

advised not to use this ground water for drinking-water for their animals any more.

STENCH

The smell of fur farms is another problem. In summer especially the stench is hardly bearable in the neighbourhood of such a farm. This is caused by two things. One of the characteristics of foxes is that they demarcate their territory with urine, a "scent-flag". They also do this in their cages. Mink have a scent-gland. In times of emergency (which is often the case when they are caged) they will try to get rid of their enemies by spreading a foul smell.

THE DUNG

The dung mostly remains under the cages for a period of 3 up to 6 months. Each day new material is added together with food-rests, which will slowly decay. The fermenting dung is, moreover, an excellent breeding ground for flies. Mink-flies, for instance, will develop in enormous numbers and they, of course, spread out to the people and houses in the neighbourhood. The breeder is able to prevent such plagues by spraying the dung with a pesticide, but these pesticides inevitably also seep into the ground, thus polluting the ground water even more.

BOTULISM

The feed-stuff lying on top of the cages in the sideways open sheds attracts birds, which quickly learn where to find something good to eat each day. At feeding-time large flocks of gulls circle above the farms. They pick up raw morsels of food, and take them away with them in order to consume them in a safer place. In this manner the dreaded illness botulism can be spread. Botulism is caused by a virus which can easily spread via the feed for furred animals. Water birds most of all fall a victim to this lethal disease, but mink are also prone to it, that's why each mink is inoculated against it, so that they are protected from it, if the virus occurs. The birds picking up the infected food have, of course, not been vaccinated, so they can spread the virus. Mice and rats also eat this stuff. These undesirable guests are also exterminated with chemical pesticides, which means a

painful death for the animal plus extra ground pollution.

INTRUDERS

The animals bred at the fur farms of many countries were often not indigenous. When they escape from such a farm, which does happen sometimes, the animal life of a particular country may be confronted with a strange species all of a sudden. Each species eats and gets eaten. When looking for food these strangers can become a threat to all sorts of other animals. Intrusion of foreigners can have the most dire consequences: native species, for instance, can be driven away, or a new species can grow into a plague, because they have no natural enemies. In 1988 the British government in this manner prohibited the keeping of marsh beavers, while mink may not be bred in certain areas either, because they form a threat to otters and summer birds.

NATURAL PRODUCTS

Even when the furred animals have already been killed and skinned they still form a threat to the environment. Before a hide has turned into part of a coat it has to be cleaned, tanned, made supple and dyed. The quantity of chemicals needed for all this makes the recommendation "natural product" pretty misleading.

KARAKUL

From time immemorial Karakul sheep have been kept in Central Asia. The full-grown animals have a fleece of thick, straight wool, but the lambs are born with fine, glossy curls, which disappear after a few days. In order to obtain Karakul fur these lambs have to be killed and skinned shortly after birth, therefore. This is mostly done within 48 hours after the event of their birth by means of cutting their throats.

This fur is marketed under different names, of which Russian Karakul, Astrakhan and Swakara are known best. Breitschwanz (broadtail) is the name for fur from unborn Karakul lambs.

In severe conditions some animals suffer spontaneous abortions, but abortions are also caused deliberately in order to obtain this specific kind of fur, which is even finer than that of newly-born lambs.

THE FUR SHOP

"I associate fur with 'nice and warm' and never with animals sacrificed for it", the famous fur house manager Birger Christensen of Copenhagen once said..

Fur arouses emotions in people: fur is sensuous, fur gives power. People earning money with fur are only too anxious to push other thoughts away from their minds. They do not want to spend any thoughts on the animals behind those coats. That's why furriers are strongly advised against putting stuffed animals in their show-windows. Fur shops do, after all, sell honest fur, don't they, which does not mean dead animals.

HISTORY

Long ago people walked about in fur skins. Animals were hunted to satisfy the first needs of man, that of food and that of warmth. The meat was eaten, the skins used for cover. But things are different now. We do not chase an animal when we are hungry any more, nor is it necessary for us to be covered in fur when we want to be nice and warm.

FASHION IN FUR

Fur dealers try to hide the animal behind the clothes. This also shows in the trends in fur. The furs are dyed in all kinds of colours. Who, for instance, would think of mink when seeing a bilious green hairy coat? Not only the animals behind the coat are smoothed away, but the fur itself is also often hidden away, see, for instance, the latest trend of lining (rain)coats with fur or the fur trimmings on cuffs, collars or "naughty" miniskirts. Simply everything is done to make the consumer buy fur, as if fur should be a natural product.

ANIMALS NEEDED FOR A COAT

From 30 to 70 mink go into one coat of medium length and from 10 to 20 foxes, while a short chinchilla coat averages out at 120 animals.

All in all an enormous amount of suffering. And this for a product which people do not even need, for fur is for animals: for people there are warm coats of different materials in plenty.

Table 4. shows how many animals go into one coat. In many cases only parts of the skins can be used. Because of this