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It's Time to Ban Wildlife Killing Contests in Colorado

Killing for fun is brutal, senseless, and a complete disregard for life.

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It's time to ban wildlife killing contests wherever they're held

The photographs are disarming: dozens of coyotes, their fur smeared with blood, strewn across the ground while grown men and sometimes children stand over them, proudly grinning from ear to ear.^{1,2} This is a familiar scene at wildlife killing contests, a little known bloodsport rarely glimpsed by the general public. During these events, participants kill the target species for prizes or bragging rights. At the [High Desert Coyote Classic](#) in Pueblo this year, teams paid \$100 to enter the coyote contest, with one hundred percent payback for the winner and side pots and prizes for “biggest”, “littlest”, and “ugliest dog.”

Cut from the same cloth, coyotes and our furry four-legged friends share many similar characteristics: intellect, inquisitiveness, friskiness, and rich and deep emotional lives. Coyotes have been spotted playing with dog toys and even with dogs themselves. Coyote skeptics need look no further than the recent [viral video of a coyote in a play stance](#), rear end in the air, enticing his badger companion to join him. Coyotes and badgers also are known to hunt small prey together, having discovered that their own hunting strategies compliment the other's.

While Americans spend an estimated [\\$73 billion on their pets](#), governments and individuals kill roughly one coyote per minute with traps, poisons, aerial gunning and other cruel methods. Persecuted and misunderstood, coyotes die by the thousands in wildlife killing contests across the country.

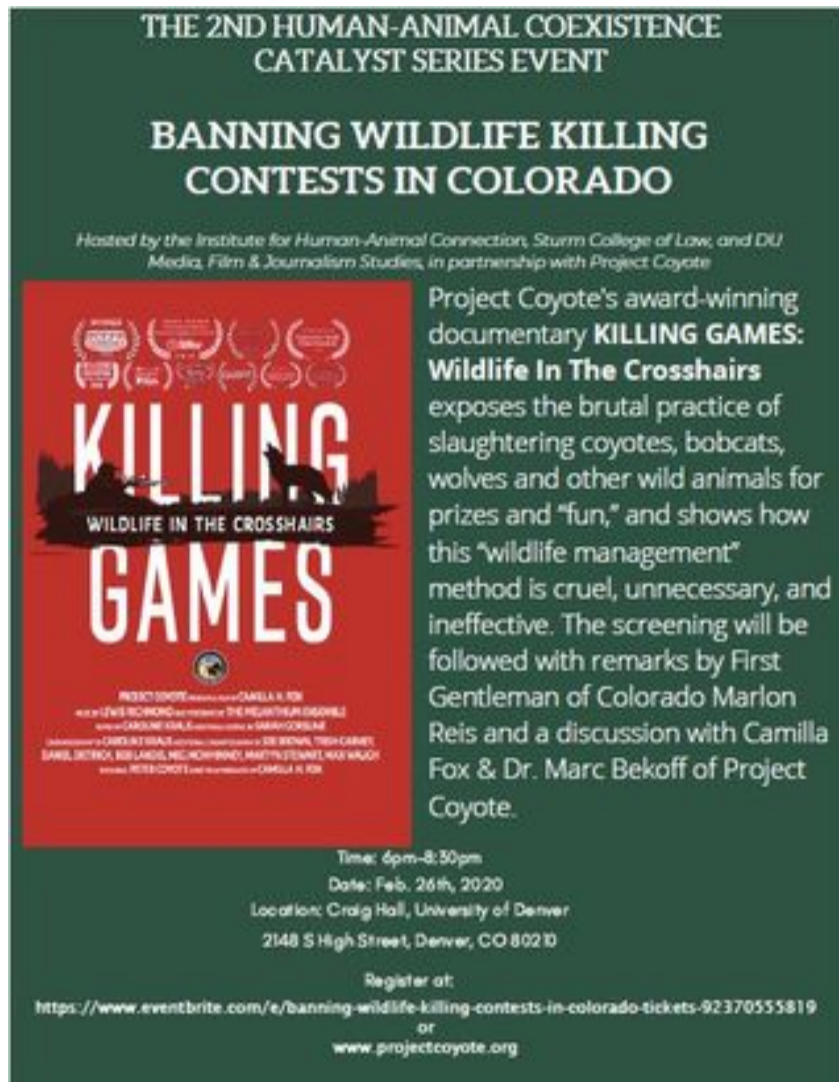
In Colorado, coyotes aren't the only victims of these barbaric events. In prairie dog contests, participants use the animals for target practice. Specialty shots include the “red mist” in which the prairie dog's body explodes; and the “flipper” whereby the bullet's impact blasts the prairie dog backwards. As with coyote contests, countless animals are left injured or orphaned. Once the events are over, participants frequently dump the animals, stacked like cords of wood; out-of-sight, out-of-mind for the general public.

