

culture would be threatened, if they were to be prohibited to trap animals.

TALL STORIES

The arguments of the Canadian government are rather hypocritical. The Red Indians have always been treated as third-rate citizens, not in the last place by the government itself, while further the large fur-trading companies personally have made the Indians and the Eskimos dependent on this trade in fur. The aboriginals were paid handsomely for their first few skins, and they were enabled to borrow money from the companies in order to buy the equipment they needed.

To clear their debts they then had to hand in all the furs they collected in the course of time, but the prices constantly diminished, whereas the debts grew larger and larger.

The largest fur company, Hudson's Bay Company, has never done anything for the development of the areas in which the aboriginals lived. They only installed a shop where people could buy on credit, after which they could pay off their debts by way of fur.

The prices trappers get are not nearly in proportion to the large gains for the fur traders themselves and with it to the taxation yield for the coffers of the Canadian State.

In 1985 the turnover of furriers and fur shops amounted to no less than 510 million Can. dollars.

In that year the approx. 50 thousand Indians and Eskimos received about 20 million dollars for their skins, which more or less amounts to 400 dollars per person per year, figures which cast a doubt on the benevolent intentions of the Canadian government.

The threat to the culture of the North American aboriginals is not the main reason of the Canadian agitation: fur is above all a source of income for Canada.

WILD ANIMALS IN CAGES

A growing number of species of furred animals are used for breeding purposes especially. Until recently breeders only used minks, foxes, chinchillas and marsh beavers, but of late coyotes, lynxes, wolves and other large beasts-of-prey have also been reared in cages in the United States and Canada.

When the hunt for lynxes will shortly be prohibited the fur traders can rightly say

that they "only" use bred specimens and that no animal species is threatened with extinction, therefore.

THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

The unbridled hunt for wild animals on behalf of the trade in fur already has threatened many species with extinction. The Washington Convention prohibits the trade in animal species threatened with extinction, but there is still a lively black market in skins of rare species. Even the giant panda is not safe from poachers. In the spring of 1988 a batch of as many as 146 panda skins were confiscated, and this notwithstanding the fact that killing a panda is a capital offence in China. Panda skins fetch 100,000 dollars on the black market.

FUR BREEDING

"Instead of this toilsome hunting and trapping we had better breed furred animals in cages". This was in 1910 a unique idea of a few Canadian hunters. After Canada this novelty spread fast over the United States, Russia and Europe. Especially in Scandinavia -because of its climate- furred animals are being bred on a large scale.

By research and primitive experiments breeders have succeeded in creating all sorts of novelties as regarding colour. Mink and foxes are kept far more than any other kind of furred animal.

WILD MINK

Wild mink live along the wooded banks of small streams, rivers, marshes and lakes. They are excellent swimmers and spend a large part of their life in the water. Since they are nocturnal animals they are rarely visible, only their footprints are there to be seen. The males cover enormous distances. The females need less space, it is true, but they still need a few square km in any case.

The babies, which are born in spring, stay with their parents until fall comes round, after which the family disperses. The 44 million minks living at factory farms can only dream of an existence like that...

CAGED MINK

Danmark, with its over 10 million animals, is the world's largest producer of mink. Holland is the largest fur-

producer of Western Europe (cf. table 2.). Mink-farms are the same almost everywhere in the world. The cages, floorings included, are made of wire, which makes it difficult for the animals to stand in them, especially for the young ones.

Practically everywhere the standard measures for these cages are 70 cm x 20/30 cm x 40 cm. Extra nesting-boxes are fitted on to the cages, in which the pups are born. There is some drinking-water in a metal bowl in each cage, and that is all the water there is for them, except in winter, when it's freezing, in which case the watery feed-stuff is mixed with an antifreeze to prevent dehydration of the animals.

The cages are mostly stacked up in two long rows under a corrugated iron roof. Each breeding farm has several such sheds.

The number of mink differs a great deal from farm to farm. There are small farms with only 100 animals, but also very large ones, such as in Finland, for instance, with over 100,000 animals.

The food the animals get consists of a mash of meat and fish offal and flour. In some cases this stuff is further mixed with the carcasses of minks or foxes which have died prematurely.

In May the babies are born, five per nest on average.

At some farms as many as eight young animals are kept in one cage. They are only allowed a separate cage or put two by two when they tend to fight.

After seven months their life is over. They are killed by means of neck-breaking, by an injection, by gassing with carbon monoxide or by exhaustion-fumes.

Mink are very agile creatures. They love running, swimming, playing, climbing on things, and they are very inquisitive. In captivity their pattern of behaviour is, therefore, totally violated by the unnatural conditions they are forced to live in.

MINKS WITH STRESS

According to animal behaviour researchers certain social patterns of behaviour of domesticated animals kept for agricultural ends can remain unchanged for over a period of five to seven thousand years.

If solitary animals are forced to live in groups, they become subject to constant stress. And that stress causes abnormal