

NJ SPCA Opposes “Netting & Bolting” of Deer: Urges NJ Fish & Game Council to End Practice & Convene Expert Panel

Statement by: Terry Clark, President, NJ SPCA

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ, MARCH 7, 2006—The New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (“NJSPCA”) has carefully reviewed the practice of netting and bolting deer as a method of deer population management - commonly referred to as “net and bolt.” The Board of Directors of the NJSPCA has concluded that the net and bolt method of deer management is in fact cruel and not an acceptable form of euthanasia. Therefore, the NJSPCA urges the New Jersey Fish and Game Council to end the practice, pending a more thorough review of the practice by a panel of experts.

Net and bolt refers to the practice of luring deer to bait sites above which nets have been suspended. When deer approach bait sites, the nets are released, typically capturing several deer at a time. The deer inside the net tend to thrash violently, often resulting in injuries, including broken limbs and antlers, and endure a significant amount of stress. The deer are then physically restrained by the “netter and bolter,” who then shoots a large steel bolt into the brain of the netted deer.

The NJSPCA believes that the killing of deer by netting and bolting inflicts substantial pain, stress and suffering during both the netting and bolting phases of the operation. The NJSPCA has reviewed various expert opinions, all of which concluded that netting and bolting of deer constitutes unnecessary cruelty. Even Dr. Temple Grandin, one of the nation’s foremost experts in designing systems to reduce the stress and suffering of animals before and during slaughter, describes the process as “cruel.”

According to Dr. Grandin, because deer are “flighty” animals, the netting process alone causes undue stress and panic. Stress may be so acute as to cause the death of some of the deer prior to bolting. Moreover, in desperate attempts to escape the netting or evade those trying to subdue them, deer will often break legs and antlers. Other experts concur that this method, when used on deer in the wild, is inhumane.

Shooting bolts into the brain, a practice commonly used on domesticated animals in slaughter plants, similarly causes unnecessary pain, suffering and injury when used on deer in the wild. Captive bolt guns were specifically designed for use on restrained domestic animals in highly structured and controlled environments. These bolt guns do not cause a quick or clean kill when the animal’s head is not immobilized a difficult if not impossible task given a deer’s reaction to drop netting.

A misplaced bolt will likely cause severe injury to the deer and will require repeated attempts to kill the struggling animal. A number of experts agree that the use of captive bolt guns on wild deer caught under nets is unnecessarily cruel. In fact, the American Veterinarian Medical Association (“AVMA”) only approves of such methods if an animal is adequately restrained and the captive bolt is properly placed (Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia, 2000) Such requirements are virtual impossible to meet when using the netting form of capture on wild animals.

The NJSPCA questions whether or not proponents of net and bolt killing are correct in citing the exemption for “[t]he shooting or taking of game or game fish in such manner and at such times as is allowed or provided by the laws of this State.” NJSA 4:22-16(c). While the NJSPCA has the utmost

respect for the New Jersey Fish & Game Council and understands the emergent need to control the deer population in specific areas, the Board of Directors of the NJSPCA unanimously agrees that the practice of netting and bolting of deer is unusually cruel and strongly urges the New Jersey Fish and Game Council to immediately end the practice pending a more thorough review of the practice by a panel of experts.

Since 1868, the NJSPCA has had the responsibility of enforcing laws enacted for the protection of animals. Criminal provisions of the current law prohibit, among other acts, the unnecessary infliction of cruelty, abuse or harm upon animals. (See - NJSA 4:22-17(a)). The NJSPCA recognizes that New Jersey's deer population must be controlled in certain areas pursuant to properly authorized rules and regulations. However, the NJSPCA strongly believes that netting and bolting is both cruel and inhumane and is a practice that must be ended.

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