucks were expensively outfitted with raised decks, comfortable chairs and gun mounts.
- The competitors also used electronic calling devices, which mimic the sounds of animals in distress, including cries of dependent young, to lure animals to their deaths.

Some other known Texas 2021 contests:
- West Texas Big Bobcat Contest, San Angelo, Jan. 16, Feb. 13, March 13
- 2021 North East Texas Big Bobcat Hunt, Honey Grove, Feb. 6-7
- Scurry County Predator Calling Contest, Snyder, Feb. 6-7
- Decatur Predator Hunt 2021, Decatur, March 20-21
- 18th Annual Gatesville Varmint Hunts, Gatesville, Jan. 30-31, Feb.13-14, March 13-14
- Rockne Varmint Round Up, Red Rock, March 27-28

Texas residents can contact state policymakers and urge them to ban cruel, unsporting and ecologically destructive wildlife killing contests. Policymakers in Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington have already banned the events. Visit our website for more information.
Texas Wildlife Killing Contest Advertisements

Example One

For more information, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.  
ALL PHOTOS BY THE HSUS
Example Two

4TH ANNUAL GONZALES COUNTY CRITTER GETTER
VARMINT HUNT
4-MAN TEAM
FEBRUARY 6TH - 7TH 2021
SIGN-UP SAT, THE 6TH FROM 10AM-11:30AM
LOCATION Old Show Barn in The Independence Park, US-183
GONZALES, TEXAS
HUNT STARTS AT 12PM SAT, AND WEIGH-IN AT 12PM SUN,
NO LATE ENTRIES AND ANY TEAM LATE FOR WEIGH-IN
WILL BE DISQUALIFIED
FOR INFORMATION CALL DYLAN MILLS 830-857-5311 JIMMY
MILLS 281-796-1639 RAUL CONTRERAS 830-857-5469
PARTICIPANTS MAY HUNT ANYWHERE IN TEXAS

For more information, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.
ALL PHOTOS BY THE HSUS
MILLS COUNTY GENERAL STORE
VARMINT HUNT

FEBRUARY, 6-7, 2021
HUNTING STARTS AT NOON THE 6TH AND WEIGH-IN IS 10:00 ON THE 7TH
ENTRY FEE: $50 FOR MAIN CONTEST PLUS $25 SIDE POTS
COUNTIES WITHIN CONTEST AREA INCLUDE: Mills, Bosque, Brown, Burnet, Coleman, Comanche, Coryell, Eastland, Erath, Hamilton, Lampasas, Llano, Mason, McCulloch, San Saba
PAY OUT IS 1ST-50%, 2ND-30%, 3RD-20%
IN ORDER TO WEIGH COON, TEAM MUST QUALIFY WITH ANY OF THE LISTED ANIMALS:
5 GREY FOX, 1 RED FOX, 1 COYOTE, OR 1 BOBCAT

| 1.) MAIN CONTEST WILL BE DETERMINED BY HEAVIEST COON |
| 2.) TEAMS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CHOOSING WHICH ANIMALS ARE TO BE WEIGHED IN ALL POTS |
| 3.) SIDE POTS WILL CONSIST OF THE HEAVIEST IN EACH CATEGORY; COYOTE, GREY FOX, RED FOX, BOBCAT |
| 4.) IN THE EVENT OF A TIE, WINNER WILL BE CHosen BASED ON NUMBER OF ANIMALS |
| 5.) FAILURE TO MAKE WEIGH-IN TIME WILL RESULT IN DISQUALIFICATION |
| 6.) MUST FOLLOW ALL COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS. IF YOU BREAK THE LAW IT WILL RESULT IN DISQUALIFICATION |
| 7.) 4 MEMBERS TO A TEAM MAXIMUM |
| 8.) ALL TEAM MEMBERS MUST STAY TOGETHER |
| 9.) ALL TEAM MEMBERS MUST BE PRESENT AT WEIGH-IN |
| 10.) ALL ANIMALS MUST BE KILLED DURING CONTEST HOURS. NO TRAPPED, SNAILED OR FROZEN ANIMALS WILL BE ALLOWED. NO MODIFYING THE WEIGHT OF ANIMALS. ANIMALS WILL BE INSPECTED |
| 11.) NO HUNTING OVER BAITED AREAS, NO TROLLING, NO AIRCRAFT, NO DOGS, NO NIGHT VISION, THERMAL OR INFRARED IMAGING |
| 12.) DECISIONS MADE BY JUDGES ARE FINAL, JUDGES WILL BE HUNTING IN THE CONTEST |
| 13.) LEGALLY REGISTERED SUPPRESSORS ALLOWED |

TEAM NAME:___________________________
ADDRESS:____________________________
CITY, STATE, ZIP:_____________________
PHONE:______________________________
SIGNATURE:__________________________

TEAM MEMBERS
___________________________
___________________________
___________________________
___________________________
Example Four
18th Annual
Gatesville TX Varmint Hunts

Dates
January 30th and 31st 2021
February 13th and February 14th 2021
March 13th and 14th 2021

Times
Mail ins and early entries welcome
Registration 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM Saturday
Weigh in 2:00 PM Sunday (Must stop hunting
No later then 12:00 Noon)

Place
Gatesville Civic Center
301 Veteran’s Memorial Dr Gatesville TX 76528

Entry Fees
Monthly Hunt
Entry Fee $200.00
PayPal, Venmo, and Facebook Pay Available
Side pots counted in entry fee
Most Bobcats, Most Coyotes,
Most Fox, Most Animals, Big Raccoon

Grand Slam Series Free
Must Hunt at least 2 Hunt
With same Team Members
And be entered in last hunt
To win the belt buckles in March

Point System
Max of 5 animals per species
(Head shots add 1 point)
January - Bobcats 5pts, Coyotes 2pts, Fox 2pts
February - Coyotees 5pts, Fox 2pts, Bobcats 2pts
March - Fox 5pts, Bobcats2pts, Coyotes 2pts

For more information contact
Toby Small (325) 247-0139, Lee Ann Small (254) 589-1818,
Tina Zimmerman (254) 722-2308

Contact Email
Gatesville.TX.VarmintHunts@gmail.com
Pay Pal Email - lhoffman41182@gmail.com
PayPal Please Choose Friends and Family
Venmo - @LeeAnn-Small
Facebook Pay – Please contact Toby Small