

Questions and Answers about Fur



BREDO GROEVENBONT VOOR DEEREN

The use of fur by the fashion industry raises many questions of a moral and a technical nature. As we work toward ending the use of fur in the next century, we must gather as much information as we can. To this end, the answers to a few of the most frequently asked questions about the fur industry follow.

The advent of synthetic fabrics that are warmer and lighter than fur has eliminated the need for fur garments.

Q: Is Cage-Raised Fur Humane?

A: No. The bottom line is that fur producers tend to employ the most cost-effective methods and products, often at the expense of animal welfare. Animals raised on fur “farms” or fur “ranches” (euphemisms invented by the industry) include minks (the most common), foxes, sables, and chinchillas. They are confined in small wire cages where all natural activities are denied them. These animals often suffer from rapid spread of disease and obsessive-compulsive stereotypic behavior such as pacing, self-mutilation, and cannibalism—behavior induced by the boredom, frustration, and deprivation caused by their biologically inappropriate environment. Moreover, the use of hormones and environmental

manipulation is routine in these facilities in order to accelerate breeding and increase profit. The animals are inbred for specific colors, causing severe abnormalities such as deafness, crippling, deformed sex organs, screw necks, anemia, sterility, and disturbances of the nervous system. Animals are usually killed between seven and ten months of age by inhumane methods such as electrocution, gassing, and neck breaking. Although the fur industry attempts to deflect public concern by advertising the existence of animal care guidelines, these are strictly voluntary. There are no laws regulating the keeping, handling, or killing of cage-raised fur-bearing animals in the United States.

Q: Isn't Raising Animals for Fur the Same as Raising Animals for Food?

A: There is a major difference. We recognize that meat consumption is considered by some to be necessary to human survival. However, there is no justification for the commercial killing of animals for their pelts. The advent of synthetic fabrics that are warmer and lighter than fur has eliminated the need for fur garments. To condone the killing of animals for the sake of fashion cheapens life, including our own.



ANTI BONT COMITE/BONT PAST GEN MEIS

Q: Isn't Fur a Sustainable Natural Resource?

A: Trapping does not encourage stable, healthy wildlife populations. Trappers claim that they are simply “harvesting” those animals who would die anyhow. Natural ecological factors such as weather and food scarcity as well as wild animals’ innate ability to limit their populations through natural means interact over time to keep wildlife populations in balance with their habitats. There is some indication that healthy animals are more likely to be caught by traps because they are more active than diseased or otherwise weak animals.



A great horned owl is the unintended victim of a leghold trap.

Thus, trapping is harmful to animal populations because it removes healthy animals and leaves behind those who are sick.

Traps are not as species specific as trapping proponents claim. Trappers themselves report that they trap approximately ten “nontarget” animals—domestic dogs and cats, rabbits, songbirds, raptors, deer, etc.—for each intended victim. These incidental deaths, which include endangered and threatened species, are not factored into the sustainability of the fur “resource.”

The impact on populations of target species is also unclear. Trapping is largely unregulated, and where restrictions do apply, they are poorly enforced. Trappers are allowed to catch some species, such as the lynx and river otter, whose populations are low. The fur trade has nearly caused the extinction of fishers, martens, and several species of wild cats.

Fur apparel is treated with various chemical brighteners and dyes that can damage the environment and pose a hazard to human health.

Q: Is Trapping Needed to Control “Nuisance” Wildlife?

A: As the human population grows and sprawls into wildlife habitats, our encounters with wildlife become more frequent. Tolerance and understanding for the animal members of our communities should be our guides in solving problems between humans and wildlife. A wide variety of nonlethal humane solutions are available; animal-proof trash containers, chimney caps, hardware cloth, one-way doors, and scare balloons are just a few. Due to their indiscriminate nature, traps are dangerous to use in urban and suburban areas.

Q: What Is More Harmful to the Environment, Fake Fur or Real Fur?

A: Turning animals into coats is far worse environmentally than producing synthetic fur apparel. A 1979 study by the Scientific Research Laboratory at Ford Motor Company compared the amount of energy required to produce real versus synthetic fur coats. A synthetic fur coat was found to require 120,300 BTU (British Thermal Units), which is approximately equal to the amount of useful energy in one gallon of gasoline (128,000 BTU). A coat made from trapped animals required 433,000 BTU, and a coat made from cage-raised animals required a staggering 7,965,800 BTU—66 times more energy than what is needed for a fake fur. Unlike most comparisons of real and synthetic fur products, this study took into consideration the feed required for cage-raised animals and the transportation, skinning, scraping, drying, and dyeing of pelts.



Additionally, fur apparel is treated with various chemical brighteners and dyes that can damage the environment and pose a hazard to human health. In 1992 the Dutch Advertising Standards Authority ruled that fur apparel advertised as “ecological” was improperly



REIS/FRANZ DANZLER

and misleadingly labeled. In 1991 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) fined six firms \$2.2 million for illegally generating, storing, transporting, and disposing of hazardous materials used to process fur pelts. Fur-processing materials such as formaldehyde and chromium can cause respiratory problems and are listed by the EPA as possible carcinogens. Some fur processors have been charged with endangering workers by exposing them to hazardous materials.

Q: Is the Survival of Indigenous Cultures Dependent on the Fur Trade?

A: No. That's just what the fur industry wants us to think. It's a feeble attempt at trying to increase public acceptance of trapping. Europeans introduced the fur trade to North America, altering the traditional nomadic lifestyles of many native peoples and leading to sociocultural upheaval. Commercial trapping is neither culturally nor economically central to native peoples, who simply have become pawns in the fur industry's public relations efforts to defend and resurrect a dying industry.

Q: Are Humane Trapping Standards Helping?

A: The European Union (EU) banned the use of the steel-jaw leghold trap within member nations in 1995; it also banned the import of fur

pelts of thirteen species from countries that allow this trap or that have not met international humane trapping standards. The United States subverted this second ban by signing an agreement with the EU in December 1997. The agreement is a charade for four reasons: 1) it allows trade in fur from animals caught by "conventional" steel-jaw leghold traps for another six years, 2) the term "conventional" is not defined and therefore may not eliminate the most commonly used steel-jaw leghold trap, 3) the agreement allows the use of these traps for an unspecified period of time until a replacement trap is identified, and 4) the United States is not legally bound by the agreement.

Efforts to establish trap standards through the International Organization for Standardization have been unsuccessful after more than ten years of debate among more than a dozen nations. The reality is that trapping proponents apparently seek not so much to create traps that are more humane, but to create standards that declare existing, brutal traps humane. This is just one of a number of tactics aimed at increasing public acceptance of trapping.

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.
- Solve wildlife conflicts in a humane manner. Encourage others to do the same.
- Urge your elected officials to support trap bans or restrictions in your state or community.

Due to their indiscriminate nature, traps are dangerous to use in urban and suburban areas.

Cage-raised foxes are usually killed by electrocution or injection with chemicals.



HSU/FRED HESS



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
- The Chart of Death
- Flyer for Activists
- The Decline of the Fur Fashion Industry

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100 ■ Internet: www.hsus.org

© 1998 The HSUS. All rights reserved.
Printed on recycled paper.