Consequences of mink farming for animals, people and the environment

A PREDATORY BUSINESS
Fur Free Alliance (FFA) is an international coalition of animal protection organisations working to bring an end to the exploitation and killing of animals for their fur. The Fur Free Alliance represents millions of supporters worldwide.

Otwarte Klatki Association — a nationwide initiative for animal rights established in 2012. Its goal is to prevent animal suffering through the introduction of systemic social change, documenting conditions of factory farming and education that promotes positive attitude towards animals.

Coalition for Banning Fur Farming in. Poland was founded in 2012. It brings together 25 Polish organisations and aims in pushing a legal ban on fur farming in Poland.

Poznań, 2013
1. INTRODUCTION

We present to you our second report that covers the reality of fur farming in Poland.

In November 2012 we published our first report: “Price of fur: The reality behind Polish fur farms”, the result of a two-year long investigation of Polish fur farms. It was based on footage from 52 fox, raccoon, dog and mink farms in Poland. It contained an analysis of the raising conditions of the animals which focused mainly on the implications of the housing conditions on the physical and mental state of the animals. The analysis not only exposed numerous cases of violations of animal welfare, sanitary and environmental laws but foremost provided hard proof that injuries and diseases are commonplace on fur farms even if they abide to all regulations – they are definitely an inherent part of fur farming.

The current report expands and complements last year's investigation. The publication was based on footage collected in 2013 on American mink farms – the most frequently farmed fur animal in Poland. It focuses on the methods and consequences of farming this species.

The emergence of new American mink farms in Poland is an increasingly controversial and socially relevant topic. A sign of public interest are almost a hundred protests against planned and existing farms in the last couple of years.

The report includes footage from two factory mink farms which belong to two members of the board of directors of the Polish Fur Breeders and Producers Association (PZHiPZF): Rajmund Gąsiorek and Wojciech Wójcik. The PZHiPZF is an organization that holds a substantial influence on legislation concerning animal husbandry. The second part of the report focuses on much broader aspects of the industry’s operations: its influence on the environment and life of local communities as well as legal regulations of its development.

As our main area of interest is the raising of animals for fur we would like to kindly encourage you to make yourself acquainted with the report “Price of fur”\(^1\) to get a comprehensive and reliable picture of the industry in Poland and Europe.

The turn of 2012 and 2013 brought major changes for the situation of the fur industry in Poland and Europe. They were mainly caused by the introduction of a complete ban on fur farming in the Netherlands in December 2012. The ban that has been introduced in a country that, according to statistical data, is the second biggest mink producer in Europe imposes a transition period until 2024 on the leaders of the Dutch fur industry to shut down their farms and find new possibilities for investment abroad. The trend to offshore farms to Eastern Europe has been increasing in past years due to stricter regulations in Western Europe. It displays in the dynamic change that Polish fur farming is subjected to: an ongoing transition from small farms to industrialized factory farms holding ten or even hundred thousands of animals. A favorable legislation that is being upheld by strong associations protecting the interests of farmers result in a rapidly increasing number of factory mink farms often funded by foreign capital.

Today the American mink is the most commonly farmed fur animal in the world. According to the European Fur Breeders Association data from 2011 the global production of fox and mink skins increased by 6% in comparison with 2010 and summed up to 57 million skins – mink skins comprised 52.1 million of this number. 60% (31.3 million) of these mink skins are produced in Europe. According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland came in third (after Denmark with 14.6 million and the Netherlands with 4.75 million mink skins) in terms of mink skin production in Europe, in 2010 4 million mink skins have been produced in Poland that year. An estimated number of 5.4 million mink skins were produced in Poland in 2012. As for today 340 of the biggest mink producers in Poland have joined the EFBA and over 15% of the total European mink production originated from this country. Foreign auction houses see a potential of increasing the annual Polish mink production to 7 million skins.

Today there are 647 carnivorous fur animal farms in Poland, more than a half of them are mink farms. Modern factory mink farms are located mainly in the Western and North-Western part of the country. Most farms are based in the Greater Poland voivodeship – a total of 144 farms with 80 mink farms. The West Pomeranian voivodeship comes in second with 71 fur farms of which 57 are mink farms. This voivodeship is popular among foreign investors. Right now 25 new applications for a permit to build a mink farm are being processed. In these two voivodeships, as well as in the Subcarpathian voivodeship, an increase of the number of fur farms is clearly visible – it is compensated by the number of small farms that are closing down in other regions. At the same time the rapidly increasing number of mink skins produced in Poland gives reasons to assume that most of the new investments are planned as factory farms with hundred thousands of animals.

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2 „Poland has joined EFBA”, http://www.efba.eu/news.php


4 Data taken from the Veterinary Office registers in September 2013. They may be viewed here: http://www.wetgiw.gov.pl

5 Information from the Office of the Marshall of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship from October 2013
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**Total: 2012 — 615 farms, 2013 — 647 farms, including at least 336 mink farms**

The numbers provided by the fur industry are much higher. A number of 800 has been claimed for 2010.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Fur in Focus, Issue 28, Summer 2010

*As not all County Veterinary Offices give the species of the farmed animals the quoted number is only a minimal number of mink farms to grant a general insight into the industry.*
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Fur farms in Poland, 2013

- mink farms

! — sharp increase in the number of farms compared to 2012
3. FACTORY MINK FARMING

Mink farming prevails because of the profit maximization due to low running costs and the possibility to keep large numbers of animals in a relatively small area. These features are typical for factory farming.

