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June 25, 2020

Animal Protection of New Mexico urges the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish to end policy of routine cruel strangulation of wildlife

Public documents reveal a bobcat was denied humane euthanasia via injection, was choked to death with catchpole by a Game & Fish officer as per department protocol

ALAMOGORDO, N.M.— Today, Animal Protection of New Mexico (APNM) sent a [letter](#) to the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish urging the Department to end its practice of routinely “euthanizing” wildlife via cruel strangulation.

Last month, APNM’s Animal Cruelty Hotline was contacted by a concerned citizen who shared information about a disturbing incident occurring on May 1, 2020:

A bobcat was captured alive in the Alamogordo area in a cage trap. Local animal control officers took custody of the bobcat and proceeded to contact the Department of Game & Fish via phone. They then administered sedatives (which appears to be 2cc of 5:1 Telazol and Ketamine) to prevent the panicked bobcat from injuring himself in the cage, and then transported the bobcat to the animal control facility where someone from Game & Fish would meet them.

Game & Fish concedes that local animal control officers offered at least once to euthanize the bobcat via humane injection of Euthosal (a solution containing pentobarbital sodium and phenytoin sodium as the active ingredients, leading to humane, painless, and rapid death). Nevertheless, multiple responding Game & Fish officers and officials insisted that they must “choke out” the bobcat instead, advising that is their standard practice. At least one Game & Fish officer offered that the animal control officers could do it themselves if they were comfortable with that (indicating that Game & Fish does not require special training to administer strangulation).

Approximately one to two hours after the initial capture and sedation of the bobcat, a Game & Fish officer arrived at the animal control facility, removed the bobcat from the cage, and choked the bobcat to death using the catchpole around the neck. It is uncertain what level of sedation or anesthesia was present at the time of the bobcat’s strangulation (the combination of Telazol and Ketamine can fail to provide adequate pain relief unless specifically determined prior to strangulation). There is no evidence of consciousness being checked prior to the physical strangulation.

APNM also received an anonymous report that the bobcat was seen struggling during the strangulation process, indicating that the bobcat had possibly regained some consciousness before being asphyxiated.

After this incident, one of the animal control officers again confirmed with a department representative that strangulation is part of Game & Fish's protocol when "euthanizing" small wild animals such as bobcats.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) deems strangulation as "unacceptable" as a primary method of euthanasia. This means that the AVMA has established that strangulation does not meet the requirements of the term "euthanasia," which it defines as "a method of killing that minimizes pain, distress, and anxiety experienced by the animal prior to loss of consciousness, and causes rapid loss of consciousness followed by cardiac or respiratory arrest and death."

(See <https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/2020-Euthanasia-Final-1-17-20.pdf>).

While strangulation may be permissible as secondary euthanasia, after the animal is rendered deeply anesthetized or otherwise unconscious, it does not appear that anesthesia or unconsciousness is a prerequisite as part of Game & Fish's strangulation protocol. There is no evidence that the bobcat strangled to death in Alamogordo on May 1, 2020 remained deeply anesthetized by the time of the strangulation—in fact, one report indicates the bobcat may indeed have regained consciousness.

"In all my years of doing this work, this is the most egregious report of inhumane conduct and internal practice in a state agency that I have ever seen," said Alan Edmonds, cruelty case manager for APNM, who manages the organization's animal cruelty hotline. "Strangulation is a cruel and unacceptable form of so-called euthanasia. It's time that New Mexico steps up to ensure neither the state nor private individuals are cruelly killing wildlife."

"This is just one of many examples where the Department of Game & Fish has turned a blind eye to—and even championed themselves—atrocious, inhumane wildlife practices that cause unacceptable suffering," said Jessica Johnson, chief legislative officer for Animal Protection of New Mexico and Animal Protection Voters. "We are calling on the Department of Game & Fish to stop and prohibit their routine strangulation of our public wildlife."

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Media Contacts:

Alan Edmonds, Cruelty Case Manager
Animal Protection of New Mexico
alan@apnm.org
505-506-4000

Jessica Johnson, Chief Legislative Officer
Animal Protection of New Mexico & Animal
Protection Voters jessica@apnm.org
505-220-6656

[Animal Protection of New Mexico](#) is the premier animal protection organization in New Mexico, advocating for animals by effecting systemic change and working towards the humane treatment of all animals since 1979.

[Animal Protection Voters](#), formed in 2002, is the leading non-profit legislative and political advocacy organization for animal protection in New Mexico.