

THE GRISLY TRUTH

A 10-year HSUS campaign is exposing the origins of fur sold to unsuspecting shoppers // by Karen E. Lange

The video is hard to watch: A raccoon dog is clubbed and hung upside down, still conscious, as a seller in a Chinese market yanks off her skin. Then the peeled animal—alive, moving, blinking—is thrown on a pile to die. The subject of a 2005 investigation, she was just one of millions of raccoon dogs killed every year in China for her fur.

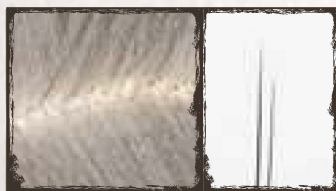
After the footage was released, The HSUS found raccoon dog fur at retailers across the nation, where trim still sells even as full-length coats go out of style. Advertising and labels misidentify it as faux or polyester or “Finni raccoon.” Some labels fail to mention it at all. None begin to tell the story. “There is suffering involved,” says Pierre Grzybowski, research and enforcement manager for the HSUS Fur-Free Campaign. “And death. And, at the retail end, deception.”

For 10 years, HSUS investigations have exposed this deceit. The organization has sued companies and petitioned the Federal Trade Commission to impose fines and jail time. It has also asked that the name “raccoon dog” appear on labels, rather than the incorrect “Asiatic raccoon.” The efforts are inspiring greater transparency and change in the industry. In 2010, with the support of The HSUS, Congress passed the Truth in Fur Labeling Act, which requires all animal fur trim, however small the amount, to be listed on the label. Many of the companies The HSUS has caught deceiving consumers have pledged to stop selling animal fur. And U.S. imports and sales of animal fur apparel have fallen by more than a third. In China, though, live skinning still goes on.

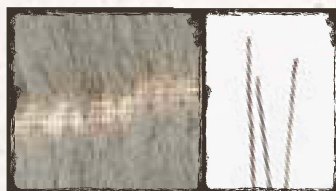
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How to tell real animal fur from faux

The roots and tips of fur may show whether it's faux or taken from an animal. Part the material and compare to the diagrams below. If you have a magnifying glass, examine the ends of individual strands.



Real: At the base of real fur, there will be an animal's skin. Strands may taper to points (if the fur is sheared, however, they will not).



Fake: Faux fur will emerge from a fabric backing—identified by its weave. Strands will usually have blunt ends.

How to read a manufacturer's label

Labels can be misleading. The fur industry calls raccoon dog “Asiatic raccoon,” a term the Federal Trade Commission has upheld despite HSUS challenges. The HSUS argues the fur should be identified as “raccoon dog.” That is the term scientists and other federal agencies use. Raccoon dogs are part of the dog, or canid, family and are raccoon-like only in appearance.



Cruel trade

China and Finland supply the majority of the world's raccoon dog fur. On certain websites, Chinese dealers offer strips of raccoon dog fur for as little as \$5 apiece. Many garments trimmed with the fur are exported to the U.S.



How they die

Around the age of 8 months, raccoon dogs die for their fur—their first-ever winter coats. In Finland, they're killed by anal electrocution. In China, people stun them by slamming their heads against the ground or clubbing them. Often they do not lose consciousness or otherwise soon regain it. They are awake as they are skinned and linger afterward.

How they're raised

Small and docile enough to be handled, raccoon dogs are raised on factory-style fur farms and confined from birth in rows of squat metal cages. Unable to engage in natural behaviors in these cramped, barren environments, they develop abnormal ones such as pacing.



How they live in the wild

Native to Asia, raccoon dogs now range over much of Europe. They live in pairs or small groups. Fathers bring food to their pregnant mates. Later, they guard the young so nursing mothers can forage for seeds, berries, insects, birds' eggs, rodents and frogs. The fur for which the animals suffer grows so thick that in winter they appear short-legged. In the summer, they look more like their actual canid relative, the fox.

DECADE OF CHANGE

2005: A Swiss Animal Protection/East International video shows raccoon dogs skinned alive in China.

2006: HSUS finds raccoon dog fur on Burlington Coat Factory and Macys.com garments advertised as faux fur.

2007: HSUS files first of many petitions with Federal Trade Commission over false advertising and mislabeling of fur.

2008: HSUS sues Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's/Bloomingdale's, Dillard's, Lord & Taylor and Andrew Marc for selling real animal fur as faux.

2010: Truth in Fur Labeling Act signed into law.

2013: FTC issues enforcement actions against Neiman Marcus, DrJays.com and Revolve clothing.

2015: Hugo Boss pledges to go fur-free, joining more than 300 other companies, including Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger and Overstock.com.