3.1 HOUSING CONDITIONS

Typically mink on farms are housed in sheds. Depending on the size of the parent stock and the litter, a farm may be comprised of a few up to a couple dozen parallelly positioned sheds with a total length ranging 100-150m each. Every shed is equipped with two rows of battery cages. According to the Regulation of the Minister 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 Union, a cage should be at least 35 cm high and its floor size should not be smaller than 0.18 sq. m, with a minimal width of 30 cm and minimal length of 60 cm. Every additional mink in the cage requires additional 0.065
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The number of animals in a single cage should range from 1 to 4 depending on the sex and designation of the animal as well as on the time of the year. A 100 m long shed should house 1500 – 2000 animals at the peak of the production cycle.

3.2 ANIMAL WELFARE

As one of the legal bases of the regulation on fur farming the Ministry states the Council Directive 98/58/EC according to which:

1. Member states shall make provision to ensure that the owners or keepers take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and to ensure that those animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury.

2. Member States shall ensure that the conditions under which animals (other than fish, reptiles or amphibians) are bred or kept, having regard to their species and to their degree of development, adaptation and domestication, and to their physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge.

The directive is met by the Animal Welfare Act: art.12

par.2 “The housing conditions of animals must not cause any injuries or any other kind of suffering.” The Act obliges the farmer to provide adequate housing conditions which are defined by art.4 par.15 as “[having to] guarantee the animal the possibility to dwell according to the needs of its species, race, sex and age.”

The minimal housing conditions set by the regulation were set referring to the definition of animal welfare:

• Freedom from thirst and hunger
• Freedom from discomfort
• Freedom from pain, injury and disease
• Freedom to express most normal behavior
• Freedom from fear and distress

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development “the law that regulates the minimal housing conditions of fur animals is a result of consultations and agreements with fur animals breeders and producers associations and the Institute for Zootechnics – National Research Institute in Kraków which means that they have been set on the grounds of experience and long-lasting observations of the breeders.”

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1 The full text of the Regulation may be viewed here: http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20101160778
3 The full text may be viewed here: http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/Download?id=WDU19971110724&type=3
4 Answer of the Ministry on the letter from Otwarte Klatki on animal welfare, signature ŻWsdp/ek-053-3/2013(1559)
The PZHiPZF defines practical methods of ensuring a proper animal welfare standard as “creating a breeding environment that takes into account the species related needs, allows free movement, food and water, social contacts, cage enrichment that should stimulate the animals to play and explore, (...) appropriate husbandry, protection from inadequate weather conditions, injuries, parasites, diseases and behavioral disorders, (...) expanding the comfort of the animals by their emotional needs, (...) stimulating the animals to fulfill not only their basic but also their psychological needs.”

But the association also states that “the setting of an animal welfare level on a farm is arguable and subjective as it may be determined only by the production rate and a subjective assessment by the farmer. Some states may be interpreted differently by supporters and opponents of fur farming.”

### 3.3 LEGISLATION ON FUR FARMING IN OTHER COUNTRIES

It seems that the experience and subjective assessment of Polish farmers differs a lot from the experience of farmers in other countries.

- In Switzerland according to the local animal welfare law mink have to be housed in zoo-like conditions. Every pair of animals has to be granted 15 sq. m floor space, the cage should not be smaller than 15 sq. m though, no matter if it houses one or two animals. Every further animal has to be granted an additional square meter. Moreover every cage should be equipped with a water basin, among other equipment.

- In Germany every mink has to be granted at least 3 sq. m floor space, from 2016 the animals have to get access to cage enrichment such as climbing possibilities, water basins and hard ground.

- A remarkable number of European countries – including the Netherlands, Great Britain, Austria, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – came to the conclusion that the farming of carnivorous fur animals and the demand for better welfare standards, such as the possibility to fulfill the needs and natural behaviors of these animals, cannot be fulfilled on factory farms and thus banned fur farming. As for now legislative work to ban fur farming continues in Estonia, Belgium, Finland, Italy and Ireland, among others.

### 3.4 NATURAL NEEDS OF AMERICAN MINK

Maintaining the welfare of American mink cannot concur with factory farming because of various reasons resulting from the ecological niche of the species, i.e. its needs and dwelling requirements.

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7 More: https://antyfutro.pl/zagraniczne-kampanie
Contrary to cattle or pigs that have been adapted to being farmed by humans in the course of thousands of years, mink have been farmed for only 80 years. This makes it very difficult to recognize all their needs that have to be fulfilled to guarantee an adequate animal welfare standard.

