

Bloody Harvest

The real cost of fur



A study of the intensive fur industry



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With thanks to Oikeutta Eläimille

1. Taking Responsibility

There has been enormous controversy over the wearing of animal fur in recent decades, but as the evidence mounts of the cruelty and suffering involved, it is becoming clear that the breeding and killing of wild animals for their fur is unethical. Animals bred on intensive fur farms suffer terribly; their short, miserable lives spent in squalid surroundings full of fear and distress, suffering injuries, infection and deformities.

Some of the most popular species of animals farmed for their fur are mink and fox, yet neither species has been domesticated over centuries to adapt them to living in proximity to humans, or to each other, as with domesticated farm animals such as cows and sheep. These are wild animals: they retain all of their wild instincts and needs. Claims that their nature has been changed or behavioural needs modified by captive breeding over a few generations are false and unscientific. They are shy and fearful of humans and other animals; thus, their mental and emotional suffering is compounded in an intensive farming environment.

Those who wish to wear animal fur must therefore take responsibility for the way in which the product they are wearing is produced. The animals killed to produce these items of clothing are kept in tiny, wire mesh cages and suffer from injuries and physical deformities, as well as behavioural abnormalities indicative of psychological damage, indicators that the animals cannot cope with the environment in which they find themselves.

- Up to 15-20 foxes suffer and die to make a fur coat
- Up to 60-80 mink suffer and die for a mink coat

Despite public education campaigns exposing the cruelty and suffering involved in the wearing of fur, some designers are choosing to use this unethical product in their collections. Yet there is a wealth of substitute materials that can replicate the appearance of fur, reflecting the beauty of the natural world.

Designers especially, must take responsibility for the unnecessary suffering caused by their choice of product. At the very least, any designer wishing to use fur should inspect the conditions of the animals being bred and killed for the product they desire. There is no excuse for accepting the assurances of industry at face value – this is an issue of personal responsibility – the designer is creating demand for a product that causes millions of animals to suffer horribly, and die an excruciating death.

This report covers a seven month study of the conditions in a random sample of 30 sites in Finland, producing mink and fox skins for the worldwide fur industry. Of Finland's circa 1100 fur farms¹⁶², this figure represents a statistically relevant sample. The Finnish Fur Breeders' Association claims that 47 per cent of Finland's pelt production comes from certified farms, and that 25 per cent of Finnish fur farms have been certified. Thus, of this sample, it would be expected that several of the facilities would be certified.



Wild, free Arctic fox.



A young fox cub looks up from the corner of its cage.

Certification:

The aim of the Finnish intensive fur farm certification programme is to provide reassurance to consumers, public and the authorities that pelts come from a farm operating in accordance with animal protection and welfare criteria demanded by legislation¹²⁵. *“The farm certification programme provides added assurances, because consumers want to know the origin of the product and be assured of the ethics behind it”*¹²⁶.

The scheme also advocates “transparency”. It is, therefore, hoped that our candid appraisal will be welcomed by industry.

The Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association certification brochure claims: *“Clean farm surroundings contribute to the welfare and comfort of both the animals and the fur producer.”* And, *“The basis for all measures is individual care and the monitoring of all animals, while special attention is paid to animal welfare throughout the entire production chain”*¹²⁶.

Of their standards of animal protection and welfare, the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association website provides consumers and public with even more far reaching assurances:

“All fur animals in Finland are bred in a manner honouring their well-being. Today’s care and breeding methods are based on extensive experience and fur-industry research. For decades, we have studied the breeding conditions, behaviour, and well-being of fur animals as well as the environmental issues connected with fur farms and the composition of the feed used at the farms. We continuously study and develop means of addressing issues connected with fur animals’ space and stimulation needs as well as all issues associated with the environment, in order to offer living conditions as good for the animals as possible.”

“In Finland, the care and breeding of fur animals and feed manufacturing are of a high standard.”

“Taking care of the well-being of animals is the basis for the breeding of all domesticated animals. On Finnish fur farms, the animals are carefully and professionally cared for.”

“The authorities monitor compliance with the legislation by, for example, conducting annual animal welfare and hygiene inspections. In these inspections, the following issues are studied: the pen sizes and the number of animals in each pen, the material from which the base mesh has been manufactured, the escape-security of open-sided sheds, the materials from which the water cups have been manufactured, how water is provided for the animals, how the animals are put down, what kind of shelves and nest boxes the animals have, whether chewing sticks are used, and how carcasses are handled.”

