

FUR PRICE



WWW.OTWARTEKLAKI.PL

KONTAKT@OTWARTEKLAKI.PL

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to inform the readers about the fur industry in Poland as well as the global context in which it operates. The production cycle of fur garments is complex and the breeding of animals is just one of the first stages. The aim of this report is to pass reliable information about this cycle (with a focus on the farm stage) as well as the fur industry itself. The problem of fur farming has been a part of the Polish public discourse for many years now. During this time a lot of myths and inaccuracies arose, a lot of information that is being passed is wrong, some is only partly true, some comes from sources that are

unreliable or not corresponding to the local reality. This is true for activists and people dealing with this topic as well as for representatives of the industry who put a lot of effort to uphold a good image. For this reason the first part of the report is a recap of the most important facts and statistics connected with this topic as well as a brief insight into the mechanics of fur farming. The main part of the report is an analysis of an investigation on fur farms in Poland that has taken place in the years 2011 and 2012. As it is the first time that this kind of footage is being published in Poland it is necessary to create some foundation that will help to understand the images.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF RAISING ANIMAL FOR FUR

Today 85% of all skins that are being sold on the market have been produced on fur farms¹, the other 15% include i.a. skins from animals caught in their natural environment. This procedure however is non-existent or irrelevant in terms of the whole scale of production in Poland.

2.1 BREEDING OF ANIMALS ON FUR FARMS

Two kinds of animals are raised for their fur on fur farms in Poland: carnivores and herbivores. The most important carnivorous species belong to the canidae family – the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), especially the silver fox, polar fox (*Vulpes lapogus*) and raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procynoides*) – as well as the American mink (*Mustela vison*). The herbivorous species raised for fur are rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), chinchilla (*Chinchilla langier* and *Chinchilla brevicaudata*) and coypu (*Myocastor coypus*). However only carnivorous species are raised on factory farms in Poland².



The standards for keeping fur animals are regulated by the Regulation of the Minister

¹ Hong Kong Fur Federation, „The Socio-Economic Impact of International Fur Farming”, dokument dostępny on-line: <http://www.hkff.org/en/furfacts/pdf/socialeconomicimpact.pdf>

² Kuźniewicz, J., Filistowicz, A., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, p. 145f

of Agriculture and Rural Development from the 28th of June 2010 regarding the minimal conditions for keeping farm animals other than those for whom welfare standards have been specified by the legislation of the European Union³. These conditions are based on one of the definitions of animal welfare:



- freedom from hunger and thirst
- freedom from discomfort
- freedom from pain, injury and disease
- freedom from fear and distress
- freedom to express normal behavior

2.1.1 Minimal standards for keeping foxes and raccoon dogs



The minimal standards for keeping fur animals are specified by chap. 7 § 29.1 of the the regulation: „Polar foxes, red foxes, raccoon dogs, mink and polecats should be kept out-

³ The complete text of the Regulation may be found here [in Polish]: <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20101160778>

side in sheltered single or group cages that prevent them from escaping.”

The regulation sets the size of the cages in which the animals are kept. A fox or raccoon dog cage should be at least 50cm high and its floor should not be smaller than 0.6 m² with a minimal width of 60cm and length of 90cm. In group caging the space for every additional animal is set at 0.4m²⁴.

A fully grown male fox weighs approximately 6-8kg and is 65-75cm long, a fully grown female weighs about 4,5-6,5kg and is 55-65cm long. A fully grown male arctic fox weighs approximately 5,5-6,5kg and is 60-65cm long.

A fully grown raccoon dog is 65-85cm long (in addition the tail is 18-20cm long) and weighs 4-10kg depending on the time of the year⁵.

Two caging systems are used on fox and raccoon dog farms: single cages and battery cages (often placed in sheds). The cage type depends in the first place on the type of animal that is being kept; the parent stock, i.e. the male and female individuals used for reproduction, are kept in single cages (which are often equipped with a nesting box). Battery cages are used for raising foxes and raccoon dogs that are going to be slaughtered at the end of the production cycle.

The cages are built from zinc wire that allows for the excrements to get out of the cages and stack up underneath them. They should also be equipped with special feeders and drinking troughs. The cages are organized in parallel rows, the distance between them should not be smaller than 1-1,5m. For battery cages the stand-off is smaller and averages a couple dozen centimeters⁶.

2.1.2 MINIMAL STANDARDS FOR KEEPING AMERICAN MINK

A fully grown male mink weighs approx. 2-3,3 kg and is 35-45 cm long, a fully grown female is slightly smaller: it weighs 1-1,5 kg and is 30-35 cm long⁷.

Sheds are the standard keeping method on mink farms. Depending on the size of the pa-

rent stock and the resulting number of animals a farm can comprise of several up to a several dozen parallel 100-150 m long sheds. In every shed there are two parallel rows of battery cages. Every cage has two parts of which one is a nesting box in the front. Every cage is connected to an automatic watering system, the food is delivered on top of a closed cage. Depending on the time of the year, type and sex of the animal up to four individuals may be kept in one cage.



The standard meat feed is complemented by offal and slaughterhouse waste from dismembering cattle and other animals, e.g.: livers, kidneys, spleens, reticulums of ruminant animals, blood, bones, tendons, intestines, udders, reproductive organs and others⁸. They are not the main ingredient of the feed



though and comprise 4,1-14,1% of the total feed volume⁹. For some time now the intra-species feeding of fox and mink has not been

⁴ The minimal keeping standards for foxes and raccoon dogs with cubs and in group cages are specified in art. 39 p. 3 of the Regulation from the 28th of September 2010.

