

# The Case Against Fur Factory Farming

A scientific Review of Animal  
Welfare Standards and 'Welfare'

Stephen Harris

Professor of Environmental Sciences

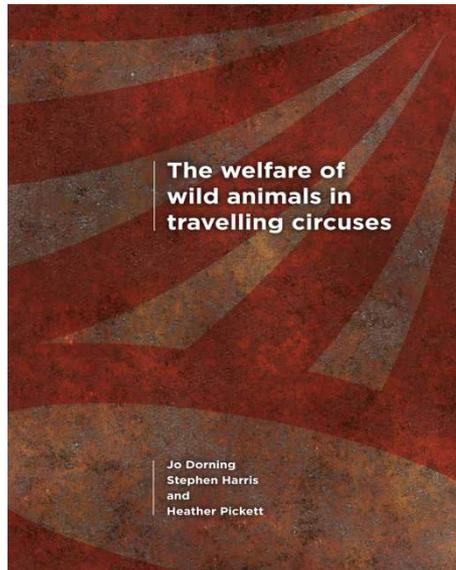
University of Bristol

# *Curriculum vitae*

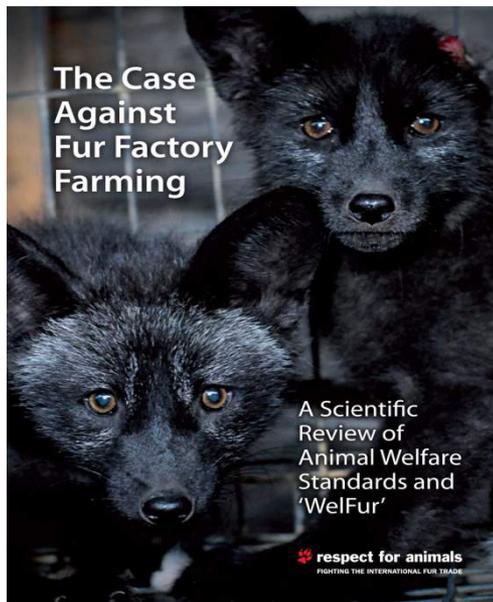


- Employed by University of Bristol since 1977; was appointed Professor of Environmental Sciences 1992
- Much of my research has been on foxes; published numerous papers on captive and wild foxes
- Over last 50 years studied ecology, behaviour and welfare of free-living and captive wild mammals

# *Curriculum vitae*



- Recent reports on the humane trapping and snaring; the Canadian seal hunt; the welfare of elephants in British zoos; the utility of killing foxes in Scotland; and the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses
- Review of welfare standards of wild animals bred on fur farms and the potential for 'WelFur' to improve welfare standards