Aside from the senseless waste and complete disregard for life, wildlife killing contests disrupt the equilibrium of ecosystems and ignore the free ecological services wild animals provide. Coyotes control rodent and rabbit populations, keep [the environment](#) clean of carcasses, and boost bird diversity. Among other benefits, prairie dogs prevent desertification, preserve the endangered black-footed ferret, and cycle nutrients in the soil.

While contest participants make grand claims about ridding society of these “pesky” animals—to protect livestock and increase populations of game species, such as elk and deer — in reality, mass killing of wildlife has the opposite effect. For example, lethal control breaks-up coyote families, allowing more females to breed, and may increase pup survival due to reduced competition for food and habitat. This disruption in the natural life cycle can increase coyote populations and can lead younger, less experienced coyotes, to prey on easier targets, such as sheep and other domesticated animals.

In a [policy statement](#), The Wildlife Society—which represents scientists, educators, and other wildlife professionals—explained: “justification for the killing contests is often based on flawed use of science,” noting claims that coyote killing contests protect deer populations for hunters as an example. More than 70 prominent conservation scientists, including four of Colorado's own, have issued a statement [condemning wildlife killing contests as ecologically destructive](#) and counterproductive to sound wildlife [management](#).

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission will meet in Aurora on March 18th-19th where they may consider a petition to ban wildlife killing contests for furbearers and small-game species (including coyotes and prairie dogs).



Source: Marc Bekoff

Prior to that, Colorado's First Gentleman Marlon Reis will present remarks at a free screening of Project Coyote's award-winning film [KILLING GAMES ~ Wildlife In The Crosshairs](#) on February 26 in Denver. The event, which is part of the [Human-Animal Coexistence Catalyst Series](#), is hosted by the Institute for Human-Animal Connection, Sturm College of Law, and DU Media, Film & Journalism Studies in partnership with Project Coyote. [The Colorado Environmental Film Festival](#) will feature *KILLING GAMES* in Golden on February 22.

While killing contest advertisements once peppered social media with gruesome photos overtly displayed as if to taunt the public, contest organizers are increasingly taking their events underground. When outlawing the contests, the Arizona Game & Fish Commission, among other wildlife agencies, noted: "[public outrage with these events has the potential to threaten hunting.](#)"

Not only are wildlife killing contests cruel and hazardous to the integrity of ecosystems, but they send the wrong message to Colorado's youth—that hunting is just about cash, prizes, and bragging rights, rather than [sportsmanship](#), responsible stewardship, and respect for the wildlife who are held in the public trust.

Furthermore, violence and oppression directed at other animals frequently, and throughout history, has gone hand in hand with the oppression and violence directed at women, people of color and other marginalized groups. Oppression and violence toward nonhuman animals are inextricably connected to domination and abusive social power structures. When we become accustomed to "killing games" of other animals we become less likely to respond to the distress and harm of vulnerable human communities.

The mass killing of our wildlife for cash and prizes does not reflect who we are as a state and should be banned immediately. In fact, these violent bloodbaths should be banned wherever they're held.

References

Note:

1) This essay was co-authored with the following people:

Camilla H. Fox, Founder and Executive Director of [Project Coyote](#) and Director and Producer of *KILLING GAMES ~ Wildlife in the Crosshairs*

Katie Stennes, Programs and Communications Manager for [Project Coyote](#)

Justin Marceau, [Brooks Institute Faculty Research Scholar and Professor of Law, University of Denver Sturm College of Law](#)

Marlon Reis, [First Gentleman of Colorado](#)

Philip Tedeschi, Executive director of the [Institute for Human-Animal Connection](#) (IHAC) at the University of Denver

The last three authors and I are members of Colorado's Governor's Coalition for Animal Protection (GCAP)

2) See [Colorado Legislators View Dogs as Disposable Commodities](#) and [Colorado's "Humane Pet Act" Fails in Committee](#) for discussions of other nonhuman animal issues in the forefront in Colorado.

- _____. [Coyotes: Dispelling Myths About Who They Are, What They Do.](#)
- _____. [Coyote America: The Evolution of Human-Animal Relationships.](#)
- _____. [Coyotes: Let's Appreciate America's Song Dog.](#)
- _____. [Coyotes: Victims of their own success and sensationalist media.](#)

Flores, Dan. *Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History*. New York, Basic Books, 2017.

About the Author



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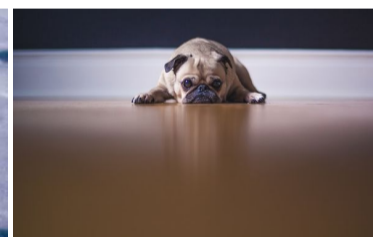
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