⁵ Kuźniewicz, J., Filistowicz, A., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, p. 147ff

⁶ Ibidem, p. 523ff

⁷ Ibidem, p. 178f

⁸ Ibidem, p. 294f

⁹ Hodowca Zwierząt Futerkowych, „Fermy zwierząt futerkowych – ekologiczne zakłady utylizacyjne”, on-line 8.12.2010: <http://hzf.net.pl/tag/naturalna-utyliczacja/> [The fur farmer – a magazine issued by the fur industry]

practiced or practiced to a small extent (because of the spreading of BSE the feeding of animals with the bonemeal of animals of the same species has been prohibited in 2002 by the Regulation No. 1774/2002 of the European Parliament and Council, this ban has been further defined in 2009 by the Regulation No. 1069/2009). Slaughter waste, i.e. specifically the corpses of slaughtered animals, should be utilized in specialized utilization plants.

2.2 PRODUCTION CYCLE

The production cycle starts, depending on the species of the animal, between mid-November and the second half of December. The first stage is the selection of animals for the parent stock, i.e. the one that is going to be reproduced during the next production year. The primary selection criteria are the quality of the coat and the overall health of the animal; the behavior of the animal (e.g. the ability to adapt to the farm environment and the reliance towards humans may be preferred) can serve as secondary selection criteria.

The remaining animals are slaughtered according to the general rules set in the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development from the 2nd of April 2004¹⁰. It

sets two methods of slaughter of animals on factory fur farms:

- foxes and raccoon dogs – Electric shock (110V) for no less than three seconds. The current is closed by inserting electrodes into the animal's snout and rectum which should cause its death.

- mink and mustelidae – carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide. The animals are put into a special chamber; the amount of gas is raised until the animals lose their consciousness and subsequently die.

After the skinning the skins undergo further processing and finally – through numerous middlemen – arrive at the auction houses and are sold to the final recipients, fashion designers and fur shops.

After the process of slaughter only the parent stock remains on the farm. The selected animals will be reproduced and used to breed a new stock of animals. From January until March the animals are being prepared for reproduction. The process itself takes place in March when the male and female specimen reach their sexual maturity. At this time the female animals are also in their rutting period. On factory farms neither paddock nor harem serving methods are employed. Two methods are preferred: hand serving and artificial insemination. Both these methods



¹⁰ The complete text of the Regulation can be found here: <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20042052102&min=1>

allow for the breeder to set the day of the serving, day of birth and origin of the cubs as well as to plan the breeding process.

The parent animals give birth – according to the species – in April or May. For the first couple of weeks the cubs stay in one cage together with the mother. During the rearing they are fed mostly their mothers milk and after some time the standard feed. Between

June and July the cubs are able to function independently and are relocated into separate cages, both single and group cages. From this point onwards a period of intensive growth begins which ends between November and December. At this time a new selection is performed, the parent stock is replenished and the rest of the animals are killed¹¹.

¹¹ Kuźniewicz, J., Filistowicz, A., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, p. 215ff



3. FUR PRODUCTION IN THE WORLD AND IN POLAND

It is not a well known fact that the fur skin market still expands and therefore the number and producers in Poland and in the European Union continuously increases. According to EFBA (European Fur Breeders Association) data in 2011 the global fox and mink skin production increased by 6% in comparison with 2010 and added up to 57 million skins. The data shows that 3,7 million fox skins and 52,1 million mink skins have been produced in 2011¹².

Europe is the biggest fur producer in the world (60% of the worldwide fur production), 60% of all mink skins are produced (31,3 million) and 56% fox skins (2,08 million) are produced on European farms. China comes in second with almost 25% of the worldwide fur production, 24% of all mink and 37,5% of all fox skins. The USA which take the third place produce only 5% of all skins. There are approx. 7200 fur farms in Europe with a production value of approx. 1,5 billion €.

According to the data published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 4 million mink and 300 thousand foxes have been bred in 2010 in Poland¹³. In comparison to the EFBA data, Poland has been the third biggest producer of mink skins in Europe (after Denmark with 14,6 million skins and the Netherlands with 4,75 million skins). Only Finland produced more fox skins (1,8 million). Thus, adding up, Poland has produced 12,7% of all mink and 14,4% of all fox skins in Europe.

According to the data published by the Vete-

rinary Office there are approx. 800 fur farms in Poland, representatives of the industry speak of approx. 1000 farms¹⁴. The farms are localized in all 16 voivodships, but most of them can be found in the West: in the Greater Poland, Lubusz and West Pomeranian voivodships.

According to the data of the Veterinary Office there are 611 farms with carnivorous fur animals (as for 2012)¹⁵:

- 1, Lower Silesia voivodship – 32 farms
 2. Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodship – 30 farms
 3. Łódź voivodship – 25 farms
 4. Lublin voivodship – 57 farms
 5. Lubusz voivodship – 37 farms
 6. Lesser Poland voivodship – 22 farms
 7. Masovian voivodship – 38 farms
 8. Opolskie voivodship – 8 farms
 9. Podkarpackie voivodship – 41 farms
 10. Podlaskie voivodship – 37 farms
 11. Pomeranian voivodship – 52 farms
 12. Silesian voivodship – 21 farms
 13. Świętokrzyskie voivodship – 11 farms
 14. Warmian-Masurian voivodship – 6 farms
 15. Greater Poland voivodship – 129 farms
 16. West Pomeranian voivodship – 65 farms
- Total: 611 farms

Although the geographical arrangement of the farms seems proportional in the whole country it has to be stressed that there is a high level of geographical diversification when it comes to size and the species bred on the farms.

