

# Caged Fur

## The Inside Story



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**M**ore than thirty million animals worldwide are raised in cages and killed each year for their fur. Not only are cage-raised animals killed inhumanely, but they suffer numerous physical and behavioral abnormalities induced by the stress of caging conditions. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is strongly opposed to raising animals in cages and killing them for fur apparel and accessories. Synthetic fabrics that are warmer and lighter than fur have eliminated the need for fur apparel.

raised; these animals are more commonly trapped. Most caged fur-bearing animals are “harvested” during their first winter.

The United States produces about 10 percent of the cage-raised fur in the world; 60 to 75 percent of the fur in coats sold in the United States comes from cage-raised animals. Fur from cage-raised animals is also used as lining and trim. An astounding 90 percent of all cage-raised foxes become fur trim.

### SHORT LIVES, PAINFUL DEATHS

#### Essential Facts

The overwhelming majority of cage-raised fur-bearing animals are minks. Foxes, sables, chinchillas, rabbits, raccoon dogs (also called finnraccoons and tanukis), and fitches (ferrets) also are raised in cages. A small number of lynx, bobcats, nutrias, and martens are cage

#### Intensive Confinement

The terms *fur farm* and *fur ranch* are euphemisms invented by the fur industry for what really is the intensive confinement system of caged-fur facilities. At a typical facility, open-sided sheds contain several rows of small wire-mesh cages. The floors also are wire so that feces can fall to the ground. Cages are adjacent to each other, and the animals are in plain view of one another. This is stressful for minks, who are naturally solitary, and for foxes, who have complex social hierarchies. Cages leave the animals little room for moving around: mink cages are about two-and-a-half feet long, a foot wide, and a foot high; fox cages



*An estimated 250,000 chinchillas are killed each year by the international fur fashion industry.*

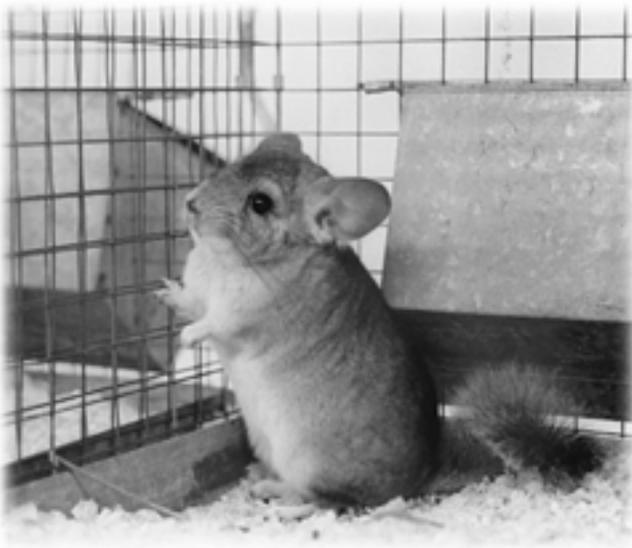


PHOTO: ERIC SAVOCH

are about a foot wider and six inches higher. (Some facilities use uncovered, free-standing cages for foxes that expose the animals to wind, rain, and sun.) Water is provided by an automated system, and food (a mixture of ground-up animal remains, including minks) is placed on top of the cage to fall through the wire mesh. Except for a nest box, the cages are empty. Foxes are provided with a nest box for only two to three months. Breeding animals can live in this cramped environment for six to eight years.

### **Behavioral Abnormalities**

Intensive confinement makes natural activities like swimming, climbing, digging, and traveling long distances impossible. Cage-raised minks commonly suffer obsessive-compulsive stereotypic behaviors: pacing, self-mutilation, and cannibalism are induced by chronic stress, boredom, frustration, deprivation, and an inability to

adapt to surroundings. Repetitive behaviors include head bobbing, head twirling, swaying, and biting the wire-mesh caging, in addition to pacing. Pelt biting and tail biting are also common behaviors prompted by confinement.

Foxes are particularly unsuited for cage raising: they are extremely fearful of humans and generally anxious in the typical caging environment. They tremble, defecate, and withdraw to the back of their cages. They may attempt to bite when handled. (Handling involves holding the fox by the neck with tongs and grabbing the tail.) An estimated 10 to 20 percent of female foxes, or vixen, kill their offspring. Many vixen fail to reproduce at all. Infanticide and injury of kits are the results of disturbing the natural social hierarchy, an inevitable consequence of caging. Early and daily contact with humans would decrease foxes' fear, but this is impractical and therefore not practiced at larger facilities.

