Not So Fashionable Furs

Our fur campaign's success and goals

It is with a great sense of pride and anticipation that I take this opportunity to announce the launching of our 1989 anti-fur campaign and to introduce our two newest spokeswomen, the outstanding actress Candice Bergen, star of TV's "Murphy Brown"; and the beautiful and talented actress Carol Ots. Ms. Bergen says, in her HSUS radio public-service announcement, "I do not want to participate in activities that sanction cruelty"; Ms. Ots is appearing on behalf of the HSUS in a magazine advertisement, "I'd be Ashamed to Wear Fur" (see page 2).

Together, the sentiments of these women epitomize the nature of the HSUS anti-fur campaign. This is a campaign whose basic approach is public education. Whether the furs are obtained from wild animals or from so-called ranched animals, brutality, cruelty, and a needless waste of animal life are unavoidable. We need to educate fur-wearsers and consumers that, because of this unmitigated cruelty, fur garments are no longer symbols of admiration and affluence but of shame and suffering. Fur is not chic, glamorous, cute, or enticing; it is simply cruel. The question, therefore, is whether a humane and caring society will tolerate the senseless suffering of innocent animals for the superficiality of not-so-fashionable furs.

Our critics have tried to obscure our message by calling us "terrorists" and labeling us a cult of "anti's." Yet the "Shame of Fur" campaign is the very antithesis of violence. Violence or antagonistic confrontation is, we believe, counter-productive to our message, for ours is a campaign of caring and compassion. We can neither advocate nor participate in violence and physical confrontation and seriously expect society to adopt the gentler values we espouse.

For many years, The HSUS and a wide variety of animal-advocacy organizations have opposed the leghold trap. Last year, the HSUS, as part of the program of The World Society for the Protection of Animals together with a host of other organizations, increased its efforts to expose the horror of trapping and to stress the cruelty of fur to the buyer. We have been rewarded with incredible success. Several fur ranches have gone out of business because there was no market for their products or they could not sell their products for a sufficient profit. Publicly traded fur companies lost millions of dollars as net revenues declined. And, in many areas of the country, the demand for fur skins decreased to such an extent that the trapping of wild animals was reduced by 75 to as much as 90 percent. This trend occurred in Canada as well. The bottom dropped out of the market for animal furs. While these declines cannot totally be attributed to our campaigns, the fact is that when people understand the cruelty and suffering inherent in fur coats, they will stop buying them, and when they do, the suffering will end.

I commend the courage, the compassion, and commitment of Candice Bergen, Carol Ots, television personality Bob Barker, and a host of other individuals. I commend, too, the national and international organizations that have committed their resources and their energies to end the horror of fur. I commend the thousands of local societies and the millions of members of animal-protection organizations whose efforts have been instrumental in exposing the tragedy of fur. All of us, together with a public that recognizes and rejects senseless animal cruelty, are bringing an end to the tragedy of fur fashion.

For The HSUS, the fur campaign has been the largest campaign in our history. Our success last year was a fantastic beginning, but only a beginning. We must now rebuild our efforts and sustain them, until the shame of fur and its cruelty ends!