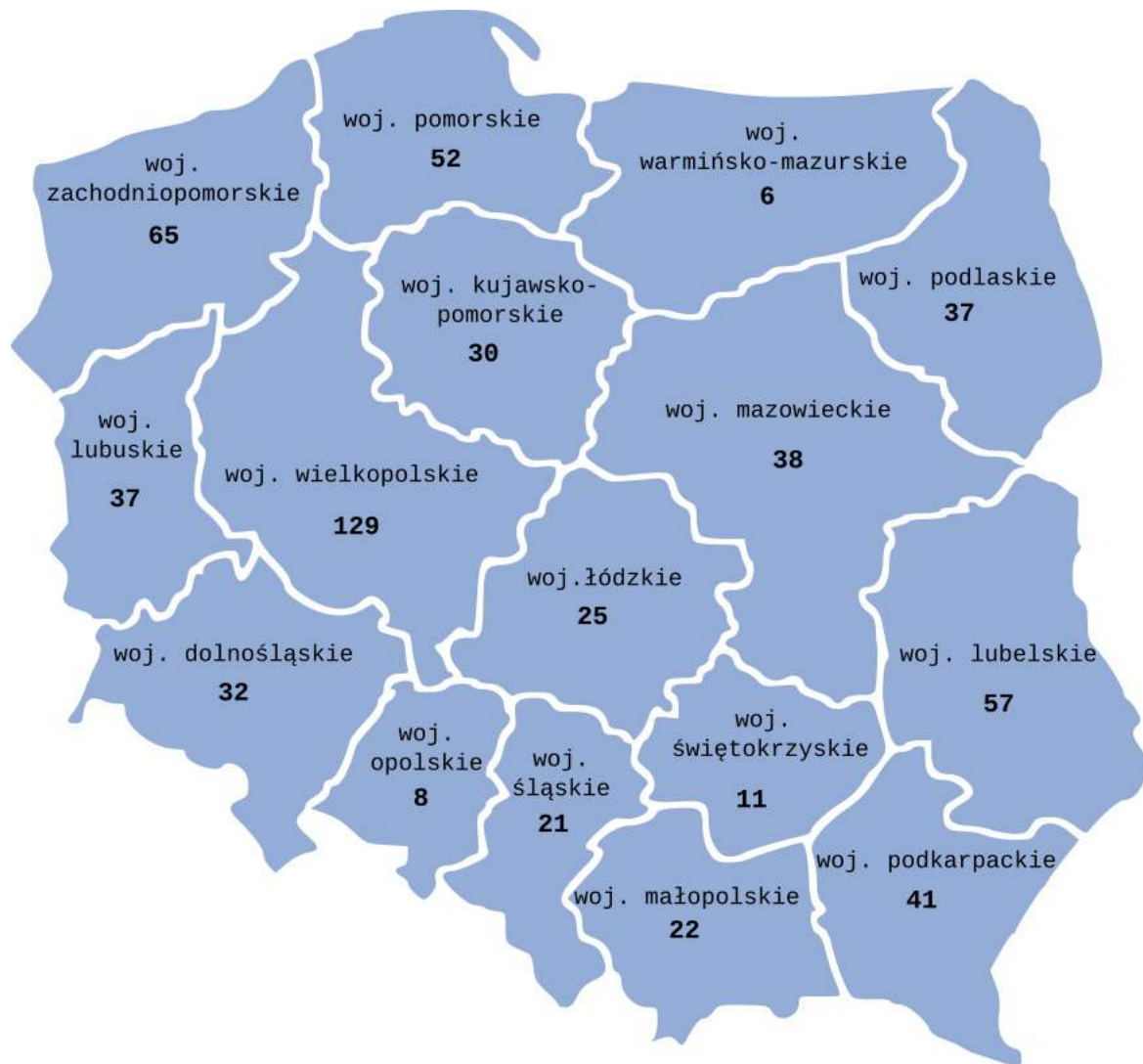
Foxes are bred in almost every region in Poland – often these farms have been functioning for years, are on a low innovation level

¹² The data comes from the EFBA reports from 2010 i 2011. They can be found here: http://www.efba.eu/download/annual_report/2010/index.html oraz http://www.efba.eu/download/annual_report/2011/index.html

¹³ The data comes from the report on fur farms in the Greater Poland voivodship published in September 2011 by the Supreme Audit Office. The report is available here: <http://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,3220,vp,4058.pdf>

¹⁴ Polityka.pl, „Nie ma jutra dla futra?”, 22.11.2011, on-line: <http://www.polityka.pl/spoleczenstwo/artykuly/1521244,1,polskie-nie-dla-hodowli-zwierzat-futerkowych-mozliwe.read>

¹⁵ The veterinary registers are available here: http://www.wetgiw.gov.pl/bip/index.php?action=art&a_id=235



and their diameter and size of the stock are relatively small. Unfortunately there is no exact data on the number of fox farms in Poland. It may be assumed that this kind of fox farms comprise most of the farms listed above.