- The mink is an expansive predator which is able to walk many kilometers to find suitable hunting grounds. The females live on an area of 8 – 20 ha, the territory of a male is much bigger and can range up to 800 ha. Mink live in solitude or with their offspring in tree hollows or burrows that they have dug by themselves up to three meters deep. They spend only 16% of their time outside of them.

- Polish law sets the minimal cage floor size at 0.18 sq. m per one animal. On the biggest mink farms there are over 100 thousand animals on a relatively small area although in wildlife mink live in solitude outside the mating season and are aggressive towards other specimen.

- Mink that live in the wild choose all kinds of water basins. Research shows that American mink are eager to invest a lot of work to gain access to water or even choose the possibility to bathe over food. In the wild a mink is able to dive up to 6 m – its waterproof fur is adapted to this kind of activity.

- On fur farms in Poland mink are deprived of any contact with water basins. The lack of the access to water baths is considered as one of the major stress factors and correlates with the frequency of stereotypical behavior and injuries.

8 A.J. Nimon, D. Broom, The Welfare of Farmed Mink (Mustela Vison) in Relation to Housing and Management: A Review
9 R. Gerell, Activity patterns of the mink Mustela vison Schreber in southern Sweden, 1969

4. THE INVESTIGATION

In the last couple of years the knowledge about fur farming in Poland expanded immensely – foremost thanks to publications such as the report of the Supreme Audit Office on fur farms in Greater Poland, the report “Price of fur” as well as interventions on fur farms that lead to fur farmers being charged with animal abuse. The footage and data that is being published by organizations and institutions are met by promotional materials of the fur industry that picture mink farms as “common agricultural and livestock enterprises” or even accredit them ecological and animal protection roles.

4.1 PRODUCTION CYCLE

The knowledge of the production cycle on fur farms is relevant in the context of interpreting information from the fur industry as well as the footage from investigations. The production cycle starts between mid-November and the second half of December when animals for the parent stock – that is these animals that will be reproduced next year – are picked. The rest of the animals are killed by carbon mono or dioxide and then skinned. In the time between the slaughter season and April/May only the parent stock remains on the farm, in spring it grows with the new litter. Between June and July, when the cubs become self-sufficient, they are separated from their mothers and put – according to their designation – into single or group cages where they stay until the next slaughter season. In winter and spring the parent stock is separated in individual cages, there are no acts of aggression and only the healthiest specimen remain on the farm. That’s why farmers tend to shoot their promotional clips and present their farms to the media in this time of the year. Footage from farms shot in other times of the year is rather scarce and carefully selected, entering the farm is denied under the pretext to “not disturb the animals”. It is in the summer time that the cages are crowded the most which results in an increased number of injuries and cases of aggressive behavior. Medical treatment of the animals that are going to be slaughtered soon cannot be justified from the economical point of view. The investigation footage comes mostly from this time of the year.

4.2 PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

The investigation carried out in 2011-2012 included footage from fox and raccoon dog farms as well as 10 mink farms with up to 40,000 animals. On farms in Chodzież, Chróstnik, Walbrzych and Modrzewie animals with bite wounds, lying in agony or already dead in their cages have been documented. Numerous cases of stereotypical behavior such as aggression, apathy and body deformations have

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1 The report critically rates the enforcement of the law on factory farms. It may be viewed here: http://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,3220,vp,4058.pdf
2 J. Kuźniewicz, A. Filistowicz, Chów i hodowla zwierząt futerkowych, Wrocław 1999, s. 215
been found. On various farms the practice of throwing skinned carcasses outside the area of the farm has been observed. A description of the conditions on the biggest farm covered by last year’s investigation has been included into the report: the farm in Modrzewie with 40,000 animals that belongs to the Dutch mink farmer Joannes Jannsen. After the report was published in November 2012, in January 2013 Otwarte Klatki released further footage that documented injured animals on the mink farm belonging to an MP from the Ruch Palikota party – Andrzej Piątak. The investigation drew public attention to the specific problem of mink farming in Poland. The MP’s farm holds 60,000 animals and was the biggest farm from which footage has been presented to the public so far. Footage of injured animals and dismembered carcasses between cages was used as evidence to file a charge of animal abuse against Andrzej Piątak.

The problem of animals suffering due to physical injuries and mental disorders is well known to fur farmers. The investigation just confirms its universality. A quote from a breeders’ textbook:

_Mink have not been fully domesticated and therefore suffer high stress levels due to unsuitable housing conditions that provide insufficient space and enrichment. (…) Mink are restless animals and therefore may experience chronic stress that can lead to various anomalies and undesired symptoms such as:

a) self-mutilation
b) external and internal injuries
c) breeding disorders
d) increased mortality among cubs
e) increased vulnerability to diseases
f) restless behavior
g) decreased vitality_

It has to be noted that the mentioned anomalies and undesired symptoms are listed by the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare in the report _The Welfare of Animals Kept for Fur Production_ as factors for animal welfare. According to the authors of the report these factors include the mortality (including cases of premature slaughter) and morbidity rates, the body condition and reproduction rates, behavior and physiology.

