

The world's second largest commercial wildlife slaughter is going on right now, in Australia.* There, 6 million kangaroos will be shot this year for the burgeoning athletic-shoe industry under the pretext of "wildlife management."

The HSUS seeks to end the mass commercial exploitation of all wildlife, regardless of whether the species involved is in danger of extinction yet or not. For that reason, we have joined Greenpeace, the International Wildlife Coalition, and other concerned organizations working to stop the Australian kangaroo slaughter.

The Australian government set this year's legal quota at 3.7 million animals, but an additional 1 million kangaroos will be legally killed for non-commercial use. The illegal kill is undetermined, though it has been estimated to be greater than the legal quota. Therefore, although the government claims it will "limit" the kill to 3.7 million animals, more than 6 million kangaroos are likely to be slaughtered.

Kangaroos are killed for their skin, which is considered softer and sturdier than

cow hide. It is used primarily for athletic shoes, as well as for dress shoes, boots, purses, wallets, belts, and golf bags. Kangaroo fur is used for stuffed koala toys, which, along with kangaroo-paw bottle openers and other novelties, are sold to tourists. The United States is the world's largest importer of finished kangaroo products, although they compose less than 2 percent of all leather imported annually and less than 1 percent of all leather sold in this country. But few suburban shopping malls

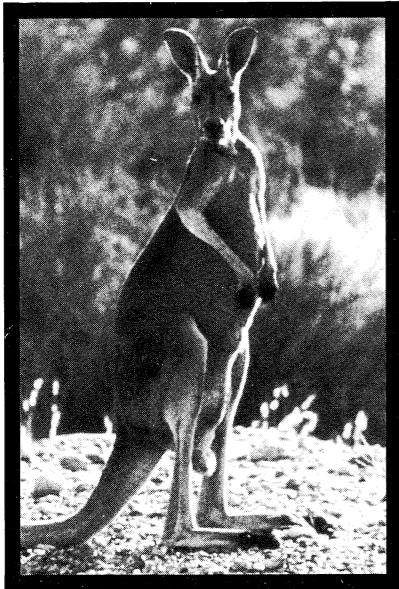
in America are without kangaroo-leather shoes.

This year, several Australian states lifted their bans on the human consumption of kangaroo meat, creating additional incentive for economic exploitation of the animals. This is also potentially dangerous to humans, since kangaroo meat often carries salmonella, tuberculosis, tapeworm cysts, toxoplasmosis, and hydatid diseases.

Eight of the forty-eight kangaroo species are already extinct, many as a result

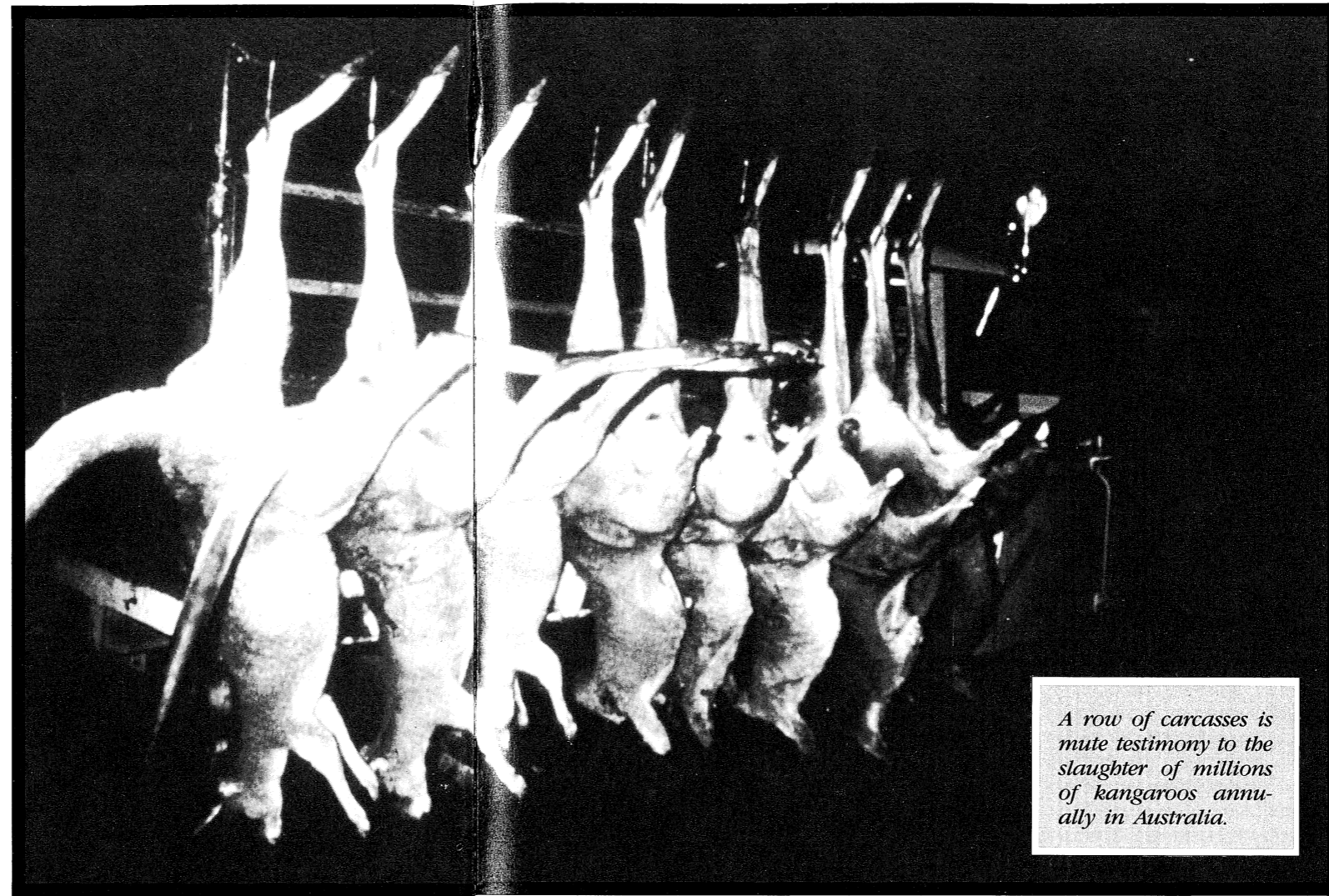
of human over-exploitation. Twenty-four more species are listed as endangered, threatened, or rare by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA), or the International Red Data Book. These include

