

Lesley Fox: Animal cruelty is not green

By Lesley Fox

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If you are making your holiday shopping list, you better check it twice.

Each year in Canada, approximately two million animals are killed for their [fur](#). Animals trapped in the wild break teeth and bones trying to escape from cruel traps. On fur farms, caged animals are gassed or anally electrocuted.

While long gone are the days of [full-length fur coats](#), most fur these days is found on the hoods of parkas or on goofy trinkets in dollar stores, pet stores, or department stores.

To boost sagging sales, the fur industry is working overtime to sneak in bits of fur onto whatever products they can. They're also trying to capitalize on the recent surge of interest in green and sustainable products by distributing promotional materials claiming fur is somehow ecofriendly.

Fur is not green

While raw pelts from the Flintstones era may be considered "natural", modern-day fur production relies on harmful chemicals, including acids, hydrogen peroxide, chromates, formaldehyde, bleaching agents, and various types of dyes.

In addition to the chemical treatment of furs that prevents them from decaying, fur farms in particular are responsible for immense pollution.

In 2009, Nova Scotia fur farms alone housed and killed 913,840 animals. Residents in several areas located near the fur farms, particularly in Yarmouth County, have been increasingly vocal about their concerns over water and air pollution due to mink farm development.

In early 1990s, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fined six fur-processing firms US\$2.2 million for the pollution they caused. The EPA stated that the waste from fur processing plants “may cause respiratory problems, and are listed as possible carcinogens”.

But since the 1990s, not much has changed in terms of environmental regulations and many fur farms simply continue to pollute.

Some fur farmers have actually been going out of business due to their inability to clean up the nitrates, phosphates, and other substances running off with rainwater or seeping into aquifers and polluting local water supplies.

Greenwashing at its best

When engaged in debate, proponents of the fur industry are quick to say that no endangered species are used in their fur products, as if this was a commendable feature. But refraining from intentionally harming or killing endangered species is the law, and following the law is a bare minimum requirement of all industries. This isn't a “green” practice.

And while it may not be the intention to trap endangered species, traps are indiscriminate. Make no mistake, species at risk do get caught in, and die from, cruel traps intended for other animals.

While most animals legally trapped in Canada are not species at risk, how few animals should be left before trapping and killing for profit is halted?

For example, the wolverine is a species whose population levels are of great concern. In Canada, their eastern population is already officially listed as “endangered” and their western population is officially listed as a species of “special concern” due to their low numbers. (A species is listed as “special concern” when it “may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats”.)

Despite being listed as a species of special concern, wolverines are still legally trapped for their fur in snare or conibear traps.

Gift for Mother Nature

The evidence is clear that fur and fur trim is not only cruel to animals, but is also harmful to our environment. And if you find any of the “green” or “ecofriendly” advertisements misleading, you can file a complaint with the Canadian Competition Bureau.

Making a commitment to be fur-free is a very easy holiday wish you can grant for the animals, and Mother Nature.

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