These assertions were put to the test. Observations were made of housing and animal care, animal health and welfare issues; over seven hours of video recordings were taken, together with one and a half thousand photographs.

Our conclusion is that not one of the farms could be said to reasonably reflect the assurances being given by the Association, and some of the injuries were horrifying.

Findings included animals with open and infected wounds, eyes infected or missing, tails bitten off, deformed legs, overgrowing gum disease resulting in difficulty eating and drinking, babies with legs stuck through the mesh floor of the cage, dilapidated caging and facilities, animal suffering and neglect.

Specific incidents of deficits in animal care reported here include:

- Obvious signs of untreated infection or disease in animals’ eyes, noses and ears.
- Foxes with visible gum masses, sometimes entirely engulfing the teeth.
- Open wounds, loss of tails.
- Malformed limbs.
- Dilapidated cages with sharp wire and mesh protruding into animals’ living space, likely to cause injury.
- Empty, unclean and broken water bowls.

What is more difficult to depict in such a study is the long-term mental suffering of animals kept for breeding. It might be argued that young animals killed for their pelts do not suffer from the extended periods of environmental deprivation experienced by the breeding adults, as they are killed within a few months of birth. However, the footage and photographs make it clear that all of the animals can and do suffer terribly. All for an unnecessary product for which alternatives are available.

This issue cannot be compared with the eating of meat, as some furriers have claimed. The animal welfare issues are distinctly different. There is no excuse for supporting an industry which causes such extreme suffering.



The cages are, at best, cramped and with little or no enrichment.

Worldwide, approximately 50 million animal fur pelts are produced annually^{163, 164}.

Finland is one of the world's four main fur producing countries and the largest producer of bluefox pelts^{1,166}. Between 2007 and 2008, total sales of fur amounted to €325.7 million, with nearly 9.5 million pelts being sold². In 2007, Finland reported 411,000 breeding foxes, which produced 987,000 cubs¹²¹; annual pelt production is approximately 4 million a year^{132,133, 134,165}. Thus, Finland produces about 8%, or 1/12th of the world's annual pelts.

This is a wealthy industry, yet it appears that none of this wealth has been invested back into animal welfare.

International Action on Intensive Fur Farming

Increasingly, governments around the world are responding to the evidence of the inevitable suffering that this industry causes, as well as the widespread public concern about both the cruelty and the environmental impact of intensive fur farms:-

- England and Wales established a ban on fur farming in November 2000, followed by the introduction of a ban in Scotland in October 2001¹³⁵.
- Austria was the first EU member state to ban fur farming when 9 regions introduced bans during the 1990s. The last mink farm closed in June 1998¹³⁵.
- In the Netherlands, fox and chinchilla farming have been banned since 1995 and 1997 respectively¹³⁵. In June 2009 the lower house of the Dutch Parliament adopted a ban on mink farming which is progressing through the upper house of the Parliament¹³⁶.
- Croatia's 2006 Animal Protection Act prohibits the rearing of animals for fur production¹³⁷.
- In Israel, a proposal to extend the law against fur production, manufacture, import, export and sale to cover all animals has recently been approved, following an earlier decision to ban dog and cat furs. This has some religious exemptions¹³⁸.
- The European Union has banned the use of leg-hold traps for wild animals, as well as the import of pelts from animals that have been caught with leg traps¹³⁹.

2. Natural behaviour and lifestyle of foxes and mink

2. Natural behaviour and lifestyle of foxes and mink

By considering the natural lifestyle and environment of fox and mink and comparing this with the conditions on intensive fur farms the level and extent of suffering caused, or likely to be caused, can be established.

Both fox and mink are naturally shy and secretive animals. They will often have large territories and generally act as solitary hunters. Mink are fiercely territorial and semi aquatic, and would naturally spend much of their time in water. Both instinctively avoid human contact, and academic studies have shown that they are fearful of humans on intensive farms.