the three most plentiful and heavily exploited species, the red, the eastern grey, and the western grey, listed as threatened by the ESA. Unfortunately, a special rule exists in the ESA regulations that exempts kangaroos from the ban on commercial trade in threatened species products. (The HSUS opposes this special rule.)



A red kangaroo male is undisturbed in Sturt National Park.

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A row of carcasses is mute testimony to the slaughter of millions of kangaroos annually in Australia.

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The last published population figures for the red, eastern grey, and western grey kangaroo estimated that there were 10 to 12 million in 1984. The Australian government asserts that the present population is 15 million for all kangaroo species. Just nine years ago, it claimed there were as many as 60 million kangaroos. In fact, there are

no accurate statistics for the present population, which is particularly alarming given the high rate of kill. The substantial decline in estimates seems to indicate that the kangaroo population is at risk. Kangaroos are now outnumbered by sheep by more than ten to one.

Although population surveys have been

attempted for the three primary species, the Australian government establishes kill quotas for the euro and whiptail kangaroo, too. Only these five species are authorized for export. An additional five species may be legally killed for the domestic market. However, the Australian government complains that it is too difficult to police the hunting since it takes place at night in the rugged and unpopulated outback. Thus, there is virtually no control over which animals are shot, and many shooters cannot even distinguish among different species. A Greenpeace study of Italian kangaroo imports found evidence of trade in skins of rare or endangered kangaroos.

The vast majority of kangaroos are killed using inhumane methods. Hunters use powerful spotlights to stun the kangaroos momentarily; the animals are then shot with automatic weapons. Joeys, young kangaroos, are of no economic value and are not considered to be worth the cost of a bullet. They are often killed by being thrown against a tree or car bumper or kicked in the head. Non-professional, weekend shooters often employ even crueler killing techniques, running the animals down in trucks, poisoning their water holes, snaring them, or shooting them from helicopters. Ninety percent of commercial kangaroo hunters are such weekend shooters. There have been many documented incidents of animals skinned alive, impaled on stakes, and beaten to death.

The Australian government supports the kangaroo industry as "an important management tool." It claims that there are too many kangaroos and that they have become pests, competing with livestock and damaging crops. This has been openly contradicted by the Queensland state government, which stated in its kangaroo-management program: "It is important to recognise that, while the kangaroo industry was originally a response to the pest problem caused by the animals,

AUSTRALIA'S KANGAROO SLAUGHTER

Millions of animals die for shoes and novelties

it has come to exist in its own right as the user of a valuable natural resource.”

There have been no scientific studies to support the claim of competition for food between kangaroos and livestock species. In fact, several studies have shown that, while there is potential for overlap in their diets, kangaroos and sheep prefer different vegetation, even under drought conditions. Australian livestock populations have decreased by about 25 percent in recent years, while kangaroo quotas increased by 242 percent. Clearly, if competition between kangaroos and livestock were the true reason for slaughtering kangaroos, kill quotas would have decreased with the livestock populations.

