

Fur-Free Friday: The Plight of Animals "Farmed For Fashion"

From [Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today / Animal Emotions](#)

November 25, 2020

An interview with Chris DeRose, founder of [Last Chance for Animals](#).



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Farming nonhuman animals (animals) for fashion is incredibly abusive, and the world knows far more about this practice because of recent headlines about the plight of farmed mink in Denmark [who were killed because of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic](#). They are not [the only fur-bearing animal beings who are raised solely to clothe humans and who suffer from the horrific ways in which they're mistreated](#). Since April 2020, there have been outbreaks of [COVID-19](#) on mink farms in seven countries, and over 200 people in Europe have become sick with mink-related strains of the illness. Also, as *New Scientist* writer Graham Lawton warns, [mink could be just the start and this is bad news for all involved](#).¹ [Who \(not what\) we choose to wear is an ethical choice, and we don't have to wear animals' skins. Globally, many companies are going fur-free](#), but there's still a lot of work to do to end fur-farming.² Friday November 27 is [Fur-Free Friday](#) and I'm pleased to offer this interview with Chris DeRose, founder of Last Chance for Animals (LCA) and recipient of the 1997 Courage of [Conscience](#) International Peace Award, about this event.³

Why did you establish Last Chance for Animals?

As a child, I grew up without a father and my mom suffered from a long-term illness, which resulted in her having to place me in an orphanage three times before I turned nine years old. Each time she left me in the care of an orphanage, I never knew if she'd be back for me. Now fast-forward to the late 1970s when I was in acting school in Hollywood. One afternoon, a stray dog walked off the street and into the classroom. He sat at my feet, knowing that I could take care of him. I took that dog home, fed him, and took him to an animal shelter the next day since I was unable to care for a pet long-term. As I tried to walk away, I recognized the same look of pain and desperation in the dog's eyes that I felt when my mother left me at the orphanage. It was at that moment I realized that animals have feelings—they are sentient beings like us.

That dog changed my life. He was the spark that began my four-decade-long journey toward fighting for the rights of animals.

How does your organization tie in with your background and general areas of interest?

My background in performing has enabled me to cultivate meaningful relationships with celebrities who are animal activists in their own right. Our celebrity spokespersons are willing to sacrifice their time and resources across the globe to support our efforts.

In the earlier days of the Organization, we engaged in far more “direct action” efforts where we would gain entry to research facilities, factory farms, puppy mills, and other locations where animals were suffering. These actions often required forcible entry, all but ensuring that law enforcement would become involved. Our actions were not for the faint-of-heart. As a young actor, one often has a higher risk tolerance—you take on roles that challenge you to become a stronger person. That tolerance served me well when we planned direct action and broke into research facilities to rescue monkeys, dogs, and other animals that were disfigured in the name of science. Law enforcement may have gotten involved, we may have been arrested, but we knew that we were ultimately doing the right thing.

What is the composition of your membership?

Many people love animals and the thought of animal abuse disgusts them. Among these concerned citizens are those who wish to do more than talk about animal rights – they want to see change come about. They look at abused and exploited livestock in factory farms, poached elephants in Africa, disfigured monkeys in research facilities, and abandoned dogs and cats in shelters and they feel more than a passing sympathy - they are outraged and demand real action. This level of concern knows no [gender](#), age nor [ethnicity](#), therefore, LCA’s membership is a broad swath of concerned Americans. We are supported by 70-year-old grandmothers in New York City, 18-year-old students from Toledo Ohio, forty-something fathers in Austin Texas, and more.

Please tell us more about Fur Free Friday. Why did you organize it, what's it all about, and what do you hope to accomplish by calling [attention](#) to the horrific trade in furs?

Sporadic fur protests against department stores were carried out in the early 1980s, but none employed coordinated campaigns or strategies that illustrated the cruelties of the fur industry. As a result, they largely failed to strike a responsive chord among consumers.

In 1985, two activist groups, Trans Species Unlimited (TSU) and the Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT), coordinated the first, non-violent civil disobedience activities protesting fur at Macy’s in New York and in Sacramento, California. Although the protests were non-violent, there were several dozen arrests.

The following year, TSU repeated the activities on the Friday after Thanksgiving, widely known as the busiest shopping day of the year, and "Fur-Free Friday" was officially created. Fur-Free Friday provides grassroots activists with an opportunity to participate in coordinated non-violent direct-action campaigns, similar to the sit-ins of the civil rights movement.

Fur sales dipped in the late '80s and early '90s as Fur-Free Friday heightened awareness about the cruelties of the fur trade. However, recent fashion trends have once again steadily increased the consumption of fur. LCA has been diligent in our efforts to reach influential designers and dissuade them from using fur in their collections. To date, LCA has recognized Versace, Prada, Jimmy Choo, Burberry, Coach, and Michael Kors for their fur-free commitments. Fur-Free Friday is one of the few nationally recognized days in the animal rights movement and involves numerous animal activist groups nationwide. Since 1986, LCA has been demonstrating in Beverly Hills, California, by marching down Rodeo Drive to Neiman Marcus and educating retailers and consumers about the horrors of the fur trade, and encouraging them to seek out alternatives to fur. Currently, LCA and a coalition of activists sponsor Fur-Free Friday at three L.A. area locations — Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, and Glendale — and support Fur-Free Friday events across the United States.

How does your organization and special day Fur Free Friday day differ from others that are concerned with some of the same general areas?

Our approach to Fur Free Friday is to regularly reassess our strategies and tactics toward the elimination of fur as an article of clothing. The annual demonstration in November is of vital importance, but we see it as an annual culmination of our almost daily efforts. I mentioned earlier that high-profile designers have renounced fur from their collections, the road to those renunciations was long and involved considerable effort from activists and grassroots pressure from our membership and more.

What are some of your current projects?

We have embarked on a five-year plan to halt the dog meat trade in South Korea. While China has officially recognized dogs as [pets](#), South Korea continues to drag their feet in removing dogs from the list of the country's officially-recognized livestock. It's no secret that animals can carry harmful germs that can spread to people. Wild animal markets, farmed and caged animals—especially ones who are subjected to [stress](#), unnatural [nutrition](#), and poor sanitation—are a breeding ground for zoonotic diseases.

We also are quite active in the Virunga National Park where we support park rangers and their efforts to preserve their mountain gorilla populations and a plethora of other wildlife. Virunga is no stranger to violence with more than 220 park rangers killed in recent decades. LCA began supporting the rangers and trackers responsible for protecting the mountain gorillas in Uganda and Rwanda in 2006 by supplying essential equipment. Since 2016, LCA has been actively supporting the AirWing of Virunga National Park, beginning with a donated Cessna 206.

Additionally, we conduct investigations into allegations of abuse on factory farms and combat the Agriculture-Gag laws that unconstitutionally ban us from releasing our investigatory findings. These so-called Ag-Gag laws appear in various agricultural states in the US and Canada and often dictate that employees and investigators must provide advance notice of their intentions before actually recording any infraction. Additionally, the Bill imposes fines on persons who enter a property without consent.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell readers?

LCA has always believed that animals are highly sentient creatures who exist for their own reasons independent of their service to humans; they should not be made to suffer for the latter. For many Americans, they realize this simple truth when they look into their pet's eyes or see a bird flying freely in their backyards. We oppose the use of animals in food and clothing production, scientific experimentation, and entertainment and instead promote a cruelty-free lifestyle and the ascription of rights to non-human beings.