The footage proves that these problems apply to animals kept in both single and group cages (in the latter case also aggressive behavior has been documented) as well as to animals that are being kept in cages bigger than set by the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development from the 28th of December 2010. This is due to the fact that the natural needs of mink cannot be met by the battery cage housing system.

Similar injuries have been documented during the most recent investigation.

### 4.3 2013 INVESTIGATION ON THE FARMS BELONGING TO MEMBERS OF THE PZHIPZF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Among the footage collected in 2013 on fur farms in Poland the material from farms in Granowiec (gm. Sośnie) and Pawłowo (gm. Czerniejewo) in the Greater Poland voivodeship is especially relevant. The farms belong to members of the board of directors.
of the Polish Fur Breeders and Producers Association – an organization that takes part in legislative work and announces proudly to take special care of animal welfare standards. The footage collected during continuous investigations on both farms in summer reveals severe and untreated wounds of the animals kept on the farms. The complete footage from the investigation may be viewed on the Otwarte Klatki homepage: www.otwarteklatki.pl

4.4 RAJMOND GĄSIOREK’S FARM – PAWŁOWO

Location — Pawłowo, community: Czerniejewo
Build year — 2004
max. capacity — 192,500

Rajmund Gąsiorek – one of the two deputy directors of the PZH iPZF and board member of Skinplex Polska, a new company closely cooperating with North American Fur Auctions— is referred to as the king of mink of Greater Poland. The total areal of his farms sums up to 3000 ha. In the beginning of 2013 he declared the ownership of four farms: in Pawłowo, Czerniejewo (gm. Czerniejewo), Radomice (gm. Września) and Stroszki (gm. Nekla) as well as plans to build another one in Grzymiałowice. In Czerniejewo numerous other farms are registered: his farms in Radomice and Pawłowo, two farms in Pawłowo that belong to other farmers, the farms in Stroszki and Sroczyn that used to belong to Gąsiorek and also other companies that own farms in Rakowo, Pleszewo, Głogóryna and Noskowo. Rajmund Gąsiorek stated in an interview that in his region of operation a million mink skins are produced each year – almost 1/5 of the Polish production. In 2009 he was awarded the Polish Agricultural Entrepreneur of the Year price.

In the course of the investigation the activists monitored Rajmund Gąsiorek’s farm in Pawłowo that he has been running since 2004. It consists of 54 sheds that can hold – given the maximum breeding performance of the parent stock (50,000 animals) – up to 192,500 mink.

In all cages that have been monitored between July and August the maximum (four mink) or a bigger than permitted by the regulation number of animals was found. Numerous animals that have been documented in different sheds on different days had vast head and neck injuries as well as patches of torn out fur and skin on their torso and sides. In some cases the wounds have been covered up by pus and scabs, but most of the time they were open, covered with blood and with visible muscle tissue. In some cases the injuries covered approx. 10% of the body. One of the mink that had been documented on the farm had, besides severe injuries of the upper part of the body, mutilated front legs. In another cage that housed – unlawfully – five specimen, one of the animals was sick and undersized – its bodyweight was three times lower than usual and its ribs were sticking out. The mink was not separated from other animals and had bite marks on its head. Most of the animals with severe injuries are apathetic and not even to the smallest extent interested in humans. In


Mutilated animals, Pawłowo, July 2013
many cases the floor of the cage was covered with feces.

4.5 Wojciech Wójcik’s Farm – Granowiec

Location — Granowiec, community: Sośnie
Build year — 2007
Capacity — at least 120,000

The farm in Granowiec is co-owned by Wojciech Wójcik – the deputy director of the PZHiPZF as well as of the companies KOZFUR and LAWOFUR – and his brother, Marcin Wójcik. Apart from the farm in Granowiec, Wojciech Wójcik owns three neighboring farms at the border of the towns Dębówiec and Wyrębin as well in Biały Dwór and Parsko. The other owner made an investment in Cieszyn (gm. Sośnie) where – despite protests from the local community – he adapted empty buildings of a former State Agricultural Farm (Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne – PGR) for his mink farm in the centre of the town. Wojciech Wójcik’s company grows rapidly – in 2012 he bought 100% of the shares of a former SAF in Rusko with almost 4000 ha of land in Koźmin Wielkopolski, Krotoszyn, Jarocin, Jaraczewo and Kotlin communities. Apart of farming animals Wojciech Wójcik owns a company that produces cages and farm equipment. He is also one of the board members of Skinpolex Polska – a company cooperating with North American Fur Auctions.

The farm in Granowiec consists of 42 sheds. It can hold est. at least 120,000 animals.

On the farm large head and body wounds have been documented by the activists. The wounds were covered with scabs and growths. The footage was taken on different days between July and September and shows how the condition of the animals got worse in one of the cages. The footage from the first visit shows only one animal with bite marks, after a couple of weeks all of the animals in...
the cage had bite wounds. There were no signs that the farmer intervened or that any medical treatment has been provided. Also no breeding documentation was found. The footage from September shows cages with dead animals inside. One of the video clips shows aggression between an already bitten specimen which leads to the presumption that the wounds are the result of fights in the cage.