Most of the farms located in the Western and North-Western parts of the country (the Lubusz, Greater Poland and West Pomeranian voivodship) are big (with a couple dozen thousand animals) and modern mink farms which often belong to foreign investors (some farmers, from e.g. the Netherlands, decide to relocate their production to Eastern countries because of lower running costs and more liberal regulations). Farms in this region comprise most of the Polish mink skin production.

All of the skins produced in Poland are exported. In Europe there are three big auction houses: in Copenhagen (Copenhagen Fur Center), Helsinki (Saga Furs) and Oslo (Oslo Fur Auctions). They are the major clients, often through middle men, for Polish fur. Recently a new player, NAFA (North American Fur Auctions), seems to try to earn some ground in Poland. The skins are sold on auctions which are held a couple of times a year (for example Saga Furs organizes four auctions annually). Through the auction houses the fur is acquired by the clothing industry and further by individual customers.

4. PROBLEMS AND CONTROVERSIES CONNECTED WITH FUR FARMING

Fur farming is connected with numerous problems and risks that raise doubts among the public opinion, animal rights and welfare activists, environmentalists as well as scientists.

Keeping animals in cages that deprive them of their most basic needs as well as killing them for their fur is considered the most basic problem connected with fur farming. Carnivorous fur animals have not been, contrary to farm animals, fully domesticated (or even only to a small extent)¹⁶ and therefore experience high stress levels while being kept in cages. Activists stress that the resulting suffering of the animals is unnecessary taking into account the broad variety of alternative synthetic materials and cannot be justified from an ethical point of view.

Another issue is the fact that fur farms – similar to other factory farms – show high odor emission rates due to the biodegradation processes on their perimeter. The substances emitted into the air include ammonia and sulfates¹⁷. An immediate proximity to a fur farm has a significant impact on the quality of life of local communities as well as the touristic value of the whole region. Because of that in many regions of Poland protests against existing or planned fur farms emerge, e.g. in Chłopowo, Dobkowo, Gniezno, Krąpiel, Myśliborz, Baranowo, Nowogard, Tarnowo or Roścín¹⁸.

A further ecological aspect is the poisoning of soil and ground waters by chemical substances like nitrates and phosphates that seep through from the farms¹⁹. Although modern



farms are equipped with concrete slabs and a number of counter-measures has been undertaken to prevent this from happening it still applies only to a small percentage of farms.

A big problem are fleeing animals – especially mink that are expansive and invasive predators that adapt quickly to the new environment and start hunting birds, especially in the laying season. Mink were considered an allochthonous species until 2011 when they were removed from the list of allochthonous species. This had a major impact on the restrictiveness of controls on the farms²⁰.

Animal rights activists campaign for a complete ban on fur farming in many countries. As for now the following countries

have banned fur farming: Great Britain, Austria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands. Other countries as for example Germany, Switzerland or Italy have introduced restrictive animal welfare laws or have prohibited the farming of some species.

The purpose of the analysis of the fur farm investigation from 2011-2012 is twofold: on the one hand its goal is to speak about the factual conditions on fur farms in Poland as well as to examine if the problems and threats mentioned above. On the other hand the educational value, that is passing knowledge (also using images), is central as in this way the readers will be able to learn how fur farming looks like in Poland²¹.

²⁰ Gazeta Wyborcza, „Miliard w norkach”, 31.10.2011, on-line: http://wyborcza.pl/1,75402,10558019,Miliard_w_norkach.html

²¹ Antyfutro.pl, Dział Fakty, on-line: <http://antyfutro.pl/fakty>

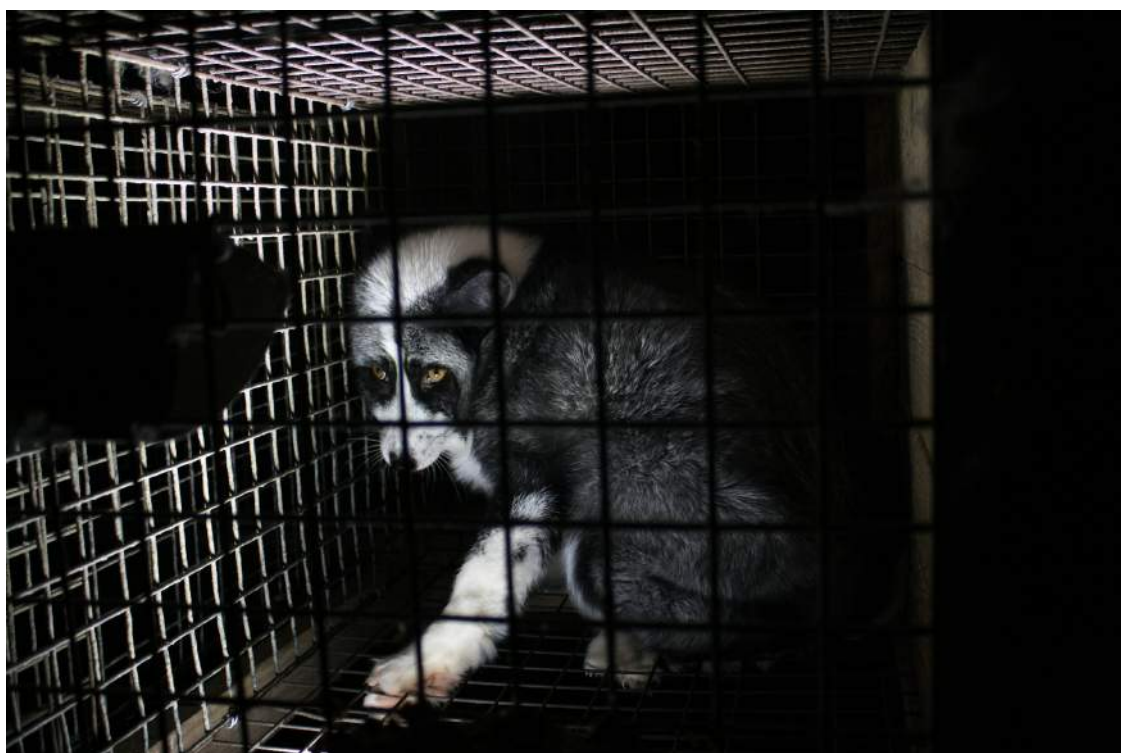
5. RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION ON FUR FARMING IN POLAND