In America and Europe mink inhabit a variety of wetlands including streams, rivers, lakes, freshwater and salt water marshes and coastlines¹⁴⁰. Mink are mostly active in, or within 100-200m of water. A study cited by Broom and Nimon using radio tracking reported that both sexes swam around 250m almost daily and sometimes twice a day. A large proportion of a wild mink's diet is derived from aquatic sources. *"It seems clear that swimming and diving are a highly significant aspect of the mink lifestyle"*^{141,142}.

The footage of mink on these farms does not show any access to water. Indeed in these conditions the water would freeze in low temperatures anyway and therefore not be accessible to the animals. Instead, they exist in cramped barren cages, with no way to express their natural swimming and foraging behaviours. Not being able to express natural, wild behaviour is a well known source of frustration in captive animals.

Two species of fox are bred for fur; the silver fox, a variety of the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and the blue fox, a variety of the Arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*)³. Foxes are shy, secretive animals, cover is important to them and therefore in open country they live below ground. Arctic foxes dig dens deep in the snow, surviving conditions as cold as -50°C⁴. Foxes establish home ranges, which can vary from 400 to 1600ha; in the Arctic, their home territory may be as large as 3000ha³.

Foxes are opportunistic feeders, consuming small mammals, fish, bird eggs, grass, invertebrates, berries and fruits. When there is surplus food, foxes will cache it in small holes, disguised under earth and twigs⁵. Arctic foxes also eat seaweed and seal placentas⁵.

A female fox will find a dry, protected area such as an earth den to give birth to her cubs, typically four to six babies^{3,5}.



Arctic fox in its natural environment.



Neck tongs used for catching foxes.



A fox stands over the body of its dead cage mate.

3. Animal health and welfare

Newborn cubs lack locomotor, visual and auditory skills and only fully open their eyes and ears at 11-20 days of age. Importantly, they cannot regulate their own body temperature. Nursing is initiated when the female calls the pups out of the den, or when pups nuzzle her belly⁶.

It is clear that the small spaces and exposed conditions on a fur farm do not allow these animals to express their normal behaviours; such environmental deprivation is known to cause distress, resulting in psychological and behavioural damage. Given the circumstances – close confinement, wire mesh cages open to the environment, it is inevitable that these animals will suffer terribly.

3. Animal health and welfare

3.1 Foxes are wild animals

Species of animal farmed for their fur are not domesticated and have the same needs as their wild counterparts. Studies have concluded, *“Generally, in comparison with other farm animals, species farmed for their fur have been subjected to relatively little active selection except with respect to fur characteristics”*⁵. The result is that **“the less fearful genetic strains are not being used commercially, and farmers are not necessarily devoting the substantial amount of time which is needed for handling of all their foxes. As a consequence, fear of humans is a major and very widespread welfare problem on fox farms”**⁵.

3.2 Health and welfare of animals

Anyone reading this report and watching the video can clearly see that the animal cages have wire floors and sides. Shelves, where present, have frequently collapsed⁷, wire may be broken⁸, protruding⁹ and rusted¹⁰ causing a hazard likely to injure the animal.

Water dispensers were sometimes empty¹¹, filled with rancid, green water¹², fur¹³ or broken and flooding¹⁴. On one occasion, the water bowl itself had broken off and was in the cage⁷. Food was seen spread onto cages which frequently appeared to be dirty and encrusted with old fur¹⁵. The overall appearance of the farms and the cages was one of dilapidation¹⁶ and neglect¹⁷.

In addition to general disrepair, most cages contain no enrichment. ‘Enrichment’ where it exists, is typically a block of wood¹⁸ or empty hollow bone¹¹.

A scientific study on the welfare of farmed foxes expressed concerns and questioned, **“have foxes the capacity to adapt fully to farm conditions and, hence, can their welfare be good on farms?”**³. It is noted that farmed foxes *“are almost always kept in small, barren, contiguous cages with no physical enrichment other than a wooden nest box when whelping and sometimes a wire mesh platform. They live in a largely static social environment, determined haphazardly. They have no opportunity to adjust their distance or take shelter in relation to aversive stimuli such as the presence of conspecifics or humans”* inevitably **“There is clear evidence that the welfare of farmed foxes in the typical bare, wire-mesh cages is very poor”**³.

