

# barroom topic: the pet fur trade

Scarlet investigates your collar and cuffs (and for once we're not talking about your body hair)

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The European Parliament is moving to ban cat and dog fur imports in an attempt to curb the slaughter of our furry friends in Eastern Asia. But a lot of people don't even realise there's such a trade. In fact, while many European countries have already banned the practice, in the UK it's perfectly legal to import and sell products made from cat and dog fur – it's only an offence to sell them under a misleading name.

## WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

An undercover investigation carried out by the Humane Society in 2000 revealed that the trade of cat and dog fur is thriving in Europe, due to direct demand from consumers. It's used in making our jackets, boots, gloves and even our hair accessories.

Around 40 million animals are bred for their furs every year worldwide and two million of these are cats and dogs – it takes up to 10 dogs and 24 cats to make a fur coat.

Activist groups have shown that at least some of the animals are kept in sub-standard conditions, killed in inhumane ways or even skinned alive. When the pelts have dried, they're often dyed to hide any evidence of what they once were. So what a consumer thinks is fox, rabbit or mink, may actually be Lassie or Tibbles.

## POLITICS AND PETA

In 2006, the European Commission drafted a regulation to block cat and dog imports to the country and introduce penalties for those found trading in the goods. But in June this year Heather Mills McCartney, who has been a leading campaigner in the fight against fur imports, commented that moves to impart the ban were too slow. The



Government has now said the ban will be in place by December 2008.


Surprisingly, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), don't support the ban. Anita Singh, PETA's Campaign Manager told *Scarlet*: "We believe the ban is useless. Exporters intentionally mislabel furs so the consumer is misled into thinking they're wearing an acceptable fur. It's naïve and unrealistic to think that the Government

will be able to intercept all furs coming into the country and undergo expensive testing to ensure it's not cat or dog fur. No fur is acceptable."

## DOUBLE STANDARDS?

Some argue that farming cats and dogs for their fur is no worse than farming cows for their hides. Though cowhide is seen as a by-product of the meat industry in the UK, the fact that cats and dogs are eaten in China – where the majority of the fur comes from – suggests it too could be seen as a by-product.

Similarly, our horror at the killing of what we see as pets is no different from how the Hindu culture could view the UK's consumption of meat. In India, cows are sacred, yet in the UK there's a multi-billion pound trade in cattle for meat and other products, such as your designer bags and shoes.

If the issue of cat and dog fur bothers you, the safest way to avoid it is not to buy any fur at all, whether it's labelled false or otherwise. If there's no demand for fur, there's no need for supply. 

**'What the consumer thinks is fox or rabbit may actually be Lassie or Tibbles'**