In the years 2011 and 2012 an investigation has been conducted on fur farms in Poland. Its goal was to examine the real keeping and breeding conditions, its motivation the need to acquire reliable, verified and objective information at its source. It was crucial to not make use of information delivered by middlemen such as activists or representatives of the industry as they (especially the latter) can be viewed as a biasing factor when describing real conditions.

The footage that has been handed over to „Open Cages” is an account (in the form of video and photo material) of 70 fox, mink

been included into the statistical analysis only 52 farms have been taken into account. In the past few years similar materials from fur farms have been published in other countries, especially in countries that are the biggest producers i.e. Denmark or Finland²². All investigations showed that there major animal welfare problems occur on factory farms and that they result in e.g. mutilations and behavioral changes.

For this reason, contrary to the NIK (Supreme Audit Office) report from 2011 that focused mainly on the enforcement of the environmental, building and veterinary law, this



and raccoon dog farms from the whole country. As in some cases the footage lacks video material (only photographs have been passed down) and the resulting incapability to observe a variety of behaviors that have

²² Footage from Denmark: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq64voiw9ok>

Footage from Finland: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akv9BB88J0>

Footage from Norway: <http://www.forbypels.no/english>

Footage from Sweden: <http://vimeo.com/13930829>

report concentrates on the keeping standards of animals on fur farms²³. It takes into account their psychophysical condition as well as the keeping and breeding standards. It should be stressed that in comparison with the NIK report almost twice as many farms with a incomparably greater geographical diversity have been analyzed. The statistical analysis considers 9 most frequent aspects in terms of the focus of the report. These aspects are: stereotypical behavior, apathy, eye diseases, gum and mouth cavity diseases, ear injuries, other deformations and injuries, aggression, as well as the overall cleanliness of the cages and the perimeter (these are the factors that could facilitate the development of potential diseases and parasites, and which are also crucial for the overall hygienic standard).

5.1 STEREOTYPY

Stereotypical behavior is one of the most frequent behaviors that appear among animals living on factory farms. They can be also observed among animals living in captivity outside of factory farms – for example in zoos or circuses. Because carnivorous fur animals have not been fully domesticated the cage environment is not appropriate for them. As they cannot exert their natural behavior the animals suffer high stress levels which lead to numerous symptoms of stereotypy, i.e. mechanically performed and successively repeated behavior patterns, sometimes acts of autoaggression such as ripping out their fur²⁴. To grant the animals some occupation the

literature suggests to provide them with special bite blocks. The analysis of the footage did not prove this to be a standard piece of equipment of the cages.

Behavioral patterns as follows have been observed and documented: continuous running in circles, running from one end of cage to the other, attempts to force through the cage (also by biting the bars), jumping and climbing the walls of the cage. These behaviors increase with the age of the animals, although they can be observed shortly after the animals have been separated from their mothers. As this kind of behavior has been observed on 50% of all farms it seems legitimate to state that this problem is common on fur farms.

5.2 APATHY

Another common occurrence that has been observed on fur farms is apathy. Apathy may be caused by many factors but it can be assumed that – similar to stereotypy – its main reason are the living conditions and the resulting changes in the behavior of animals. Apathy may often be a symptom of diseases common among animals on fur farms as for example: tuberculosis, leptospirosis or Rubarth's disease (infectious canine hepatitis)²⁵. Although apathy not always means that the animal is sick it is still a common symptom and it is probable that an apathetic animal is in fact ill. The listed diseases are infectious and when they are not diagnosed on time they may lead to a significant number of fallen animals in the stock.

The observed and documented behavior are e.g. animals cowering on the back of their cages, animals that are listless, non-responsive to stimuli and not interested in their surrounding. This applies for both young and old animals – although this occurrence increases with age. Apathy has been documented on over 48% of the investigated farms.

5.3 Eye and oral cavity diseases

Another problem that the footage has shown are eye and oral cavity diseases. They occur both among foxes and mink but are by far more frequent among the former. The most common occurrences among fur ani-

²³ The results of the report were critical on the the functioning of fur farms in Poland in conformity with the law and concluded that „on 87% of these farms violated provisions of the environmental law, 48% of them used illegal buildings and 35% didn't abide to veterinary law.” The report is available here: <http://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,3220,vp,4058.pdf>

²⁴ Studies show that American mink, which is a species that lives close to water in their natural environment, are eager to perform a big amount of work to gain access to a water bath. The lack of access to water is considered a major stress factor and positively correlates with the occurrence of stress behaviors. [J. Mononen i in., „Water baths for farmed mink: intra-individual consistency and inter-individual variation in swimming behaviour, and effects on stereotyped behaviour”, *Agricultural and Food Science*, Vol. 17, 2008, on-line: <http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/AFS/article/view/5900/5098>].

