

Curbing the public's taste for fur

by Minga O'Brien

In Canada, approximately 15 million animals are trapped or ranched for their pelts each year. Of this 15 million, 1.5 million are ranch-raised, 4 million are trapped and their pelts sold, and 9.6 million are non-target casualties inadvertently caught in traps. The trade in pelts is a billion dollar industry in Canada, providing many jobs as well as government revenues through trapping licenses, pelt royalties and land taxes.

At the base of this industry are the ranchers and trappers. Fur ranching — mostly of mink and fox — accounts for 80% of the world's fur supply. In PEI, farmers learned how to raise toxes at the beginning of this century.

In Yarmouth, N.S., mink farming has been supporting dozens of families for several generations — bringing as much as \$14 million in export dollars to the province. For many years, fur auctioneers have sought out the blacker, silkier and softer mink bred in this region.

According to Kent England, a fur

rancher from P.E.I., "all the people in the fur farming industry... have a real pride and love of their animals... we spend great time and energy looking after their well-being... [It is only] normal to be concerned when it comes time to dispose of that animal, but it is business... It is a natural course of events and there is not one thing wrong with it... people have been using animals for 1000's of years and will continue as long as man survives."

For some, fur is a livelihood, a way of life. For those who wear it, it is a symbol of status, class and power. But for others, fur symbolizes brutality, cruelty, indulgence and vanity.

Many believe it is immoral to kill for luxury, vanity and profits, and that we must re-evaluate our way of life on this planet, broadening our ethical horizons to include other creatures. By viewing animals on a different moral plane, we accord them less respect, and forget that other animals are also capable of feeling and suffering, that they also display much of the behaviour that we ourselves show when we feel pain: screams of

protest and anger, writhing and twisting, wincing, trembling, attempts to avoid the source of pain, and so on.

While fur farming began about one hundred years ago, most of the animals on fur farms are descended from animals taken more recently from the wild. So, unlike traditional farm animals, the animals on fur farms are, temperamentally, still completely wild. In the wild, a mink is

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semi-aquatic and ranges over an area of 1-2 km² for a female and up to 10 km² for a male. Similarly, foxes range over 5-10 km² and lynx 15-20 km². In a fur farm, these animals are confined to cages 30 by 60 cm for mink, 60 by 90 cm for fox, and 105 by 135 cm for lynx. These animals are nocturnal, and like all wild animals, shy, nervous and typically solitary (except during mating or breeding sea-

son).

Confined in cages, in full view of humans and other animals, they experience constant stress. Symptoms of this stress include chronic pacing, tail-biting, self-mutilation, ulcers, eating of young, and lunging against the walls of their cages when frightened or disturbed. Inbreeding for qualities of fur texture and colour — particularly in mink — have resulted in a number of genetic deformities: 'Hedlund White' are totally deaf, 'Shadow' often have deformed sexual organs, and the 'Royal Pastels' have an inbred deficiency which causes them to tumble constantly.

Other genetic deformities include blindness, neuromuscular disorders, internal bleeding, and increased susceptibility to disease. Killing methods include electrocution (which, because the current does not pass through the brain, may cause extreme pain for up to 20 seconds), lethal injections, gassing and neck-breaking.

The price of fur is dependent on demand, which is created by public

taste and fashion. Fashion can be created or destroyed. Thus success of the anti-fur movement can be measured by its ability to change public taste. In Europe, this movement has been much more successful than in Canada.

Swiss cut fur consumption by 50% in response to a strong protest movement; Harrod's, an exclusive English department store, ended retail sales in fur. Public pressure and astute political lobbying led the European Community to ban imports of seal fur.

Here, in Canada, fur sales are down and the Hudson's Bay Company is getting out of the fur business. It is difficult to say, however, if this is simply a reflection of the recession, anti-fur trendiness or a genuine change in our awareness of the suffering of ranch and trapped fur-bearing animals.

An anti-fur protest will be held on Saturday, February 11, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, please call the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group at 494-6662.

A lot of food and a lack of will

by Barbara Müller

The United States is the world's largest producer of food. The trouble is, they also tend to overproduce waste.

The United States of America is dominant in agriculture. They produce up to 80% of the world's soya beans, 70% of the world's corn and 40% of the world's wheat.

There is a big problem today because in the 1970s farmers were encouraged to constantly increase their yields, thinking there would always be a market out there.

They encouraged the use of chemicals, more and bigger machinery, as well as loans to pay for it all. The produce from one in three acres of land are for export. However, the third world countries they sell much of their crops to are so poor that they cannot afford them anymore.

The result is a surplus, so the crop prices fall too low for the farmers to pay back their debts, so many go bankrupt.