Aside from the dilapidated and potentially dangerous cages we have seen, the animals themselves are often in a pitiful state. Some have tails missing; one tail stump was red, raw and protruding¹⁹. There were dead animals in their cages^{20,21} one of which had been eaten by its cage mate²² and one cub had been dead long enough for maggots to be present²³. As the mother sniffed the body, a wound on her shoulder and a bald, raw patch behind one of her withered ears were clearly visible²⁴.

Whilst it could be argued that some injuries or incidents (other than a corpse with maggots) could happen within a few hours and are therefore beyond the control of the farmer, other conditions have clearly been present for prolonged periods of time, possibly months.

Observations and recordings included animals with grossly distorted mouths, which they are unable to close^{25,26}; infected, weeping eyes^{27,28} often to the extent that it is unclear whether the animal's eye is still there²⁹. Some animals were also suffering from a condition where their ears have become withered and deformed^{9,30}, so much so that one animal appeared to have no ears³¹. A familiar sight was also foxes with abnormal limbs, standing awkwardly on the mesh floor of their cages, limbs bent in extreme directions, not showing the typical “tip toed” stance of their species^{32,33,34}.

3. Animal health and welfare

3.2.1 Genetic / hereditary diseases

Eyes

As mentioned earlier, many animals had discharge from one or both eyes. One fox cub had clouding in both eyes with the eyeballs appearing swollen³⁵; whether it could see was not clear. Another animal had such an infected / injured eye, it was impossible to see if the eye was still present³⁶. These eye conditions may be worsened by the animals' dirty cages and the fact that some animals have excessively long claws^{37,38}, which would exacerbate the irritation if they scratch their eyes.

These clearly distressing conditions may be due to entropion, which is described as *"A complex genetic condition that results in the turning in of the upper or lower eyelid, potentially resulting in corneal ulceration"*³⁹. This is relevant because *"Entropion has been observed usually in heavy individuals among blue foxes during the winter season. It causes conjunctivitis in the affected eye(s). This disorder, which in some respects seems to be hereditary, has until now not been studied systematically. The farmers had been advised not to use these individuals for breeding"*⁵. However, even if these animals are not used for breeding, the animals are experiencing eye problems and will undoubtedly suffer.

Mouth Disease

Some of the animals appeared to be suffering from a disease called gingival hyperplasia (extreme overgrowth of gums), a condition that is seen in some breeds of domesticated dog. Some had clearly suffered this disease for a considerable length of time, as the extent of the overgrown tissue was so extreme that they were unable to close their mouths – this would cause problems with both eating and drinking^{40,41}. See case study box opposite.

This is not a new problem: ***"Since the 1940's, farmed foxes have been observed to exhibit an inherited gum condition called hereditary hyperplastic gingivitis (HHG) which is associated with long, thick fur"***⁴². This condition *"eventually inhibits normal functioning and presents an animal welfare and economic concern"*⁴³.

The gum grows up the crown of the tooth and also thickens. This can affect the ligaments and the bones of the jaw, so the problem must be addressed. If it is not, then the enlargement of the tissue can become extreme. *"In advanced cases, the patient cannot close his/her mouth without chewing on the redundant/hyperplastic tissue. Even before this occurs, chewing on food and treats may cause the loose flaps of gingiva to be traumatized. The result of this trauma – pain!"*⁴⁴

With time, the condition *"can actually result in the movement of teeth, sometimes all but pulling teeth out of their sockets"*, therefore, experts have advised that *"the condition definitely needs treatment"*⁴⁴.

3.3 Housing

As mentioned earlier, many of the cages filmed during the investigation were covered with fur and debris⁴⁵; some had



This fox has noticeable issues with the eyes and mouth.



Example of the raw, exposed stump of a missing tail.



Example of the build up of discharge in and around the eyes.

Examples of poor health and welfare.



The same animal, over 13 weeks later.

Animal case study: Long suffering male fox

From the state of the animals' health, it is clear that many easily-recognised conditions had not received attention. One male fox was filmed on three separate occasions. In the first instance, the animal is clearly severely affected by a disorder causing his head to tilt awkwardly to one side⁶¹. His eyes are affected, as well as his mouth, and both are exuding fluids. He also has extremely overgrown claws and one withered ear. On the second visit, almost 4 weeks later, the animal was in the same terrible state, if not in slightly poorer health, and being bothered by flies¹²³. Just over 13 weeks later he was seen, still in a poor state, with his head held at an odd angle, stained fur around his mouth and throat and diseased ears¹²⁴.



