



# GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# NEWS RELEASE



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## LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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### **More than 200 individuals face federal felony or misdemeanor charges for operating or participating in animal fighting ventures** *Weekend operation in Emanuel County marks second cockfighting raid*

**AUGUSTA, GA:** Two major federal prosecutions in the Southern District of Georgia have shut down animal fighting operations and resulted in felony and misdemeanor charges in investigations that involves more than 200 potential defendants.

An arrest warrant was unsealed today – June 22 – in U.S. District Court in Statesboro for a raid Saturday at in Midville, Ga., near Swainsboro, in which law enforcement officers from at least nine federal and state agencies shut down a cockfighting event in progress with 178 individuals in attendance, said Bobby L. Christine, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia. Also today, a federal indictment was unsealed naming 38 individuals charged in the Dec. 14, 2019, raid of a cockfight in progress in Lincoln County, Ga.

“Most people in our community rightly would be shocked to learn that the barbaric bloodsport of cockfighting still exists – and even more shocked to discover that it’s happening right in their midst,” said U.S. Attorney Christine. “But thanks to the outstanding cooperation and work of our law enforcement partners, these cruel activities have ceased in the Southern District of Georgia.”

Saturday’s raid, dubbed Operation Sunrise, began with information developed by the South Carolina Department of Public Safety Immigration Enforcement Unit (SCDPS-IEU), leading to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General (USDA-OIG). That investigation identified a cockfighting operation at a facility south of Midville, Ga., that already had staged several events this year in an arena outfitted with a fighting ring, management office, concessions stand, and stadium bleachers for spectators.

In addition to the SCDPS-IEU and USDA-OIG, federal and state agencies including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the U.S. Marshals Service, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Georgia State Patrol (GSP) SWAT Team, and the Georgia Department of Corrections, with coordination from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Georgia, conducted Saturday’s raid coinciding with a reported cockfighting tournament in progress.

The raid resulted in 178 individuals in attendance processed for possible federal and state charges including those related to animal fighting and gambling, and the seizure of more than 750 roosters and cockfighting paraphernalia, tens of thousands of dollars in gambling proceeds, firearms and illegal drugs.

The owner of the property, **William Shannon Scott**, 48, of Midville, is charged in a federal complaint unsealed today with Sponsoring or Exhibiting an Animal in an Animal Fighting Venture. Additional charges are pending, and felony and misdemeanor charges are possible against the other individuals processed during Saturday's operation.

Also unsealed today in U.S. District Court is the indictment of 38 individuals on federal felony and misdemeanor charges for the Dec. 14, 2019, raid of a cockfighting tournament in Lincoln County, Ga, by officers from the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and Georgia DNR.

In the indictment, the property's owner, **Lanier Augustus Hightower Jr.**, 64, of Lincolnton, is charged along with six other defendants with Sponsoring or Exhibiting and Animal in an Animal Fighting Venture, and Possession and Transport of an Animal in an Animal Fighting Venture. All 38 defendants are charged with Attending an Animal Fighting Venture, a misdemeanor. Hightower also is charged with Conducting an Illegal Gambling Business.

Both investigations are continuing.

Complaints and indictments are only charges. Defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The cases are being prosecuted for the United States by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alejandro V. Pascual V, Jennifer G. Solari and Xavier A. Cunningham, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Edwin Caban.

For any questions, please contact Barry Paschal at the U.S. Attorney's Office at (912) 652-4422.

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