On none of the farms a “farming environment that takes into account the natural needs of mink” or any “elements that would stimulate the animals to play and explore” could be found.

Self-mutilation and aggression and the resulting injuries – from torn out fur to mutilated limbs – have been analyzed in the EC report. The authors point out that on every farm they found animals with patches of fur torn out and seek reasons for this kind of behavior in chronic stress related to the low animal welfare standards.

Wójcik and Gąsiorek are not the only big players in the fur farming industry whose farms look like this. In 2009 Knud Vest – the chairman of the European Fur Breeders Association – deemed footage and the conditions documented on smaller Danish fur farms “unacceptable”. An investigation carried out in 2010 on his farm – the biggest mink farm in Europe – showed the same conditions and injuries of the animals as were found on the farm he criticized earlier.

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8 Footage from Knud Vest’s farm: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x9ch2bMkXA

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A dead mink left in the cage, Granowiec, September 2013
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Mutilated mink, Granowiec, August 2013
Fur farming has been evoking apprehension and doubts among animal rights and animal protection activists, environmentalists as well as scientists because of various problems and risk factors connected with it. The construction and operation of mink farm causes constant protests and complaints from the local communities that find themselves exposed to this kind of neighborhood – mostly because of odours which are the most blatant consequence of mink farming, both for the environment and local communities. But this argument has been recently replaced by other equally relevant arguments. This is the effect of a broader access to information on fur farming thanks to scientific publications, investigations on fur farms throughout Europe and a growing number of audits resulting from public pressure.

The protests increase proportionally to the consequences of the construction of new fur farms – which are apparent e.g. in protected areas (such as nature reserves) – and the expansion of the industry that often locates big farms in completely wrongheaded places.

5.1 ETHICS

The sole nature of fur farming has to be considered as the most basic problem connected with it – namely the keeping of animals in cages that do not allow them to live out their natural needs as well as killing them for their fur. Animal suffering – an imminent feature of fur farming even on model farms – is unnecessary in a time where synthetic materials are broadly available and natural fur cannot in any way be ethically justified.

5.2 ODOR EMISSIONS

Odour emissions from farms are an unavoidable consequence of the biodegradation process on farms. Odours not only influence the life of local communities and the touristic value of the region due to a major degree of odour nuisance, but also pose a threat to the environment and human health. Among the substances that are being emitted into the air are ammonia and hydrogen sulphide. There are also other significant sources of odour emission that are located outside the sheds, such as manure slabs where the fermentation process of the slurry takes place, the food processing machines and the utilization of waste.

You can smell a farm depending on the time of the year and weather conditions even from a few kilometers. For a farm with 12,000 animals the odour nuisance range is 200-300 meters. The nuisance for the residents due to odours is downplayed as a “subjective” feeling as in Poland odours are not regulated by law and the dispersion of odour sources on a farm makes it impossible to measure emission rates and to analyze its composition.

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1 Footage from Denmark: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq64voiw9ok
Footage from Finland: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akyv9BB88J0
Footage from Norway: http://www.forbypels.no/english
Footage from Sweden: http://vimeo.com/13930829


5.3 CONTAMINATION OF THE GROUND AND SOIL

A common consequence of the operation of mink farms is the contamination of the surrounding ground and soil with wastewater. Mink feces contain large amounts of concentrated nitrogen and phosphorus that interfuse to the soil environment. A major cause of contamination happens due to neglect and violations of the law. The Supreme Audit Office report states that on 87% of the farms in Greater Poland breaches of environmental requirements have been found. There are frequent reports of disposing of wastewaters into the ground, drains and standing waters.

- In 2011 a leakage from the farm owned by R. Gąsiorek in Radomice into the Wrześnica river was reported. The contamination that the owner referred to as “harmless kitchen waste” (animal offal and meat feed) proved to be feces washed down from cages. None of the controlled farms in Września was able to meet the requirements imposed by laws concerning waste management and environmental protection.

- Farms owned by foreign investors failed to meet environmental requirements. This was proven during an audit carried out by the Provincial Environmental Protection Inspectorate (Wojewódzki Inspektorat Ochrony Środowiska) on a mink farm in Modrzewie owned by Johannes Jannsen and a mink farm in Karsko owned by the Dutch company Farm Equipment International. In Karsko, six trenches have been dug behind the concrete wall of the farm, two of them were filled with an indefinable substance, probably wastewater. Below the fence numerous narrow ditches were found that enabled the draining of wastewater from the farm area into the trenches. The wastewater was also transported by a PVC pipe that has been dug into the ground. Furthermore puddles of rainwater mixed with feces have been found on the farm. The extracted samples showed high levels of CHTZ Cr, nitrates, phosphates and suspension. Tests also confirmed the presence of fecal coliform bacteria in the samples.

- On the farm owned by Jannsen the wastewater was drained through a PCV pipe into a ditch that has been excavated by workers around the farm – without the use of any sewage processing tanks or separators. The analysis of samples showed similar results as in Karsko.