Foxes cover a territory of up to 20 km² and run a couple dozen kilometers every day in their natural environment. [United States Environmental Protection Agency, „Species profile: red fox”, on-line: http://www.epa.gov/region1/ge/thesite/restofriver/reports/final_era/B%20-%20Focus%20Species%20Profiles/EcoRiskProfile_red_fox.pdf]

²⁵ Cholewa, R., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Poznań 2000, p. 322ff

imals are: tearing and purulent eyes, permanent closing of the eyes as well as a crust of effusions around them. These may be the first symptoms of canine distemper which is a relatively broadly spread disease among canines. Due to high infection rates sick animals are not medically treated in farm conditions. It is recommended to immediately dispose of all infected animals and to vaccinate the rest of the stock. The farm should be disinfected to prevent the disease from spreading²⁶.

Another widely spread disease among farmed animals is papilloma which is a non-infectious disease. It occurs usually in the snout region, especially on the gums, the lip, cheek, tongue and palate region. This viral infection causes the development of numerous tumors and papillas of various sizes. In most extreme cases these changes can prevent the animal from food consumption²⁷.

These two most frequent diseases have been documented on 52% of the investigated farms.

5.4 WOUNDS AND OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS

These pathological changes – although quite frequent – are not the only factor that significantly impacts the life of animals on fur farms. It was observed that besides a higher chance of contact with pathogens (which re-

sults from factory farming itself) there is a positive correlation between the number of animals in a cage and various wounds and other health problems. They are a consequence of the life in a cage as well as occupying it with other animals.

The most frequent wounds are bite wounds in the ear region – including various degrees of mutilation or the complete lack of one of the ears. This kind of wounds and also wounds in other regions of the body originate in the first place from living with other individuals on a too small area or for a too long period of time which is the cause of aggressive behavior. Ear wounds have been observed on 23% of the investigated farms, both on fox and mink farms.

Although ear wounds were the most frequently encountered injuries also injuries in other body regions have been observed and documented. Biting wounds are relatively more frequent among mink but they are also common among foxes. From a statistic point of view the body part most vulnerable to bitings are the tails, especially their tips. Biting wounds have also been observed in the neck, torso and head region. Among both foxes and mink partial blindness due to the loss of one of the eyes has been observed. On fur farms the wounds are usually not disinfected or treated in any other way by the farm owners.



²⁶ Ibidem, p. 327f

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 329



Another occurrence that is hard to categorize is the loss of coat due to tearing it out. There are reasons to assume that some of the documented cases – similar to the bitings – were inflicted by animals living in the same cage, especially if one of them showed aggressive behavior. Also self-biting can be observed on farms – this applies especially to the tail, thigh and belly region. Self-biting can take less severe – like the tearing out of the coat close to the skin – or more severe forms – like self-mutilation and biting wounds. It is assumed that the reason for this behavior are deficiencies in the feed as well as the lack of occupation for the animals, e.g. in the form of bite blocks²⁸.

Also the paws are a body part that is very vulnerable to injuries, especially among foxes. As they move on the wire floor all the time (plastic floors are not common in Poland and have been observed only in a few instances) the paws get deformed, e.g. overgrown and swollen pads; also other injuries of these body parts have been recorded. As the animals have no possibility to wear down their claws they tend to be overgrown, especially among older animals, which causes motoric problems.

At least one of the listed occurrences has been observed on 54% of the investigated farms. It has to be stressed though that due

to the technical side of collecting information as well as to the sheer size of some objects the footage may not be complete and cover all the welfare problems on the investigated farms.

5.5 AGGRESSION

A lot of the described injuries were inflicted during acts of autoaggression. However the location of some of the injuries indicates that autoaggression is not the sole cause of the documented injuries. This may be seen on the investigation footage. Although acts of aggression have been registered only on 15% of the investigated farms it may be assumed that – taking into account the occurrences described above – aggression is common on fur farms.

Aggression between animals results from the farming conditions themselves. The fact that carnivorous animals kept on farms are territorial is one of the major factors that has to be taken into account when considering aggression (the frequency of aggressive behavior is inversely proportional to the size of the cage). However another important factor seems to be the equipment of the cages, namely devices that influence the living conditions of the animals, e.g. biting blocks. Aggression has been observed both among

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 338



older (e.g. mink can get involved into acts of aggression when the male specimen is not separated on time from the female specimen after copulation²⁹) and younger animals that are being kept in a cage with other specimen. Typical wounds inflicted by other animals are bitings of different body parts (especially the head, neck and torso), paw and tail injuries, missing body parts, e.g. ears.

5.6 SANITARY CONDITIONS ON FUR FARMS

The sanitary conditions on fur farms are closely related to welfare standards and have a big influence on the living standard of the animals. Any pollution inside the farm may become a potential risk factor for spreading diseases and pathogens that have led to the death of an animal (if it had not happened before due to aggressive behavior of other animals or a bad overall health condition) can transfer to other animals on the farm. Additionally a case of cannibalism has been observed and documented, i.e. animals in a cage devouring a fallen specimen. Moreover numerous cases of excrements piling up in cages have been documented – an epidemic

threat as most diseases of fur animals can spread through excrements. Often the cages are filthy with pieces of coat, feed remains and other waste.

