

The Gory Fur Trail from China to the UK

Fur from cats and dogs is available in the UK
Chinese fur is ubiquitous on UK high streets
Internet fuels global trade in fur from China



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Care for the Wild International exposed how millions of animals suffer intensely every minute of every day on Chinese fur farms before being forced to endure the most brutal and violent deaths, including being skinned alive. Anything from traditional 'fur-bearing animals' such as red and Arctic foxes, raccoon dogs, rabbits and mink are turned into garish fashion items, many of which end up on UK high streets. Now, a new investigation by Care for the Wild International has revealed that even the skins of our beloved house cats and those of man's best friend are available at the click of a button over the Internet.

Chinese fur floods into Europe

The images shocked millions around the world. Red and Arctic foxes, raccoon dogs, mink and Rex Rabbits are held in horrific conditions on Chinese fur farms, many brutally killed and skinned alive at buyers' markets, their fur purchased for processing into garments destined for export to the West.

In the year since Care for the Wild International (CWI) first raised the alarm about the disturbing truth behind China's burgeoning fur trade, the issue has galvanised public opinion in dozens of countries, with high profile protests and boycotts, amnesties and appeals.

The international fur industry reacted to the pictures by claiming that they were not representative and that many of China's hundreds of fur farms have good welfare records. Fearing a commercial backlash, European and UK fur dealers tried to distance themselves from the scandal by stating that the bulk of Chinese fur is destined for Russian and Asian markets; as if this constituted an excuse for the most deplorable of standards. But fresh investigations carried out by CWI in London and Hong Kong revealed how Chinese fur is flooding into the UK, Europe and beyond. Cheap production costs, improved trade links and a growth in demand are driving this grisly supply of fur and fur products between China and the West.

Snap surveys carried out by CWI in a number of London's most popular and fashionable shopping areas in early 2006 uncovered unprecedented volumes of garments and accessories made of, or containing fur sourced from China. Anything from coats, shawls, t-shirts, handbags, shoes, hats and scarves laced or trimmed with fur from China were discovered on sale from as little as £5.

But consumers no longer need to visit the high street to purchase such goods. The rise in Internet commerce with its relative anonymity is dramatically fuelling this trade - hundreds of companies now offer Chinese fur garments, products or accessories online to an international market - no questions asked. Some cater directly for consumers, others are targeting manufacturers and fashion retailers.





Although not illegal, some of the products offered - and the ease with which they can be obtained - will shock and appal even the most hard-nosed sceptics. Posing as fur dealers, CWI investigators were offered a macabre range of animal skins, including full leopard cat and domestic cat skins, as well as fully assembled sheets of sewn-together furs, referred to as plates. Other furs on offer include Arctic and blue fox pelts and the skins of weasels, squirrels and raccoon dogs amongst other species. Investigators also discovered companies offering the skins of domestic dogs.

Fashionable fur - on a high street near you

A freezing morning in a north London high street is a long way from the fur producing hubs of rural China, but the two are increasingly linked by the avalanche of garments and accessories containing Chinese fur on sale in the shops and market stalls that characterise the area. During snap retail surveys both here and in the centre of London, CWI investigators discovered an alarming array of garments and accessories made from or containing fur from China.



With a budget of just £200, fashion conscious consumers can purchase a broad range of seemingly ubiquitous items: ladies leather jacket with fur trim (£45), black pixie boots with fur decoration (£40), t-shirt with fur collar (£10), round handbag with dyed black fur cover (£25), knitted shawl with fur clasp (£15), full fur scarf (£15) and a whole range of smaller accessories including fur flowers and pom-pom scarves for under £10.



Elsewhere, for a variety of prices, investigators discovered a full Arctic fox jacket for sale, along with gloves, Chinese-style coats with fur trim and other garments, handbags and shoes containing fur components. Although some fur items on sale originate from Spain, France, or less often, from the US, Brazil and Morocco, retailers openly acknowledged that the majority is now Chinese-sourced, largely because of the cheap cost of purchasing such products wholesale. It is almost impossible to walk along any high street these days without coming face to face with one of the most common and presumably popular items, the rabbit fur pom-pom scarf, which will set you back a mere £5, but will have been paid for in anguish and blood.