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7 Ibidem
• In 2010 the Municipal Guard in Szymankowo discovered a hidden drainage into a lake close to a Nortex mink farm. The illegal collector was a couple hundred meters long. The owner was fined with 500 zł (approx. 120 Euro)\(^8\).

\[\text{Futrex factory's drainage ditch, www.goleniow.net.pl}\]

\[\text{8 Dziennik Zachodni, 06.11.2010: http://www. dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/329299,szymankowo-scieki-plynely-do-stawu,id,t.html} \]

• Not only fur farms cause contamination. In 2012 wastewater from a feed plant in the West Pomeranian voivodeship owned by the company Futrex contaminated a nearby stream. According to the residents the draining of wastewater into the stream continued for at least a year. Also in this case the fine accounted for 500 zł\(^9\).

\[\text{Mink carcasses embedded in the wet ground, 2012}\]

\[\text{9 Kurier Szczeciński, 02.07.2012: http://www.24kurier.pl/Aktualnosci/Region/Goleniow/Scieki-plynely-strumieniem} \]

• Many farmers also leave the skinned carcasses outside of the farm perimeter.

\[\text{5.4 MINK ESCAPES}\]

Another important and downplayed topic are mink escapes from farms. The EEA Technical Report No 11/2007 on halting the loss of biodiversity in 2010 lists mink among alien species that pose the greatest threat to biodiversity\(^10\). Research has shown that American mink escapes from farms are relatively frequent and lead to the creation of a wild population that becomes an abiding part of ecosystems.

\[\text{10 The report may be viewed here: http://reports.eea.europa.eu/technical_report_2007_11/en} \]
Studies in Denmark – the leading mink producer in the world – have shown that about 78% of the examined wild population is constituted by specimens that have escaped from captivity. As for now the population of wild mink is considered stable. Scientists though express concern that the growing number of mink farms in Poland may lead to its expansion into the environment. Genetic research has shown that the population of mink in the North-Eastern part of Poland is comprised in 12-16% of escapees from farms. This part of the country is not a primary area of new investment. In North-Western Poland in the “Ujście Warty” National Park escapees account for approx. 40% of the population.

Workers of the Park point out the vicinity of the mink farms in Pyrzany and Radachów. A rapid regrowth of the population has been observed shortly after every catch.

The effects of mink expansion are evident. In the “Ujście Warty” National Park the losses in protected bird species populations due to mink predation range up to 40-70% of every brood. Workers of the Park make the nearby farms directly responsible for this. Cases of mink destroying whole colonies of birds with 100 specimen overnight have been noted. Mink have become a constant worry for e.g. the Ornithological Park in Nowęcin where several mink attacks in 2010/2011 almost lead to the closing of the park. Polish National Parks are part of the Polish Bird Refuge (Polskie Ostoje Ptaków) program. In the course of this program mink catchings are a constant practice.

11 M. Hammershoj, Population ecology of free-ranging American mink Mustela vison in Denmark, 2004
13 Stacja Badawcza - Ośrodek Hodowli Zwierzyń ZG PZŁ w Czempiniu, Analiza oddziaływania norki amerykańskiej i szopa pracza na populacje zwierzyń drobnej w województwach lubuskim, wielkopolskim i zachodniopomorskim, 2009
14 M. Bartoszewicz, A. Zalewski, American mink, Mustela vison diet and predation on waterfowl in the Słońsk Reserve, western Poland 2003
16 Website of the project: www.ptaki-life.pl
Mink farms are met by a favorable legislation that – in comparison with other EU member states – makes Poland a very attractive country for investors.

The Regulation of the Minister of the Environment on the list of alien plants and species that when released to the environment may pose a threat to autochthonous species and natural habitats does not include American mink. The consequences of being listed are regulated by art. 120 par. 2-4 of the Environmental Protection Act. For their import, keeping, breeding and sale a permit is required. These regulations do not concern mink farms.

Odours are not regulated by any legislation, when planning new farms the farmers ensure that the fence will limit the spread of odours to a sufficient extent. Farmers succeeded this year in blocking further legislative work on an odour act that would set an admissible odour nuisance.

According to environmental protection laws farms are considered “installations” for which a assessment of the impact on the environment has to be prepared. In 2004 the LSU (livestock unit) factor of mink used to assess the necessity of preparing such a report has been lowered. In the regulation from 2002 the LSU value for mink was 0.025 – or 40 animals. In the Regulation of the Council of Ministers from 2004 that has been signed by the Prime Minister at that time, Marek Belka, some minor changes have been made in comparison to the 2002 version. But in the appendix to the regulation a major change occurred: the LSU value for mink was set at 0.0025 – 400 animals. This allowed 10 times bigger investments without the necessity of preparing an environmental impact assessment.

Mink farms are listed among special branches of agricultural production. Instead of regular accounting so called estimate norms are applied which show that the businesses are unprofitable. It turns out that starting a farm is relatively cheap – they are built on land of the lowest categories which are excluded from taxation. The sale of mink skins accounts for 91% of incomes of the industry – in 2011 they amounted for 132 million Euro.