Also the sanitary conditions on the perimeter and the surrounding area of the farm are often illegitimate. The most frequent problem are large amounts of excrements piling up underneath the cages. Beside the epidemic aspect they also increase the odor emission of the farm. Although the excrements should be removed every couple of days in many cases it was observed that they had not been removed for a long time. Additionally both on the perimeter as well as in the immediate surroundings of the farm the carcasses of young animals have been found. Large amounts of skinned carcasses have been discovered behind the fence of numerous farms (according to the law all slaughtered and fallen animals should be utilized in specialized plants). Also the letting out of liquid waste outside of the farm has been documented.

The occurrences mentioned in this paragraph have been documented on 52% of the investigated farms. Therefore a general statement can be made that bad sanitary conditions on the perimeter and in the surrounding of the farm are common. They are an animal

29 Kuźniewicz, J., Filistowicz, A., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, p. 241

welfare problem and have a negative impact on the environment nearby.



Norka bez ogona i z raną na fermie w Chodzieży

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The statistical analysis shows clearly that fur farms in Poland are similar in terms of animal welfare in comparison with other countries. Behavioral disorders, injuries, diseases, parasites, bad sanitary conditions on and outside of fur farms are common. At least one of the mentioned problems was found on 100% of the investigated farms – thus it may be said that none of the investigated farms had an appropriate welfare standard. All farms have to undergo at least once a year a control by the Veterinary Office so every farm included in the investigation has been checked by the authorities.

Both facts show that these are not just single cases or exception to the norm, the result of an oversight by the control authorities (according to the report of the Supreme Audit Office 35% of the controlled farms broke the veterinary law, additionally irregularities during veterinary controls have been confirmed, in one case one of the controllers from the Veterinary Office is suspected of having committed a crime). These problems seem to be rather structural (all the farms were run in accordance with the law) and are a part of industrialized fur farming. Putting aside the legislation and quality of controls, it is doubtful whether it is possible to guarantee appropriate living conditions to carnivorous fur animals as they have not been domesticated. Furthermore in the context of the presented consequences as well as their scale it has to be assumed that it is impossible.

Footage from investigations that has been published in other countries where the legislation sets higher animal welfare standards showed a similar situation. An investigation on a showpiece farm in Denmark has proven that the welfare standards are not much different from the standards on conventional farms. Also footage from showpiece farms in other countries and farms in Poland that have won awards seems very similar and is not much different from other farms.

It seems that a logical conclusion should be that if it comes to animal welfare the only solution is the immediate abandonment of fur farming. Governments in countries such as Austria, Croatia, Great Britain and the



Netherlands already decided on a complete ban on fur farming, Denmark has banned fox farms. In other countries there is a de-

bate on stricter legislation or complete bans. The analysis of the footage clearly shows, that this is also the right way for Poland.



EXTENDED DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STATE OF HEALTH AND KEEPING STANDARDS OF ANIMALS ON FUR FARMS IN POLAND



To give the readers a better understanding of the conditions on fur farms we decided to include a detailed account of the state of health of the animals in addition to the statistical analysis. This account has been based on the footage from the investigation. We chose three farms: in Karski (fox farm), Ryczywół (fox and raccoon dog farm) and Modrzewie (mink farm). The description focuses on the state of health of the animals as well as their keeping standards.

1. KARSKI [GREATER POLAND VOIVODSHIP, OSTRÓW POWIAT]

The farm has been visited multiple times. Every time cases of neglect in terms of health and animal welfare have been observed.

During the first visit on the 26.04.2012 a fox with symptoms of stereotypy (moving back and forth in the cage) has been observed.

Additionally one of the foxes had a mangy tail with a wound on its base as well as bite marks in his left back paw. Animals with severe eye injuries have been found. One of the foxes was missing his right eye another had one clearly infected eye, there were also foxes with both eyes infected. Another fox had symptoms of advanced papilloma. One of the most drastic cases on this farm was a fox with a mangy tail and vast excrescences at its base. Also numerous other animals had problems with their tails. There were no indications of medical treatment. One of the young animals (about 3 weeks) had an excrescence on his front right paw.

The situation on the farm has to be considered as very bad due to numerous physical wounds – tail injuries, eye and gum infections – as well as the fact that the cages didn't have any equipment that could be used by the animals to occupy themselves.

During the next visit on the 03.07.2012 similar problems have been confirmed. The fox with the gum infection was still on the farm. One of the young foxes was missing one of his ears – it had presumably been bitten off by another fox in the cage (young foxes are kept in groups). The wound had not been treated in any way. More cases like this have been documented – in another cage with two foxes one of them had his ear bitten off. The other fox showed symptoms of stereotypy – he jumped wildly and continuously back and forth in the cage. Another fox was continuously walking in circles in his cage. Numerous adult foxes had overgrown claws (they had no possibility to wear them down due to the wire floor) and pads.

Another visit on the 06.07.2012 proved that no measures to treat the bitten off ears had been undertaken. Photographs of a fox in a bad overall conditions have been taken. The fox had i.a. reddened eyes and in his left eye was pus-filled.