One retailer, who declined to comment on his own specific import arrangements, admitted to investigators that "everyone sources from China now - it is so much cheaper and easier to obtain." Another said that the increasing popularity of fur in the UK this winter meant that many retailers were struggling to order enough to keep up with demand. Both said they had no idea of conditions inside Chinese fur farms, adding that they were seldom questioned by customers about the origin of the fur sold.

What's more, CWI investigators also succeeded in ordering dog skins - small, medium and large - for less than £10 each from an Internet-based company in Germany (see front cover and p. 6) - and later found the matching boots, made from the same type of skin for sale by a company in Shanghai (see front cover). "We were also offered skins of domestic cats for less than £2.60. Our research therefore shows how skins, even from domestic animals can easily and cheaply be bought and are delivered direct to your doorstep."



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Farmed in tiny cages, clubbed to death or skinned alive - the fate of millions of Chinese animals bred for their fur

Perhaps such retailers should watch the shocking hard evidence gathered by CWI in conjunction with Swiss Animal Protection and EAST International: undercover film obtained by investigators in late 2004 and early 2005 graphically revealed for the first time how millions of animals in typical Chinese fur farms are confined in rows of tiny, often filthy, wire cages. Housing conditions of this kind result in high cub mortality, self mutilation and pathological behaviours. The foxes and raccoon dogs are now transported under horrendous conditions to wholesale markets where they are slaughtered, skinned, sold and bought by clothing and processing companies.

In shocking sequences, animals were filmed being lifted from their cages using a 'capture pole' with a noose at the end. Helpless and wide-eyed, foxes and raccoon dogs are suspended from their necks for considerable periods of time before workers grab them by their hind legs and, using a wooden or metal club, repeatedly strike them on the head. Others are swung hard against the ground by their hind legs in an attempt to stun or immobilize them, while their cage mates, who are next in line, look on. Many are seen convulsing and trembling, unable to move away, on the ground, no doubt suffering from bone fractures, ruptured organs and internal bleeding.



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Then, in perhaps the most shocking scenes of all, workers were filmed as they skin the animals - many still alive - by plunging a knife into the rear of their belly whilst the animal lies on its back or is hung by its legs from a hook. Beginning with the hind legs, workers then wrench the animal's skin from its body, until it peels off over the head. Some workers first hacked off the animal's paws to facilitate subsequent skinning.

Workers made no attempt to ensure that animals were dead before skinning them. As a result, many remain fully conscious during the entire process and start to writhe until workers again attempt to stun or immobilize them by striking them with the handle of a knife or by standing on their necks. Even after their entire skin has been stripped off, some animals remained alive for up to ten minutes, breathing and moving their heads (see overleaf).

When the film was released alongside CWI's report "Fun Fur - a report on the Chinese fur industry" in early 2005 it provoked an international outcry. The brutal footage was circulated on the Internet and broadcast on television in many countries. The Chinese government and fur producers were quick to react, first accusing investigators of having staged these nightmarish scenes, before blaming poor, un-educated farmers for isolated incidents of cruelty, unrepresentative for the industry as a whole. Worried that such adverse publicity could damage the important economic value of fur exports, the international community was told that the situation had been resolved. The British fur industry, eager not to damage its hard fought for new hip image, was quick to distance itself from fur produced in China, claiming that hardly any of it enters UK or European markets.

While China has no laws to protect captive wild animals against even the most devastating abuse, Britain banned fur farming in 1998 because of the unavoidable health and welfare problems associated with farming animals for their fur.



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Internet fuels bloody trade from China to the UK

Many of China's fur suppliers and product manufacturers are increasingly turning to the Internet to reach out to an international market increasingly hungry for animal skins and the garments and accessories made from them. During investigations in 2005 and 2006, CWI encountered hundreds of companies offering products made from Chinese fur, including raw fur in every form from unprocessed skins to dressed and cut trim. Although there is nothing illegal about the online trade in fur, the disturbing volume and range of animal products offered is shocking.

Posing as fur dealers, CWI investigators engaged with a number of leading suppliers of Chinese fur and fur products. One company, the Yikang Fur Co Ltd, based in Daying Town in Hebei province, offered investigators a diverse range of skins and assembled fur plates including white and Rex rabbit, hare, and blue and silver fox. Company representatives also told investigators that they could supply the skins of leopard cat and house cat - all sourced from China. Yikang Fur boasted that it already supplies fur products to many customers in Europe.

