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- [Home](#)
- [> News](#)
- [> UK](#)
- [> This Britain](#)

Madonna & the curse of chinchilla: What she should know about *that* coat

When she stepped outside to face the paparazzi in London last week, the singer might have known she was walking into a storm of protest about her £35,000 chinchilla coat. But could she have known the suffering that went into keeping her warm? We think she should be told, says Jonathan Owen

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Stepping out in London's Mayfair last week, Madonna had no reason to know she was about to walk into a new scandal. Still reeling from the row over her adoption of a baby boy from Africa, the 48-year-old, who started her career as the self-styled Material Girl of pop, was pictured smiling and happy as she left a restaurant with her husband, film producer Guy Ritchie.

But trouble was lurking. Pictures of her in a £35,000 chinchilla fur coat were flashed to newspapers and magazines around the world, provoking a storm of protest. Now animal campaigners are calling for a boycott of her music.

The coat - and thousands like it - represents the end product of a macabre trade. More than 40 animals were killed to make the latest addition to Madonna's wardrobe, but hundreds of thousands are bred on factory-style farms, then killed by strangulation or electrocution, campaigners claim.

"Madonna is showing herself up to be shallow and selfish and lacking in all compassion which, particularly in this season of goodwill, is regrettable," said Mark Glover from Respect for Animals. "The message she's sending out to her fans is contemptible and people should stop buying her albums until she stops wearing fur."

Anita Singh of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) said: "It is ironic that just weeks after struggling to prove she has a heart, adopting a child from Malawi, she comes out in support of one of the most violent industries on the planet. This is an industry responsible for bludgeoning, strangling, gassing and electrocuting small, defenceless animals for the sake of fashion.

"It is unfortunate for the millions of defenceless animals trapped on fur farms that have to suffer the horrific consequences for her vanity and that of others like her."

Chinchillas are shy, intelligent animals that can live for up to 15 years in the wild and are fast becoming one of Britain's best-loved pets. Fur farming has been banned in Britain since 2003, after heavy anti-fur campaigns in the Nineties, but chinchilla furs are still imported.

Mr Glover added: "The hypocrisy is perverse that, while the means of production is illegal, people are still able to buy and