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1 Full text of the regulation: isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20112101260
2 Rzeczpospolita, 08.10.2013: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1055016.html
3 Full text of the regulation: http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20042572573
read
5 Central Statistical Office data
Despite the relatively favorable legislation and big financial capacities the farmers constantly break and evade the law. The control by the Supreme Audit Office on mink farms in Greater Poland proved that “87% of these farms violated provisions of the environmental law, 48% of them used illegal buildings and 35% didn’t abide to veterinary law.” Moreover the audit showed that the controls by the Veterinary Office have not been reliable, in one case a notification on suspicion of committing a crime has been issued.

Legal consequences of discovered violations are irrelevant to such an extent that a lot of farmers purposefully break the law to cut down on the costs. Laws are also broken or bent in the process of issuing licenses for the construction and operation of farms.

- In Baranowo near Poznań an unregistered farm has been operating for 30 years in the direct neighborhood of a residential area.\(^1\)

- MP Piątak has been granted a permit to operate his farm that he had run since 2005 in September 2013 after paying a 150 thousand zloty (approx. 35 thousand Euro) fine.

- The farm owned by Farm Equipment International in Bronowice has been operating since 2004 without the acceptance of the premises by the Construction Inspectorate – despite of protests and complaints of the local community. Animals have been transported to the farm during construction works.\(^3\)

- The investors register their farms at the Veterinary Office after they have transported the animals to the farm. This has happened e.g. in Cieszyn-Dobrzec where Marcin Wójcik opened his farm.\(^3\)

- Several attempts to transport animals to farms still under construction have been thwarted by protests and blockades of the residents in Przelewice.

- In September 2013 the Local Government Appeal Court revoked the permit issued for the construction of a Farm Equipment International mink farm in Brzeście (gm. Żórawina) and deemed the administrative decisions that allowed for the construction illicit

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1 More: http://www.otwarteklatki.pl/nielegalna-fermanorek-w-baronowie-pod-poznaniem


In the light of the presented facts it is understandable that every investment project is met by resistance of the local communities that live in the area of its impact.

The proportion of the protest depends on the size and social capital of the town that is affected by the problem. In smaller villages, where the investor is a member of the local community, the residents express their dissent in the media or issue complaints. But at the same time they are reluctant to reveal their identity and rarely show themselves openly. The most common form of protest is the sending of protest letters that have been signed by the residents to the local authorities. It often happens that the local community will not even be granted the chance to express their dissent on the administrative stage where the permit for the investment are being issued. Administrative decisions most frequently are made without public consultations and the residents get to know about the new farm at the very moment when the construction works start. Being faced with this kind of situations, residents draw on more radical and increasingly more frequent direct forms of action such as demonstrations and the physical blocking of roads and investments.

The appeals for help addressed to the Coalition for the Abolition of Fur Farming in Poland and the analysis of media reports from the years 2010 – 2013 sum up to a number of at least 50 new investments against which residents are protesting. Most of these interventions successfully prevented the construction of the respective farm. Since the beginning of 2013 protesting residents attained numerous triumphs and halted the investments of a couple of leaders in mink farming from abroad as well as of the head of the PZHiPZF – Wojciech Fortuna. Media reports have gained great attention both on a national – mostly in towns where such farms already exist – and international level where the protest in Poland have been described as unique throughout the whole European Union.

In many towns the dissent arises post factum when the investor’s claims about the innocuousness of his investment have been verified by reality. Fewer protests in towns with existing farms stem from a feeling of helplessness and the ineffectiveness of Polish legislation and law enforcement.
Protests against the fur industry in 2013
9. MAJOR PROTESTS

Brzeście, gm. Żórawina, Lower Silesian voivodeship

Farm Equipment International received a permit from the vojty for the construction of one of the biggest mink farms in Poland. The residents got to know about the decision a year later. Because of the scale of the investment and the vicinity of Wrocław, the residents held numerous protests in the voivodeship capital trying to stop the investment. Regardless of the fact that the construction permit has been temporarily withdrawn until the decision of the court, construction works still continued for some time. As a result of the investor’s actions the residents organized work shifts and patrols of a neighborhood watch with the goal to document potential violations of the law and to prevent attempts to finish the construction work illegally. In October 2013 the decision on which the permit had been based has been repealed by the Local Government Appeal Court as in the opinion of the Court it has been issued under a flagrant violation of the law. Eventually the permit was revoked completely.

Przelewice, gm. Przelewice, West Pomeranian voivodeship

The town of Przelewice is one of the region’s tourist attractions thanks to an historic dendrological garden located in its centre. In 2012 a Danish investor bought a parcel of land adjoining the dendrological garden with the intention of building a mink...
farm on it. Being faced with administrative difficulties the investor acted arbitrarily and tried several times to transport animals onto the unfinished farm. Since then the residents hold round-the-clock roadblocks on the roads leading to the farm so that no animals may be smuggled onto it. The roadblocks have taken the form of ditches or vehicles placed across the roads with work shifts on every one of them. This has lead to a current deadlock as the investor refuses to abandon the land he bought and tries to extort a permit for operating the farm.

