

Wacky Wildlife Laws

By Kelsey Rader

Introduction

Updated and “wacky” laws are interesting informational bits we find floating around the internet and in legend. Many sites and articles are devoted to listing these legislative “facts,” but how many are actually true and what events led to their creation? For wildlife laws especially, legislation on or off the books provides clues to what are, or once were, serious problems affecting animals and ecosystems.

War Camels of the Southwest

One common “wacky law” is a Nevada Act prohibiting “camels and dromedaries from running at large on or about the public highways of Nevada”.¹ The Nevada Legislature passed this law in February 1875 but repealed it in 1899, and although this law is no longer in effect, it has a fascinating history.²

The law was drafted after the U.S. War Department authorized the import of camels as potential military assets to be utilized in Westward expansion. In 1858, the imported camels were used as pack animals to assist in a road construction project from New Mexico to California, partially to test their usefulness as military animals. However, despite the camels’ adaptability, the animals were not utilized for the military, mostly due to the outbreak of the Civil War.³ After the camel military project was abandoned, the camels were sold and used as pack animals in Nevada to carry salt into the gold mines.⁴ However, many were also released into the Nevada desert and became wild.⁵ Those camels became a nuisance to other pack animals and road users, leading to the drafting of the legislation.⁶

Bear Boxing

Louisiana and Oklahoma have enacted laws banning participation in and profiting from any bear wrestling matches.⁷ In Louisiana violation of the law can incur a fine of up to \$500 and six months imprisonment, and in Oklahoma fines are capped at \$2,000 and up to a year imprisonment.⁸ In Alabama there was an entire code section dedicated solely to regulating “bear exploitation” and in particular, outlawing participation in or organizing bear wrestling matches, however this law was recently repealed as an obsolete code section.⁹ This legislation emerges from the long existing practice of pitting bears against humans in both boxing and wrestling matches. These fights have been staged in America since the 1800’s, and were common in traveling circuses and county fairs spanning shows across the country.¹⁰ Mistreatment of the bears was rampant, and they were often half-crippled from their human trainers having pulled out teeth and claws, cut arm and leg tendons, and fitted them with muzzles and boxing mitts to give their human opponents the



upper hand.¹¹ Bear wrestling was also incredibly dangerous for the human combatants as fatalities and injuries occurred.¹² The popularity of bear wrestling waned around the turn of the century, picked up in the 1930’s through the 1950’s, until it gradually declined again following the rise of animal rights awareness.¹³ However, bear fighting is not completely obsolete. As recently as 1995, an Ohio bar was caught running a series of bear fights offering a cash reward to challengers who could pin the bear.¹⁴

Protecting Easter Pets

According to Kentucky statute Title XL Chapter 436.600 it is illegal to possess baby chicks, ducklings, other fowl or rabbits that have been dyed or colored or to dye or color those same animals.¹⁵ The law is cross-referenced in KRS 525.130

prohibiting the cruel mistreatment or neglect of animals. Animal advocacy groups explain that the primary purpose of this law is to discourage the abandonment of these animals.¹⁶ Colored chicks, ducklings and rabbits are bought for Easter as gifts, but after the holiday is over, thousands of these animals are treated as novelties rather than pets.¹⁷ Children quickly grow bored of the animals and thousands of them are returned to humane societies, dumped in parks or die from neglect.¹⁸ Laws like KRS 436.600, and similar legislation in Florida discourage the sale of these animals to prevent their neglect and abandonment by owners unprepared for the responsibility of pet ownership.

Conclusion

Humans, for better or worse, have discovered innumerable ways to utilize and exploit wildlife, both animals and plants for entertainment and monetary gain. Fortunately, as support for animal cruelty and environmental protection has grown in recent years, wildlife exploitation has gradually lessened. However, often in these wacky laws, the legal system leaves bookmarks in the darker chapters of wildlife exploitation history.

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Endnotes

¹ Mark Hall-Patton, *Hump Days*, Nevada Public Radio, Dec. 2013, <http://knpr.org/desert-companion/hump-days>; “An Act to prohibit camels and dromedaries from running at large on or about the public highways of the State of Nevada” Nev. Stat. ch. 22 §§ 4799-4800 (Feb. 9, 1875)

² Gary Noy, *Edward Fitzgerald Beale*, *Journal of Sierra Nevada History and Biography*, Winter 2013 vol. 5 no.1, <http://www.sierracollege.edu/ejournals/jsnhb/v5n1/beale.html>

³ Joe Zentner, *The Desert Camel Experiment*, *Desert USA*, <http://www.desertusa.com/mag05/sep/camel.html>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *supra* note 2

⁶ *supra* note 1

⁷ LSA-R.S. 14:102.10; 21 Okl.St. Ann. § 1700

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ ALA Code §13A-12-5(a)(1-4); Act 2015-70, § 1(21) (effective April 21, 2015); STATE OF ALABAMA, OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, 2015 Legislative Summary, <http://www.ago.state.al.us/faqs.aspx/Page-Legislative-Summary-2015>

¹⁰ Peter Blecha, *Mervin Barackman, and his Wrestling Bears*, *History Link*, May 23, 2014, http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=10709

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Sarah Kurchak, *The Twisted and Terrible History of Men Fighting Bears*, *VICE*, June 29, 2015, <http://fightland.vice.com/blog/the-twisted-and-terrible-history-of-men-fighting-bears>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Sarah Mirk, *Mynt Strip Club Owner- Former Bar in Ohio Hosted Brutal Man vs. Bear Wrestling*, *The Portland Mercury*, Dec. 17, 2009, <http://www.portlandmercury.com/BlogtownPDX/archives/2009/12/17/mynt-strip-club-ownerformer-bar-in-ohio-hosted-brutal-man-vs-bear-wrestling>

¹⁵ Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 436.600

¹⁶ Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 525.130

¹⁷ Jennifer A. Kingson, *Nobody Minds Dyeing the Egg, but the Chicken is Another Story*, *N.Y. TIMES*, April 1, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/dyeing-easter-chicks-raises-concerns.html?_r=0

¹⁸ Anna Sanders, *Colored Chicks Raise Concerns, but after Easter, Many Face Fate Worse than Dye*, *Audubon Society*, April 5, 2012, <http://www.audubon.org/news/colored-chicks-raise-concerns-after-easter-many-face-fates-worse-dye>