Similarly, representatives of Shanghai Yinling Trading Ltd in Shanghai offered investigators skins and other products, including shawls, bags and accessories from Chinese-sourced mink, fox and raccoon dog, amongst other species. The company admitted to investigators that it supplies products to Switzerland, Denmark and Finland and has exported rabbit fur accessories to the UK.

Hong Kong based Ace Furs Ltd, regarded as a major player in the international fur trade, offers fur and fur garments made from sable, mink, rex rabbit, beaver, nutria, fox weasel and raccoon. Products specified as being available include full fur, knitted fur, reversible fur



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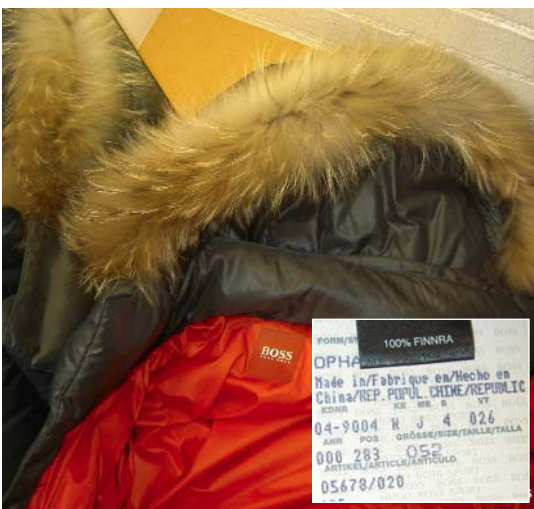
garments, scarves and other accessories. A company representative confirmed to investigators that some of its fur is sourced from China, including fur from rex rabbits. Ace Fur stated that it supplies a number of international markets, including countries in the EU. Hebei Pengpai Fur Ltd, based in Hengshui also exports to EU countries, and states that it has supplied fur from cats, dogs and wolves amongst other species.

A number of other companies, including Javy Textiles Ltd, based out of several locations in mainland China, referred investigators' enquiries to UK agents - indicating further direct trade links with regard to fur between China and the UK. Although providing only a snapshot of the scale and type of fur products available, these examples offer some of the first evidence of Chinese sourced fur being exported directly to European markets, including the UK.

Shanghai Zhenmeng Shoes Co. Ltd, which specialises in the production of ladies shoes, offers three types of boots made from dog fur from China - two black (see p. 5), one golden (see front cover), like the dog skins obtained by Care for the Wild International. Minimum order 35 pairs, estimated annual sales: US\$2.5 - 5 million, export percentage: 100 percent.

Design houses deny Chinese fur link

Despite the proliferation in the availability and import of Chinese fur, many leading western design houses continue to deny that they source fur from China. Chanel, Christian Dior, Dolce and Gabbana, Givenchy, Gucci, Jasper Conran, Prada and Versace have all produced clothing using fur. In Hong Kong, CWI investigators approached representatives from many such design houses and were repeatedly told that the fur used in their collections was sourced from Europe rather than China.



But CWI has learnt that at least one major design house - Hugo Boss (see left), part of the giant Moss Bros group behind the well known Cecil Gee, Moss, Moss Bros hire, Savoy tailors Guild, Beale & Inman and Canali brands - has acknowledged that its suppliers "may source from China" although the company declined to provide further details or describe what, if any, animal welfare standards they insist upon. The company was responding to a request for information in 2005. The disclosure that such a well known brand has been unable to deny a link with Chinese fur will further fuel calls for a ban on fur and fur products originating in China. Only a few weeks ago, Burberry, which had been using Chinese fur on its 2006 collection, withdrew these items after being shown CWI's undercover footage.

A US-based clothing manufacturer called 'The Mad Bomber Company' uses Chinese rabbit fur on its staggering array of hats (see overleaf). We came across them when we found one of their designs in an outdoors clothing shop in Surrey. Because of the attempted eco-spin the company associates with its products, it is worth a special mention here. The hat's label informs that the company "promotes a balanced use of our renewable resources. We all rely on the earth for our food, clothing and shelter. Natural fibres, synthetics, fur and leather are all important if used in a balanced way. Respect and recycle." According to their website, The Mad

Bomber Company operates "a joint venture factory in Manchuria reliant on thousands of self-employed Chinese", whilst supplying "a diverse international distribution network in Italy, Russia, Sweden, Japan, Finland, Argentina, America, France, Norway, and England. Moving materials between Europe, America, and China we have truly become a multi-national company."