A month later, on the 05.08.2012, the situation did not get better. The gum infection of the fox became worse. Another had a pus-filled eye. Another young fox (still in a cage with a nesting house) had infections on both of his eyes – he was not able to open his right eye anymore. A fox with a big open wound on his back paw and another one with a wound on his side have been discovered.

Two weeks later, on the 18.08.2012, the state of health of the fox with the gum infection got much worse – the excrescence on the gums developed to such a degree that he was not able to close his snout anymore. Another fox with an untreated wound on his side and a fox with a sick eye have been photographed. The coat of a fox photographed earlier has not gotten better. A still existing problem were the overgrown claws and paws. The wound on the side of one of the foxes skinned over. In one of the cages a very rusty water container was found.

The next visit took place on the 25.08.2012. One of the foxes had a very big wound on his back paw.

During every of the six visits the animals on the farm suffered various physical injuries and deformations. Some of them (e.g. gum infections) developed with time and no signs of treatment have been observed.

The fox with the gum infection was rescued during an intervention by Open Cages and Ekostraz in November 2012. The fox underwent a long treatment during which it turned out that the excrescences reached deep down his oral cavity and even throat and were beyond treatment as it would cause only more suffering to the animal. Due to this fact after two months of treatment the fox had to be put down in January 2013.



2. RYCZYWÓŁ [GREATER POLAND VOIVODSHIP, OBORNIKI POWIAT]

The fox and raccoon dog farm in Ryczywół was visited on the 12.09.2011. Similar to Kar-ski also here numerous and drastic cases of diseases and wounds have been documented.

At least one fox suffered stereotypy – he tried to dig in the wired floor of the cage. Digging foxholes is one of the basic needs of these animals that cannot be met in farm conditions. Numerous foxes were running in circles and back and forth in the cages which allowed them only two steps at most. One of the foxes was missing his tail, another had scars on his side. Also two raccoon dog were suffering stereotypy (they were running from one cage wall to the other).

At least one of the animals had an advanced gum infection that made it impossible for him to close his snout. One of the foxes had biting marks on one of his ears. A vast wound on the left back paw of an animal has been documented as well as an eye infection of another. The fox with sick eyes was placed in a cage with the wired floor broken and sharp pieces of metal that could hurt the fox.

Similar to other farms also most foxes on this farm (except the foxes suffering stereotypy) were listless, apathetic and anxious. Some were hiding on the back of their cages, other climbed up the walls and remained frozen in this position. In numerous cages excrements were documented, big amounts were also piling up beneath the cages. The farm looked as if it hadn't been cleaned for a couple of weeks. A pony was roaming freely on the farm, food and water for him was nowhere to be found.

Additionally a carcass of a fox in a cage has been documented in one of the cages. They must have been lying there for a long time because other foxes dragged out the intestines. This is one of the cases of cannibalism that have been documented during the investigation.

3. MODRZEWIE [WEST POMERANIAN VOIVODSHIP, GOLENIÓW POWIAT]

The mink farm in Modrzewie has been visited on the 23.08.2012. Similar to the rest of the farms also here numerous health pro-

blems have been documented. A lot of wounded animal have been found on the farm (sometimes their wounds have been treated with a bluish green substance). Some mink had parts of their tails bitten off or wounds on their bases. Over one cage a piece of paper with the remark "bitten" was found which indicates that this seems to be a major problem on the farm.

In one of the cages a mink in agony was found. The animal was hardly able to get up and had severe wounds on the whole body (e.g. on the head, snout, sides and tail) and bite wounds on the ears. The footage shows how the mink licks and bites the wounds. As there were also two other animals in the cage acts of aggression were frequent. On one of the movie clips one mink attacks the wounded mink and bites it. After the fight new wounds on the injured mink's body appear, notably in the tail region. Also aggression between the two other mink has been documented.

A mink with bite marks on the ears and numerous other with fresh bite wounds on their bodies have been documented. One of the mink had been able to escape and was roaming freely.

A part of the cages was filthy with feed and coat remains, additionally large amounts of excrements were piling up beneath the cages.

All the mink were kept in groups of 5-6 animals which together with the dull environment and stress led to acts of aggression and numerous wounds.



These three places are not an exception among the investigated farms. On the contrary, on all farms that have been investigated at least one case of the following problems has been documented: stereotypy, apathy, physical injuries and deformations. Their main cause is the lack of adaptation of animals like mink, raccoon dogs, polar and red foxes to farming conditions – to the life in captivity on a small space and a high density of animals on a relatively small area. Kuźniewicz and Filistowicz write as follows³⁰: „these species (...) [i.a. mink, polar and red fox] have not been fully domesticated and experience high stress levels due to living in inappropriate conditions, on too small and badly equipped spaces. (...)”

30 Kuźniewicz J., Filistowicz A., Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, p. 35-36

Mink are restless animals and can experience chronic stress which can lead to various anomalies and undesired symptoms such as a) self-mutilation; b) internal and external injuries; c) procreational disorders; d) high mortality rates among young animals; e) high risk of diseases; f) restlessness; g) lower vitality.” To prevent these things from happening the authors propose to keep more than one animal in a cage as this should satisfy the animals’ social needs. The footage from the investigation shows that these occurrences happen both in single and group cages (aggression is frequent in group cages) as well as in cages that are bigger than set by the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development from the 28th of June 2010.





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