The interest rates keep growing (20%). One third of the farmers owe two billion dollars to banks, and these debts are uncollectible. The result: farmers sell everything they can, including the expensive machinery.

The tension is high among farmers, and there are many more deaths (suicides), accidents and violence. About 2000 farmers leave the business every week.

Forty years ago, there were 7 million farmers, each owning approximately 150 acres. Now there are but 2.5 million farmers, each owning on average, 500 acres.

Companies are now buying farms which have 40,000 acres. These companies have the money to buy expensive machinery, and use high amounts of chemicals. In the end, however, it is less efficient than the small farms.

A representative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture says that only a few farmers are high in debt.

He says that there is no crisis and that it is a problem only for a minority of farmers. He maintains that there is nothing more productive than agriculture, and that they have the lowest cost for food. Even with this statement, 20 million Americans go hungry because the cost of food is too high.

There is enough food to feed everyone, but it does not get distributed, so there is hunger and malnutrition. We have the ability and resources to feed all, but there is a lack of will and desire. Europe, for example, has millions of tons of surplus crop.

In the U.S., there is a lot of land and comparatively few people, so

their system of agriculture works well there. However, the green revolution to bring this system to the third world was a disaster because the population base is too high.

This system has helped ruin families, forcing them off their land in search of work. The farmers of these countries simply cannot compete with huge companies. This system has given HUGE profits to a few individuals, namely the politicians and companies. Since they are in power, the many who suffer due to this system are ignored.

The government of the U.S. has found a way to feed the hungry of the third world and at the same time

helping themselves — give them our surplus food.

This helps the farmers because their food is bought. It also helps storage and transport companies. However, this system actually hinders rather than helps the third world countries, because their economy loses out (who can compete with free food?). This food has been supplied as wheat and bread, which has greatly changed the diet of the third world countries, as well as their taste buds.

Most poor countries have the resources; they just don't have access to them. The food aid goes to urban people because the government considers them essential.

Toxic beluga whales

McGill Daily, McGill University

MONTREAL (CUP) — St. Lawrence River beluga whales are so polluted that when they die, the animals are classified as toxic waste.

Tests on beached whales revealed that they were "loaded with contaminants of all kinds," said Natalie Zinger, director of the Quebec branch of the World Wildlife Federation (WWF). The contaminants include PCBs, DDT, Myrex and some heavy metals.

Also, St. Lawrence River whales have more than 10 times the PCB contaminants than Arctic beluga whales.

It has been estimated that the population of beluga whales at the turn of the century was in the thousands. Current estimates number the whales at around 50. Environmentalists say that the drop is due to the pollution of their habitat, which gets worse daily.

"There seems to be a kind of scientific unanimity that the PCBs affect the immune system of the beluga whale. . . . There seems also to be an adverse effect on reproduction," said Daniel Green of the Société pour

vaincre la pollution (SVP).

Green added that beached beluga cows showed signs of breast infections, and that there may be a link between the pollutants and cancer.

Zinger observed that these find-

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study the problems affecting the beluga whale and to develop a recovery strategy for the animals.

The plan will "identify what are the limiting factors and the threats to the beluga whales. It's also going to suggest ways of counter-acting or removing the threats," said Zinger. But SVP's Green said his group is "very nervous the way things are going." He explained that Fisheries and Oceans Canada "seem to be dragging their feet" with regards to the plan.

Green is also concerned about the direction of the plan. "What we have heard of the plan is that it won't be very target oriented. It will be more research oriented," he explained.

Green would like the proposal to include "very specific targets" for expansion of the whale population in the river, and a "more aggressive plan to stabilize the population." However, Zinger said that the plan will outline a set of actions and procedures for monitoring the whales as well as a timetable for recovery.

The plan is expected to be released in the summer, and a public review will follow.

POINTLESS PONDERABLES

Last Week's answer:

Last week's winner is Jane (check last name on email), who was the first to correctly spot the flaw in Shifty's logic. The helmet could not have been engraved "first world war", in 1918, because at the time, no one knew it was the first world war. It wasn't called the first world war until the second one broke out.

This week's question:

After your long cooets, you've finally been tracked down by those nice men in the velvet gowns and sent away for a 'rest' at Shady Acres Home for the Messed in the Head. Your first week there, you've had a great time, and now you have your first hearing to try and prove your sanity. The interview is already over, and now you sit down to write the mental flexibility test. You do OK, until you hit the following question: "What do the following three words have in common, aside from the fact that they all have 5 letters?"

TROOP SKULK CLOUD

Can you get the correct answer and save yourself from electroshock therapy?

Answers can be dropped off at the Gazette office in room 312 in the SUB, or can be emailed to gazette@ac.dal.ca. The first person to send in the correct answer gets their name published in the next issue, so hurry now!