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Instead of providing better living conditions or realizing that foxes should not be raised in cages at all, fox producers are attempting to breed animals with less anxiety.

### **Physical Abnormalities**

Caged fur-bearing animals are commonly inbred for specific colors (sapphire, gunmetal, and pastel, for example). Inbreeding can lead to deafness, crippling, deformed sex organs, screw necks, anemia, sterility, and disturbances of the nervous system. Inbreeding for dark and black minks has been so intensive that these animals are prone to excessive bleeding and are highly susceptible to infectious diseases. Artificial manipulation (the use of hormones, altering the amount of daylight) to accelerate breeding and reduce the length of pregnancy is routine in caged-fur facilities.

### **Methods of Killing**

Caged fur-bearing animals are killed by inhumane methods such as gassing, neck breaking, anal electrocution, and injection with poisons.

The U.S. fur industry recommends killing minks with carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide gas. Carbon monoxide gas (CO) is commonly channeled from the exhaust of a truck or tractor engine and piped into an enclosed box containing the minks. The hot unfiltered gas burns the eyes and lungs of the animals, causing a painful death. Carbon dioxide gas (CO<sub>2</sub>) also causes minks to die in misery. As diving animals accustomed to holding their breath, minks have an increased tolerance for high CO<sub>2</sub> levels, so their painful deaths are protracted.

Some fur producers prefer to kill small fur-bearing animals by twisting the animal's neck until it breaks (cervical dislocation), on the theory that gassing discolors the pelt.

A common method of killing foxes is anal elec-



PHOTO: FRANTZ DANTZLER

trocution. One electrode is inserted into the anus while the animal bites down on a second electrode; a lethal dose of electricity is then passed through the body. Again, this technique is employed to avoid damaging the pelt.

Other fur producers inject minks and foxes with cheap chemicals and common pesticides, often diluted with rubbing alcohol to save money. Sodium pentobarbital, used for euthanasia by veterinarians and animal shelters, is a legally controlled substance and must be administered by a veterinarian or other licensed professional. Due to the high costs associated with its use, sodium pentobarbital is rarely used for killing caged fur-bearing animals.

The animals are killed just after their first winter coat grows in, at seven to ten months of age. At this time, their fur is in prime condition because it has not yet been marred by confinement in a small cage. The fur industry claims, on the other hand, that a quality pelt is a sign of a well-cared-for animal.

## OTHER PROBLEMS WITH THE CAGED-FUR INDUSTRY

### Environmental Consequences

Because many animals are housed in a small area, caged-fur facilities contribute to environmental contamination. As animal waste falls to the ground through the cage floors, it is washed by the rain into nearby streams and lakes. The excessive nutrients contained in the animal waste

can also soak into the soil and contaminate groundwater. Unnaturally high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen cause increased algae growth and can kill trees. While waste runoff from intensive confinement of chickens and pigs has been identified as an environmental problem, the environmental effects of fur facilities in the United States have not been adequately researched. Officials in Finland, where 50 percent of the world's foxes and 10 percent of the world's minks are produced, have recognized the problem since the early 1980s.

### Lack of Regulation

There are no laws regulating the keeping or killing of cage-raised fur-bearing animals in the United States. In what appears to be a public relations ploy, the U.S. fur industry has devised its own guidelines for the "humane" care of minks and foxes; however, these are strictly voluntary and compliance is not monitored. Without objective outside oversight, the humane care of caged fur-bearing animals cannot be ensured. As long as the bottom line is economic, animals will be housed, handled, and killed in the cheapest ways possible.

### YOU CAN HELP

- Don't buy clothing made of fur, lined with fur, or trimmed with fur. Don't buy fur toys or fur decorations.
- Share the information on these pages with your family, friends, and coworkers. Tell them that caged fur is cruel.
- Urge your elected representatives to outlaw caged-fur facilities. Also urge your elected officials to support truth in advertising for fur apparel by requiring labels stating how fur animals are caged, trapped, and killed to be affixed to each fur item.



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Fur-Free Century is a consumer-driven, activist-oriented campaign designed to bring an end to the use of animal fur in the new century.

**Materials Available from The HSUS**

Trapping—The Inside Story

Caged Fur—The Inside Story

How Do Fur Animals Die

Warning! Brochure

The Decline of the Fur Fashion Industry

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