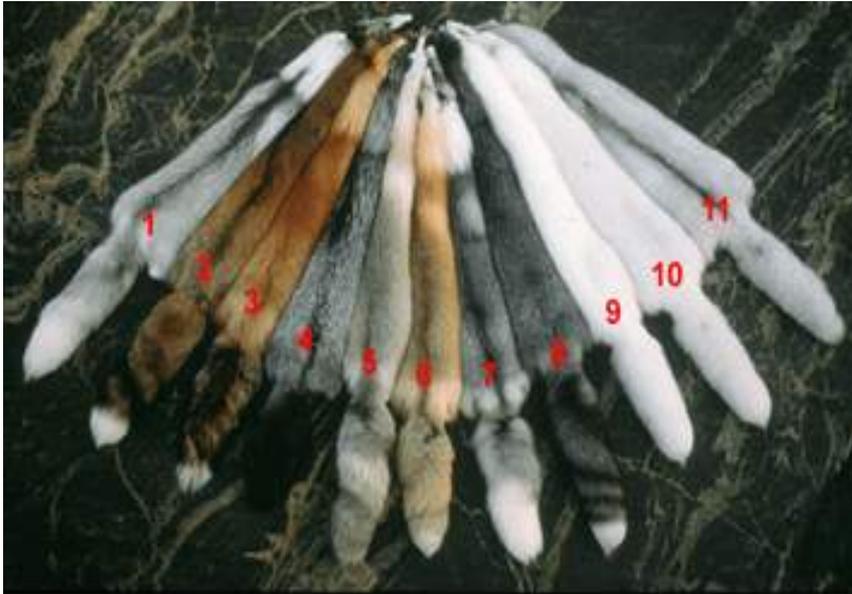


# Background



- Mink first bred on farms for fur in North America in 1860s; first foxes farmed for fur on Prince Edward Island in the 1880s; Europe 1900s
- Other species also farmed – striped skunks on English farm in the 1930s
- Yet no detailed species-specific EU legislation setting standards for animals farmed for fur
- Serious welfare concerns highlighted in 1999 Council of Europe and 2001 Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare Reports

# Background



- Around 95 million foxes and mink killed for their fur in 2014
- 1930s long-haired furs were preferred, especially fox, followed by skunk, muskrat
- Fox genetics extensively studied; 8 genes determine coat colour in “red” foxes; “silver” foxes one of many colour varieties
- Foxes selectively bred over last 125 years for coat colour but nothing else

# Background



- After WWII, short-haired furs dominated the market
- Mink replaced fox as commonest farmed fur; a big benefit is short period delayed implantation but need individual housing
- Selective breeding – diversity of colours (phases) from white to black. Phases in between such as “pearl”, sapphire”, “palomino”, “violet”; only exceeded by fox
- Reliability of supply means that mink now dominates sales



# Mink and foxes used for fur production are not domesticated

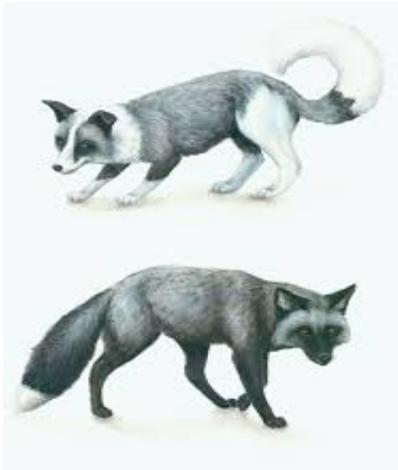


Academician Dmitry Belyaev  
1917 - 1985

- Dmitry Belyaev noted that domestic animals had same basic morphological and physiological changes
- Selecting for tameness and against aggression means selecting for physiological changes that govern the body's hormones and neurochemicals
- So selecting for behaviour may lead to other, far-reaching changes in development
- Started fox experiment in 1959



# Mink and foxes used for fur production are not domesticated



- Belyaev very strict selection criteria for breeding: no more than 5% of males, 20% females allowed to breed each year; animals selected solely on tests of tameness
- After 30-35 generations population 100 foxes (out of 45,000) that were docile, eager to please and clearly domesticated
- Domestication and captive breeding are very different

# Mink and foxes used for fur production are not domesticated



- Foxes and mink can be domesticated; domesticated animals lot traits in common
- Domestication incompatible with fur farming: foxes and mink selectively bred for fur characteristics for 125 and 150 generations, not tameness
- Foxes and mink wild animals and fundamentally unsuitable for farming

# Welfare of mink and foxes farmed for fur



- Several approaches to assessing animal welfare:
- ‘Biological functioning’ – physically and mentally healthy
- ‘Affective (emotional) state’ – are the animals happy or feeling good
- ‘Natural/motivated behaviours’ – do they have what they want

# Biological functioning indicators



- Biological functioning seriously impaired
- High levels of stereotypic i.e. abnormal repetitive behaviour
- High levels of injuries, including self-inflicted
- Physical deformities e.g. bent feet
- High levels reproductive failure/infant mortality

# Affective/emotional state indicators



- Negative affective states in farmed fur animals
- Fear – avoidance and aggression towards people
- Frustration – levels of stereotypies
- Boredom – fur chewing, tail biting
- Long periods inactivity when awake
- Heightened response to stimuli

# Natural/motivated behaviours



- Unable to perform many natural behaviours they are motivated to perform
- Stressed by their inability to perform behaviours such as accessing water or suitable substrates, need to use multiple nest sites
- Foraging and ranging
- Solitary species that use odour to avoid contact

