

Raccoon Dog Fur Investigation

Top Fashion Designers and Retailers Snared



Raccoon dogs. ©LAURI SIPP

The image is indelible.

At a crowded street market in China, a small raccoon dog is hung upside down by his rear legs and skinned alive for his fur. Filmed by undercover investigators, the incident was yet another example of the widespread callous treatment of animals killed for their fur in a nation that has virtually no animal welfare laws.

It closely followed July's mass killing of 50,000 dogs in Yunnan province to combat rabies. Many were beaten to death in the streets, and that atrocity prompted The HSUS to sharply criticize the Chinese government, lead a protest demonstration at China's embassy in Washington, and offer to help establish a humane and effective rabies control program in some of the southern provinces if the mass killing programs were halted. Our offer was ignored.

The graphic dog video stands as testimony to the horrors of the fur trade, and we used it as a launching point for action. Estimates of raccoon dogs killed in China for fur range from 1.5 to 4 million, and the world's most populous nation is the world's biggest exporter of so-called "budget fur" used mostly for trim on hoods and collars.

An HSUS investigation using mass spectrometry methods tested fur trim on coats sold by some of the biggest retailers and fashion designers in the United States. Falsely advertised or labeled with such names as raccoon, coyote, rabbit, or "faux," or carrying no label at all, 20 of the 25 coats tested were identified as raccoon dog fur, and three as domestic dog fur. It's illegal to import, export, sell, or advertise any domestic dog fur in the United States. Fur from other animals—



Domestic Chinese dogs raised for fur. ©THE HSUS/KARREMAN

including raccoon dogs—must be properly identified in advertising and labeling, but only if its value exceeds \$150.

The retailers involved included Bloomingdale's, Burlington Coat Factory, J.C. Penney, Loehmann's, Lord & Taylor, Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue. Among the designers and brands involved were Andrew Marc, Calvin Klein, DKNY, Michael Kors, Oscar de la Renta, Sean "Diddy" Combs' Sean John brand, and Tommy Hilfiger.

Many of the retailers and designers disavowed prior knowledge of the problematic fur and pulled offending items from the sales rack, swore off raccoon dog fur, and said they would support better labeling. Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, putting animals and consumers first, pledged to go fur-free. Fourteen companies who failed to take appropriate action were named by The HSUS in a legal petition filed with the Federal Trade Commission.

Taking action on Capitol Hill, U.S. Reps. Jim Moran (D-VA) and Michael Ferguson (R-NJ), backed by The HSUS, introduced the Dog and Cat Fur Prohibition Enforcement Act. The legislation aims to protect consumers and animals by outlawing the import of fur from raccoon dogs and closing the \$150 loophole so that all fur has to be labeled, regardless of value.

The HSUS investigation continues.

Fashionable and Cool: Spreading the Fur-Free Ethic

Our fight against fur during 2006 spanned the globe from China's squalid street markets to the fashion runways of New York. The HSUS sponsored the debut collection of Project Runway winner and fur-free designer Jay McCarroll at the close of September's Olympus Fashion Week, and we later held our second annual Cool vs. Cruel contest for college students studying to be tomorrow's clothing designers.

McCarroll, a dedicated animal activist and rising star in the fashion world, presented his new spring collection of colorful sportswear to an audience of more than 500, including celebrities, designers, and reporters. Teaming up with The HSUS marked the latest chapter of cooperation between the fashion industry and the world's largest humane organization.

The entire show was animal-friendly—from the fabrics to the makeup to the food. Even the goody bags were cruelty free and included a DVD of McCarroll speaking about the harsh realities of fur. "I've never even thought of fur as a material; it's a thing of the past," he said. "I want to eliminate fur from people's repertoire by educating them about the cruelty of the industry."

The Cool vs. Cruel contest inspires fashion students from The Art Institutes network of colleges to reinterpret a designer fur garment using faux fur and other alternative materials. Before the competition began, students at colleges from San Francisco to New York viewed HSUS multimedia presentations on fur farming and trapping. The 2006 winner received an internship with designer-to-the-stars Marc Bouwer, whose dresses have graced Angelina Jolie, Eva Longoria, and Tyra Banks.



Jay McCarroll. ©THE HSUS/FRANK LOFTUS



“The beautiful side of the fashion industry can be intoxicating and overpowering. It’s easy to put the cruelty of fur out of your mind when you’re

surrounded by beautiful people, stunning clothes, and lavish parties—not to mention the money. Our job is to cut through these distractions and make the cruelty issue top of mind for those in the industry.”

—Kristin Leppert, Manager, Fur-Free Campaign