Dr Barbara Maas, CWI Chief Executive, commented on the latest set of investigations: "These shocking findings illustrate the massive scale of trade in Chinese fur and its increasing and easy availability in the UK and Europe. It is appalling that fur taken from living animals reared in Chinese fur farms, under nightmarish conditions, has swamped everyday fashion collections at bargain basement prices. No longer the preserve of the rich and famous, fur is once again considered nothing out of the ordinary. It is remarkable that fur has crept back in popularity amongst consumers who wouldn't have been seen dead wearing an animal's pelt only ten years ago. This change of heart is the result of a concerted and sustained multi-million pound PR campaign by the international fur industry to lull shoppers into a false sense of security about the reality of where their fur really comes from."



With regard to the increasing Internet trade in fur and fur products, Dr Maas said: "It is highly disturbing that with little more than a few clicks of the mouse virtually anyone can obtain the skins of popular and enigmatic animals such as leopard cats, foxes, domestic dogs and cats - the ease with which our investigators were able to locate and order such items is a graphic illustration of the explosion in this gory trade. These animals have been denied even the most simple acts of kindness and compassion during their tormented lives, only to be gracing somebody's neck for as little as £5."

The UK government has explained its past reluctance to ban the importation of cat and dog skins on the grounds that they do not enter the UK. But Care for the Wild International's findings provide clear evidence that this is no longer so. The charity therefore urges the UK government to make good on its promise and ban cat and dog fur imports into this country.

The British public has always been a champion for animal welfare and in 1998 the UK government banned fur farming on humane grounds. We don't need fur to make a fashion statement. On the contrary, not wearing it shows the world that it is cool to be kind.

Largest fur trade hub on Earth

China is now the world's largest exporter of fur clothing and the biggest fur trade production and processing hub on earth. In 2003, according to Chinese customs figures, the overall volume of fur imports and exports totalled \$997.6 million. At least 95% of fur clothing produced in China is exported overseas, with Europe, the USA, Japan, Korea and Russia among the customers. Typical products exported include fur, fur garments and fabric or leather garments adorned with fur trim.

Globally, the retail value of sales of fur garments, trim and accessories exceeds \$11 billion and is expanding. The EU is now the world's biggest consumer of fur. The UK has become a global centre for fur buyers, with retailers, traders, wholesalers and manufacturers





purchasing the majority of the world's 'primary fur' or pelts, worth an estimated £500 million a year in turnover.

According to Chinese fur industry sources, a growing number of international fur traders, processors and fashion designers are gradually shifting their business to China, where cheap labour and the absence of strict animal welfare guidelines keeps costs down. Traditionally, fur for the fashion industry was obtained from European countries and Scandinavia. In the UK, fur farming was banned several years ago after successful lobbying by animal welfare campaigners.

Around 85% of the world's fur comes from fur farms breeding fox, mink, sable, raccoon, mink, rabbit and fitch. Wild fur is additionally sourced from beaver, opossum, weasel and muskrat.

In China, species bred for fur include red and Arctic foxes, raccoon dogs, mink, and Rex rabbits. During the past decade hundreds of fur farms have sprung up to meet growing demand, many of them situated in the country's north-eastern region. In Shandong province farms are estimated to hold as many as 500,000 foxes bred for fur, in Heilongjiang Province, as many as 300,000 animals are housed; in Hebei Province, the largest fur farm holds more than 20,000 animals.

Care for the Wild International calls for:

- Fashion designers to shun the use of fur in their collections and use non-violent materials instead
- Shoppers not to buy fur garments or accessories or clothes with fur trimmings
- Shoppers to make sure designers do not incorporate fur in their collections
- Fashion retailers not to stock garments or accessories or clothes with fur trimmings
- The UK government to ban the importation of cat and dog skins
- EU member states and the European Parliament to ban the import of fur from China and of garments that contain such fur
- The Chinese government to urgently introduce and enforce legislation prohibiting inhumane treatment of all animals



For full details of CWI's campaign on Chinese fur, see www.careforthewild.org

For high resolution images, please see www.careforthewild.com/files/pictures7/



Care for the Wild International, Tickfold Farm, Kingsfold, West Sussex, RH12 3SE
Telephone: (01306) 627900 Fax: (01306) 627901
E-mail: info@careforthewild.com Website: www.careforthewild.com
Registered Charity No. 288802