Example of abnormal posture involving the feet.

Animal health: Injuries and limb deformation linked to housing conditions

As a result of the cramped housing, animals appeared to have suffered injuries from other cage mates with whom they were confined. These included missing ears⁵², missing tails with raw, exposed stumps⁸⁵ and open wounds on various parts of the body¹³.

As a result of the nature of the mesh netting, many of the animals displayed an abnormal posture when walking. Foxes would normally walk on their toes, but the farmed foxes were often walking with their feet flat on the floor (back of the foot on the cage floor)^{54,9}, indicating an attempt to make moving around on mesh more comfortable for their feet.

One particular animal appeared to have suffered a broken leg. This injury had either not been, or was inadequately attended to; it had healed, leaving the animal with a withered and twitching foot⁵⁶.



Example of overgrown gum tissue engulfing the teeth.

Animal health: Eye, mouth infections

Infection was a widespread problem, affecting animals of all ages and species.

Eye problems: Many of the animals appeared to be suffering from eye problems. One condition involved swollen and misty eyes. Another caused the eyelids to turn in, resulting in weeping eyes and ulceration¹²². Symptoms observed included constant blinking³⁶, opaque eyes³⁵ and pus around the eyes⁷². In some cases the animal's eye had produced so much discharge that the fur around the eye and down the face was encrusted⁷⁵. It is likely that many of these animals suffered visual impairment as a result.

Mouth infection: The occurrence of oral masses were seen in foxes to varying degrees of severity. The overgrowth of gum tissue, which can be managed in domestic dog species, had been left to develop to a horrendous level in some animals. In one fox, the problem had advanced to the extent that huge masses protruded from the top and bottom jaws, entirely engulfing the animal's teeth, clearly causing eating and drinking difficulties⁴⁰.

3. Animal health and welfare

broken, protruding wires presenting an injury hazard to the animals⁴⁶. Furthermore being in captivity, especially in such tiny cages, causes these animals mental and physical harm.

3.3.1 Bald tail patch

Many foxes were seen to have a white patch at the base of their tails^{47,48}, this could indicate an earlier disease or injury.

One study described a condition in mink *“Psychogenic alopecia, sometimes resulting from excessive self-grooming, has been linked with stress in a range of species. Mink with patches of shortened or absent fur, especially on the tail, exist on every farm. Careful observation has shown this to be caused by animals sucking or biting themselves. The fur on the lower hind part of the back, and/or the tail, may be clipped short, and the tail may even be bald, apparently sucked clean of fur”*⁵.

It is possible that the patches on foxes' tails were caused by tail biting earlier in the animal's life as some tail patches appeared to have healed²¹ and some tail patches are clearly fresh wounds⁴⁹.

3.3.2 Abnormal behaviour

Abnormal, repetitive behaviours are often referred to as 'stereotypic' behaviour by animal behaviourists. This is where an animal spends long periods of time repeating a movement or abnormal activity and is an indicator that the animal is stressed; it is unable to cope with its environment.

Some animals observed in this study displayed abnormal or frustrated behaviour, repeating the same movement, with no obvious purpose⁵⁰. Behavioural problems included an animal walking repeatedly in circles around the cage⁵¹, and some more severe behaviour, for example, foxes were seen frantically jumping around the cage, darting from one corner to the other^{52,53}.

These animals can show signs of mental disturbance. Currently, studies on farmed animals have concluded: *“The extent of stereotyped behaviour in farmed foxes is not adequately documented”*³. And, *“Since foxes may show stereotypies when humans are not present but cease when humans are present, failure to observe stereotypies does not mean that they do not occur”*⁵.

3.3.3 Abnormal stances, locomotion and limbs

Many foxes had limbs that were clearly abnormal. Instead of standing on the tips of their toes, as foxes usually do, a stance known as 'digitigrade', they were bearing weight on the whole sole of their foot^{54,9}, which is known as 'plantigrade'. There is little scientific literature on limb problems in farmed canids, as *“Conformation problems, especially plantigrade instead of digitigrade locomotion, have apparently received little if no attention”*⁵. The problem could be due to the animals' genetics or to the mesh cage floor that the animals must stand and lie upon for the whole of their lives. The size of the mesh holes may have caused the animals to walk in this atypical fashion, as they try to make movement around the cage more comfortable; limb distortion may have occurred over time.