**Rościn, gm. Myśliborz, West Pomeranian voivodeship**

In October 2013 a settlement was achieved between the mayor of Myślibórz and the chairman of Agrocomplex on the mink farm located in Rościn. The Danish company Agrocomplex z o.o. started operating the farm without reporting the fact to the Veterinary Office. The farm operates on the premises of an old turkey farm in the centre of the city and is located only several dozen meters away from a residential area. In protest against the farm the residents of Rościn blocked the main road in Myślibórz together with residents of Chłopowo in March 2013. The investor declared to be eager to relocate the farm into a peripheral area but no dates have been set. The relocation of the farm will face further difficulties due to the vicinity of areas protected by the **Natura 2000** project.

**Piskory, gm. Blizanów, Greater Poland voivodeship**

The Piskory village is an untouched area which is part of the Pyzdry Forest Landscape Park, the habitat of rare bird species (e.g. the black stork), plants and fungus that have been considered extinct. In the village itself a developing agritourism farm is located and is a plein-air painting location as well as a place for school excursions. In the end of July 2013 the residents received notice about the planned construction of two farms with a combined size of 240 LSU. In protest road blocks have been formed to prevent trucks with building materials from entering the farm which hindered the beginning of the construction works. In late September the investor from the smaller farm claimed for a suspension of the application for the land development conditions – but a few days later brought the building materials to the perimeter. The “Stowarzyszenie Doliny Czarnej Strugi i Bawolu” association and the village administrator’s office of Piskory are entangled in an administrative struggle to prevent this investment, they fear that the investor will try to present them with a fait accompli.

**Osada Leśna, gm. Oleśnica, Lower Silesian voivodeship**

The chairman of the PZHiPZF Władysław Fortuna together with his company MENFOR planned to
erect a farm near Oleśnica with a capacity of 50-60 thousand animals. The residents of the village housing approx. 70 people reacted by forming the association “Nic o Nas bez Nas” (“Nothing About Us Without Us”) and have issued a petition on the Internet that has so far been signed by over 1000 people. In response the vojó officially declared that he does not support the investment and that he will include a ban on the location of fur farms in further urban plans for the gmina (municipality). The local representatives of the Oleśnica gmina voted unanimously on a resolution that there was no approval for the construction of fur farms in the region.

**Nowe Gronowo, gm. Debrzno, Pomeranian voivodeship**

The local representatives of the Debrzno gmina adopted a similar strategy against the fur industry. After tumultuous protest meetings organized by the residents the representatives declared in March 2013 that there should be a ban on such investments in further urban plans.

**Budziszewice, gm. Skoki, Greater Poland voivodeship**

In June 2010 the residents of Budziszewice were informed by the mayor that there were plans to locate a mink farm with 18 sheds for 22,000 animals in their town. The parcel on which the farm was to be erected is in close vicinity to a residential area and directly adjoins the Landscape Park “Zielonka” Forest.

**Protest against fur farms in West Pomeranian voivodeship, Szczecin, October 2013**
The residents issued a written objection against the investment, they wrote protest letters and petitions that have been delivered to the mayor of Skoki. As a result the administrative procedures could not be finalized in time and the mayor obliged the investor to provide an environmental impact assessment on the Natura 2000 area by the head of the Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection. The RDEA in Poznań decided that such an assessment is not necessary. Despite this the mayor of Skoki refused to issue the land development conditions for the construction of sheds for a mink farm which meant that there was no legal permission to build the farm. The Mayor elaborated on his decision stating that he is responsible not only for the application of often contradictory laws but also for the functioning of the local community as a whole.

Cieszyn, gm. Sośnie, Greater Poland voivodeship

Marcin Wójcik, the co-owner of the farm shown in the investigation, put mink into a provisional farm located in empty buildings of a former SAF in the middle of the village. The farm adjoins a kindergarten, among other buildings, and is located close to the Barycz Valley Landscape Park. The first transport of animals arrived on the farm without the permission of the Veterinary Office. Several confrontations between the farmer and residents took place, as well as meetings of residents and local authorities. The authorities took no action and ignored the voice of the local community, it was possible to get a promise of not allowing the farm to expand though.
Fur farms — especially factory mink farms — imply serious consequences for the animals, local communities and the ecosystem. The incapability to ensure a satisfactory level of welfare for the animals, ecological threats, and the rise of social conflicts are arguments against the fur industry. Each single argument is relevant — but if put together they unambiguously show that the only solution is a total ban on fur farming. This report is not only a documentation of facts but also a political appeal to speak up in defense of the animals, people and environment.

Let us make the fur industry history!
Otwarte Klatki Association – a nationwide initiative for animal rights founded in 2012. It connects activists who have been working with the Polish animal rights movement for many years – both in NGOs and in informal groups. The goal of Otwarte Klatki is to prevent animal suffering through the introduction of systemic social change, documenting conditions of factory farming as well as educational work that promotes a positive attitude towards animals.