

Nest boxes are obligatory for mink and ferret but not for foxes nor raccoon dogs. Finland has signed 1992 the Council of Europe Convention for fur farming, and winter nest boxes and resting shells are obligatory for foxes and raccoon dogs. However, there is a transition period to meet with the latter regulation, so in practice it does not yet work.

Foxes

Finnish fur farms produce 60 % of all fox furs in the world. Today the numbers of foxes are as follows:

- blue and polar fox 1.3 million
- silver and red fox over 0.3 million
- cross-bred fox 0.1 million

= total number 1.8 million of foxes. (In mid 1980s the number was 4 millions.)

The word "fox" means actually two different species of foxes: arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*) and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*).

Arctic fox has two different colour forms: blue one (blue fox) and white one (polar fox). Blue fox is the far most common fox out of all foxes in Finnish fur farms.

Red fox has also two different colour forms: red one (red fox) and black one (silver fox). Silver fox is more common than red fox on Finnish fur farms.

It is quite common to try to cross-breed two species of foxes to get "excitingly coloured" foxes for the fur market. A very popular colour form is "blue frost" which can be achieved by cross-breeding blue and silver foxes. Another economically important cross-bred colour form is Golden Island. Naturally, the cross-bred animals are not able to reproduce by themselves.

The price of fox fur skins varies greatly due to changes in fashion. In the season 1985/86 the price of silver fox skin was 550 FIM, and of blue fox skin 229 FIM. In April the prices were 197 FIM and 267 FIM, accordingly. At this moment, the most expensive skin type is Blue Frost (see above) whose price is over 300 FIM.

Red foxes (includes both red and silver fox) seem to suffer much from being in the cages. The red foxes on the fur farms are often nervous and aggressive, and that is why each of them is normally kept in a cage alone. The domestication process of red foxes has been slow because only some years ago it was legal to capture wild red foxes onto the fur farms. This means the genome of red foxes is still very wild from its origin. It is also noteworthy, that, normally, a good breeder (both a male and a female) could be kept alive for 3-4 years, which should be kept in mind when the real number of the generations of the animals on the fur farms is to be counted.

Today almost all red fox furs are used as trimmings for jackets. Long fox furs are out of fashion and that has dropped down the price of fox fur skin.

Arctic foxes are extremely endangered species in Finnish nature. Only some tens of pairs live in the northernmost Finland. One reason for the rarity of arctic fox has been hunting for fur. Another reason for the rarity is spreading of red foxes to the north.

Arctic foxes are lazy and apathetic on the fur farms. That is why people think they feel happy in the fur farm. Arctic foxes are more gregarious (in the wild, too) than red foxes, so many of them (usually three) are kept together in a cage.

Through breeding the size of arctic foxes in the fur farms has arisen significantly compared to wild animals. When wild animals weighs 4-5 kilos, animals on the fur farms weigh today 8-10 kilos. The bigger the fur skin the better the price a farmer gets from it. However, "super foxes" are not found anymore in Finnish fur markets.