A study of fox physiology with varying cage size and floor type found that bending of the front foot tended to occur more often on a mesh floor than an earth floor. Furthermore, smaller cages caused more animals to have bent feet⁵⁵.

The European SCAHAW (Scientific Committee on Animal Health And Animal Welfare) report concludes its section on the welfare of farmed foxes with the following statement regarding fox caging ***“In particular, it imposes monotony of the physical environment, restricts physical exercise and species-specific behaviour such as digging. In relation to the lack of physical exercise, limb bones are significantly weaker than those of foxes kept in large cages where more exercise occurs”***. The same section states the occurrence of *“locomotor problems in heavy blue foxes, and entropion in blue foxes”*⁵.

One fox in this investigation appeared to have suffered an injury to a back leg, leaving the individual with an extremely atrophied, unusable limb – it was almost unrecognizable as a foot. He was unable to walk correctly and had a red, sore patch on his foot, probably from the compromised way in which he had to move, shuffling across his cage. At one point this distorted, malformed foot appeared to twitch uncontrollably⁵⁶.

3.3.4 Cannibalism and tail biting

Some foxes had lost their tails. Where this loss was recent, the animal had a red, raw protruding stump¹⁹. The animals' pain can only be imagined, especially if the fox that bit off the tail repeatedly worries at the injury. In one cage, two animals were seen to be lacking their tails⁵⁷. *“The killing and injury of cubs (tail removal, biting) by their mothers has been reported as a common problem on fox farms, and yet comparatively few studies have examined this issue”*³.



Rows of wire mesh cages.



This fox's face is distorted by an open, infected wound; a not uncommon sight in the fur farms visited by the investigators.

4. Breaches of national and international regulations

One red fox had a deep open wound on the back of its neck⁵⁸. Additionally, a mink was seen that appeared to have lost its ear, leaving a recent, open wound⁵⁹. One fox was dead and had been partially eaten by its cage mate²².

The SCAHAW report discusses findings from another study, regarding infanticide in foxes and how it is an *“important welfare problem for the cubs because of their likely high sensitivity to pain. A clear relation between infanticide and tail-biting of the cubs was described. Infanticide frequently started with tail biting, and some vixens only bit tails in some years and killed offspring in other years”*⁵.

3.3.5 Long claws

A recent scientific paper reported on the effects of the provision of sand floor for juvenile blue foxes (*Vulpes lagopus*) and its affect on their physiology⁶⁰. The paper found that more claw breakages occurred in the group of foxes which were given a mesh floor and that animals which were given sand had *“better mass and overall quality of furs”*.

The authors found *“The slightly better mass and overall quality of furs in the Sand group foxes might suggest that the Sand group foxes could afford to invest their resources in fur development and growth during their early lives, that is, from August onwards, whereas the Control group foxes were investing more of their resources in coping”*⁶⁰.

Long claws can cause problems as they *“can become caught in the mesh of the cage and break, exposing the foxes to digit inflammations [sic] which impacts on both the functioning-based and feelings-based welfare of the animals”*⁶⁰.

3.3.5 Possible neurological disorders

Some foxes were clearly in a deplorable state of health, but the cause of this suffering was unclear. One individual, a male, held his head tilted with his right eye uppermost. This eye was severely red and inflamed, the other was almost completely closed, and his left ear was also withered. His body, under the thick coat was thin, making his head and limbs appear too large. He turned slowly in circles, sniffing the air. The underside of his muzzle was discoloured with saliva and his rear legs were used abnormally, stand on the whole bottom part of the limb (plantigrade)⁶¹.

Another example is a cub in a very poor state of health. He was a lot smaller than his cage-mates and sat with his head held at an abnormal angle and appeared to be pre-occupied and agitated. His front limbs were very distorted and his cage mates were walking over the top of him. He seemed oblivious. His limbs were so distorted that when he sat down, his stomach appeared to be touching the floor⁶².

4. Breaches of national and international regulations for the protection of animals

The farms studied in this investigation are required to abide by laws put in place by the Finnish government. In addition European Union (EU) regulations for the protection of farmed animals, including those farmed for fur, cover illness, injury and poor health; feeding and watering; animal housing/cages; satisfying the animal's natural behavioural needs.