# The Five Freedoms



- Widely used to assess animal welfare and as part of assurance standards
- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

# A life worth living



- Farm Animal Welfare Council – minimum legal requirement should be such that an animal has a ‘Life worth living’
- Not the case for animals on factory fur farms
- Welfare of mink and foxes is seriously compromised in current fur farming systems

# A life worth living



- Whichever measures of welfare that are used, factory fur farms fail to meet basic standards
- Fail to satisfy all of 'The Five Freedoms'
- Fail to provide a 'Life worth Living'
- Whichever approach to measure welfare is emphasised, the welfare of farmed mink and foxes (and other species) is seriously compromised

# European citizens oppose fur farming



- Majority of European citizens recently polled in ten countries, including those with substantial fur production, are opposed to farming animals for fur in cages
- A number of European countries have already implemented bans
- Widespread support for a ban at European level

# The 'Origin Assured' label



- Fur industry's 'Origin Assured' label does not stipulate any specific production standards
- Unenforceable industry codes of practice sufficient for a country to be 'Origin Assured'
- 'Origin Assured' label for fur produced in small wire cages with inherently low welfare
- These production methods opposed by majority of European citizens



# 'WelFur' cannot address welfare issues



- 'WelFur' initiated 2009; mink and fox protocols published 2013 and 2014 implementation began 2015
- Three objectives:-
- To provide a reliable on-farm animal welfare assessment system based on scientifically proven measures and independent third party assessments.
- To improve animal welfare on European fur farms through analysing of the assessment data and education of the farmers.
- To provide consumer transparency on the welfare status on European fur farms by publishing assessment data.

# 'Welfare Quality' cannot address welfare issues



- Based on the principles of the European Commission funded Welfare Quality® project, the programme takes on a multi-faceted approach to animal welfare that considers all important welfare parameters including the animal's positive and negative emotions, health, natural behavior, the housing system, feeding, human-animal relationship and how the farm is managed

# ‘WelFur’ cannot address welfare issues



- ‘WelFur’ assessment protocols specifically designed around the very serious limitations of current housing systems
- Generally reward *status quo*
- Fail to penalise practices that do not meet existing minimum standards
- Downplay importance of serious injuries associated with extreme suffering

# 'Welfare' cannot address welfare issues



- Fail to address inhumane handling, killing methods, lack of training for all personnel killing animals
- Will underestimate levels of mortality, stereotypes
- Use inadequate measures of hunger, human-animal relationships, mental state
- Use complex scoring systems which allow high scores on some elements to mask serious failings on others

# 'WelFur' cannot address welfare issues



- Will not achieve 'WelFur's stated aims of ensuring 'a high level of animal welfare' on fur farms and their goal of functioning as 'the new scientific reference' for fur-farmed species
- Only scores welfare up to 'best current practice'
- Would be misleading if used as basis for labelling system



# ‘Welfur’ does not meet standards for a certification system

- Best practice framework for animal welfare certification schemes; Professor David Main and colleagues; *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, **37**, 127-136 (2014)
- No internationally agreed mechanism for recognising the equivalence of animal welfare schemes



# Transparency to consumers



- “Higher” welfare claims when schemes include “good life” opportunities that are valued, but not necessarily needed, by animals – Farm Animal Welfare Committee 2009
- European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-2015 – urgent need to provide “transparency and adequacy of information to consumers on animal welfare for their purchase choice”

# Transparency to consumers



- The 'best current practice' ceiling makes the WelFur scores of limited value and misleading because 'best current practice' still represents what the majority of people would consider to be an unacceptable level of welfare
- Alternative systems with the potential for higher levels of welfare do not exist for mink and foxes

# Conclusions



- The farming of mink and foxes for fur should be prohibited in accordance with:-
- Council Directive 98/58/EC: “No animal shall be kept for farming purposes unless it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype or phenotype, that it can be kept without detrimental effect on its health or welfare”
- Council of Europe Recommendation Concerning Fur Animals: “No animal shall be kept for its fur if: a. the conditions of this Recommendation cannot be met, or if b. the animal belongs to a species whose members, despite these conditions being met, cannot adapt to captivity without welfare problems”