The relevant national legislation is Finland's Animal Welfare Act (247/1996)⁶³, which sets out to protect animals from distress, pain and suffering and to promote the welfare and good treatment of animals. In addition, Decree no. 16/VLA/1999 on the matter of Animal Protection Requirements Regarding the Keeping of Furred Animals⁶⁴ applies. This, more specifically, contains provisions which aim to protect furred animals from suffering and pain. Another relevant decree which makes the provisions in the Animal Welfare Act more specific to this case, is Animal Welfare Decree (396/1996)⁶⁵.

In the EU, furred animals are covered under EU Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes⁶⁶. The measures in this directive are based on past experience and present scientific knowledge.

4.1 Illness, injury and poor health

The illness and injuries described earlier appear to breach animal protection legislation, for example:

- Animals whose injuries or diseases were advanced, therefore appropriate care had either not been obtained, or has been inadequate
- Animals with injuries or open wounds; missing tails; open sores
- Abnormal or malformed limbs, abnormal gait; apparently broken limbs
- Swollen, overgrown gums preventing drinking and eating; clearly developed over a long period of time

Examples of breaches of national and international regulations

4.1 Illness, injury and poor health:



The spine of this dead animal is prominent, a possible indicator of prolonged poor condition prior to death.



This fox's claws are overgrown, and its ears are withered. These signs are unlikely to have appeared over a short time span.



A bloody wound on the elbow joint.

- Injured, infected, missing eyes
- Overgrown claws
- Dead animals covered in maggots

These instances are clearly covered by the legislation. For example:

- When an animal falls ill, appropriate care must be obtained without delay. The welfare and conditions of the animal must be checked often enough^{143,144,145}
- Where an animal does not respond to care, veterinary advice must be obtained as soon as possible¹⁴⁵.
- The animals' claws shall be clipped as required¹⁴⁶.

4. Breaches of national and international regulations

4.2 Feeding and watering

- Animals without sufficient drinking water
- Dry bowls / watering systems broken, overflowing, not running
- Apparently broken water supply
- Dirty water bowls, contaminated with algae and fur
- Broken water bowl, with pieces on floor
- Methods of feeding that do not take account of the animals' nutritional needs.
- Food pumped out and shared in a cage
- Overall conditions indicate that animals are not checked regularly and are therefore neglected

These instances are clearly covered by the legislation, for example:

- The animal must be able to obtain suitable food, drink and other necessary care in sufficient quantities and of good quality^{147,148}.
- The needs of each animal must be taken into account in feeding and it must be ensured that each animal gets enough nutrition and must be appropriate to their age and species^{148,149}.
- Drinking and feeding vessels shall be such as not to cause injuries to the furred animals¹⁵⁰. The animals shall have daily access to an adequate amount of clean water. The animals' drinking vessels and watering systems shall be kept clean^{151,152}.
- Such equipment essential for the animals' health and well-being must be inspected at least once daily. Where defects are discovered, these must be rectified immediately¹⁵³.

4.3 Animal housing/cages

- Small cages, made of wire mesh, do not take the needs of the animals into account
- Cages littered with faeces, fur, and dirty
- Little or no environmental enrichment
- Damaged and broken cages with sharp protruding ends, likely to injure
- Small cubs in cages with wire mesh too large for their feet, resulting in legs dropping through cage floor

Examples of breaches of national and international regulations.

4.2 Feeding and watering:



Example of poor feeding methods.



Example of inadequate water supply.

- Cages with young cubs, no 'lair' or 'nest'; lack of bedding for young animals
- Collapsed shelves

These instances are clearly covered by the legislation, for example:

- The animal premises must have sufficient space and lighting and it must be protective, clean and safe as well as appropriate in other respects taking account of the needs of each animal species¹⁵⁴.
- The cage material and construction should be such that they do not cause danger to the animal's health or well being. The cages shall not have such edges and projecting parts as can injure the animals. If the bottom of the cage is of netting or perforated material, it shall be suited to the species in respect of the animal's size, age and weight^{155,156,157}.
- Foxes shall have a suitable lair for whelping and care of the cubs. In fox cages there shall be a shelf at a suitable height on which the animal can lie in a natural position. The furred animals' lairs shall be spacious enough for the animals to be able to rest in a natural position¹⁵⁸.

4.4 Satisfying the animals' natural behaviour.

- The physiological and behavioural needs of the animals are not taken into account in the design of the cages. By comparing the natural behaviour of foxes in the wild and these foxes in Finland's fur farms it is apparent that these animals are suffering extremely deprived environments, where they are unable to cope, and this causes great suffering.
- Disturbed, abnormal behaviour is present, indicative of psychological damage.
- Problems identified include abnormal and frustrated behaviour that is sometimes severe and possible cannibalism, as partially eaten bodies were observed.
- Most of the adults display an abnormal gait; rather than walking on the tops of their feet in the normal way (digitigrade) they move with a larger area of their foot on the ground. In comparison to the natural movement of foxes in the wild, the locomotive behaviour of these animals is obviously compromised.

These instances are clearly covered by the legislation, for example:

- Maintaining the health of animals must be promoted in the keeping of animals and the physiological and behavioural needs of the animals must be taken into account¹⁵⁹.
- Particular attention shall be given to any possible behavioural problems that ensue from the establishment of new social relationships¹⁴⁶.
- The premises must have enough space considering the specific needs of each animal species and must not be restricted in a way which causes unnecessary suffering. The animal must be capable of standing and resting in a natural position as well as moving about in the premises^{160,161}.

Examples of breaches of national and international regulations.

4.3. Animal housing/cages:



The dead body of a fox, having been partially eaten by its companions.



The mesh floor of this cage is too large for the cubs' feet, causing their legs to fall through the holes.



The wire mesh shelf in this cramped cage is twisted and broken; a potential cause of injury.

5. Killing

5. Killing

The issue of how intensively farmed fur animals are killed at the end of their lives, whilst an important element of their whole life experience, is not covered in detail here. This report focuses on the animal care and management issues, however below is a summary of the killing:

The method of slaughter is dependant upon the species being killed and includes some horrific practices such as gassing, electrocution through the anus and mouth and, for smaller animals, breaking their necks.

“The traditional way of stunning farmed foxes is whole body stunning”. For this method the fox is immobilised by the neck and tail whilst a metal rod is inserted into the anus and the mouth, and an electrical current applied¹¹⁷. The European Fur Breeders Association recommends that the application of electrical current should last at least 3 seconds¹¹⁸.

The American Veterinary Medical Association recommendations regarding electrocution state that *“its disadvantages far outweigh its advantages in most applications. Techniques that apply electric current from head....are unacceptable”*¹¹⁹. It should also be noted that the use of electrocution to kill foxes in the UK is not permitted and when foxes were bred in the UK, prior to the fur farming ban, they were killed by lethal injection⁵.

The killing of mink is carried out using a gas chamber, which is moved along a shed and selected animals are removed. 30-50 mink may be placed in a killing box at one time. Studies have commented, *“Unless unconsciousness is instantaneous, it is likely that this also causes stress.”* It has also been reported that animals killed by this method may *“pile up and be killed, in part, by suffocation”*⁵.

Conclusion

The end product of fur farming, other than the pelts, are seen in our footage; piles of skinned, bloodied bodies, some with swollen, bitten tongues and protruding eyes. Clear signs of an horrific death at the end of a life of appalling suffering. The unwanted fur from the animals' feet remains in place¹²⁰.

This hugely wealthy industry has not resolved the problems of the inherent cruelty and suffering it causes in decades of ***“...individual care and the monitoring of all animals, while special attention is paid to animal welfare throughout the entire production chain.”***

Given the circumstances where the industry pressure is for constantly increasing profits, the wild nature of these animals and their high intelligence, emotional and psychological needs, it is simply not possible for the intensive fur industry to provide these animals with the facilities they need to make the end product ethical.

It is time for all fur farming to be banned.

Wearing animal fur is never ethical. It is cruel and socially unacceptable.



Grass and trees are visible through the wire, close beyond the confines of the cages.



Slaughtered foxes

Bloody Harvest. The real cost of fur

Examples selected from each of the 30 sites visited depicting the conditions.



Bloody Harvest. The real cost of fur



Bloody Harvest. The real cost of fur

Examples selected from each of the 30 sites visited depicting the various conditions of the animals.



Bloody Harvest. The real cost of fur



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