The numbers of kangaroos killed is subjectively determined by the wildlife ranger and the farmer. Their incentive is commercial, not biological. If biological control were really the paramount issue, many non-lethal management alternatives would be utilized, including protective fencing (with a slanted top edge to prevent the kangaroo from jumping over), control of reproduction, purchase of marginal farmlands where kangaroo populations are dense, and establishment of more parks and reserves. None of these has even been considered by the Australian government, which continues to yield to pressure from the kangaroo industry for quotas, killing, and more quotas.

Australian farmers, grazers, and govern-

ment officials defend quotas by observing that “kangaroos breed like rabbits” and that their populations are not at risk from commercial exploitation. This is simply not true. Kangaroo reproduction varies with climate. In a *good* year, only 56 percent of the young reach sexual maturity. Under drought conditions, sexual maturity is delayed, all breeding activity ceases, and there is 100 percent mortality of young. In the past century in Australia, only twenty-two years were free of drought. A female kangaroo produces two young every three years under good conditions and *none* during drought.

For fifteen million years, kangaroos have co-evolved with their ecosystem. Like all wild animals, they are subject to predation by other animals, such as dingos and foxes; disease, starvation, and drought also take their toll. These factors, coupled with the low rate of reproduction, control the kangaroo population at a level compatible with the carrying capacity of the habitat. Neil Shepard, a biologist who studied kangaroos for many years, states, “Culling of kangaroos is not an ecological necessity in national parks. The system is quite capable of managing itself.”

The kill quotas are unnecessary and ineffective management tools for several reasons. First, they are established arbitrarily. The Australian government claims to set quotas based on population statistics. However, surveys have never been attempted

for two of the species for which quotas are set, the whiptails and the euros. Aerial surveys are used by the government for the other three species, but this method was rejected as inaccurate by the Queensland state government (which sets the highest quota), and it is impossible to distinguish between the eastern grey and western grey in aerial surveys, in any case. Quotas have continued to increase greatly despite no corresponding increase in populations.

Second, the tagging and quota system does not limit the number of kangaroos actually slaughtered. It is designed to limit the number of skins which enter the commercial market, not the number of animals killed.

Third, kangaroo quotas are not an effective means of population control. Natural population controls depend on the present density of the animals and their rate of reproduction. Such factors fluctuate with natural fluctuations in the population. Kangaroo quotas, however, are set artificially. They are determined from inaccurate statistics from the previous year or by simple guesswork and, thus, are not related to the actual size of the population, reproductive rates, or age demographics.

Ironically, kangaroos, as indigenous wildlife, are declared “protected” by the Australian government. According to Peter Ranlinson, an Australian expert, such design-

ation is virtually meaningless, since there is no national management program or national control of the state management systems. Each state is expected to submit a management plan to the Australian government for approval. None of these plans is consistent with the guidelines suggested by the central government, yet each one is approved. The Australian government has consistently failed to exert control over the state management programs, the kangaroo finishing plants, or the kangaroo export market, all of which encourage the illegal kill. Regulations that do exist are rarely or weakly enforced. The kangaroo industry, worth a relatively small \$10–15 million a year, seems to have more control over the government than the government has over it.

Prior to European colonization about 200 years ago, there was no problem with kangaroo overpopulation in Australia. If there is a problem now, it is the result of human activities and must be addressed by wise and humane stewardship of the land. The commercial slaughter of kangaroos as “pests” is not a solution.

Commercializing wildlife is a dangerous and destructive practice. The African elephant, the rhinoceros, the passenger pigeon, and the American bison stand as reminders that *no* species is ever safe from extinction so long as humans believe it is more valuable dead than alive. Extinction is only one

of the dangers. Modern day flora and fauna are the products of millions of years of natural selection and co-evolution. Commercial harvesting alters this process by removing the largest, healthiest members of a population. This substitutes “artificial selection” for natural selection and compromises the “wild” status of the animal. The resulting changes in inter- and intra-species demographics may de-stabilize the population, normally kept in delicate balance with its environment. The effects this will have on the species being exploited, its fitness, the surrounding species, and the ecosystem cannot be estimated or ignored.

If the rampant exploitation of the kangaroo is allowed to continue, the kangaroo, its neighboring species, and its habitat will be further degraded.

Loss of the kangaroo may also lead to increased destruction of the land. Sheep, cattle, and pigs are not native to Australia and are not well adapted to its landscape and environment. Extensive grazing by these hard-hooved animals, along with the spread of their manure, which is difficult for native micro-organisms to break down, has caused rapid desertification and destruction of land. Kangaroos are soft-footed animals uniquely adapted to Australian conditions. They help prevent desertification by spreading the seeds of native plants and by producing manure that is easily broken down and that fertilizes the soil.

They do not eat the vegetation as sheep do, leaving more growth in place. Further depletion of kangaroo populations will lead to an increase in erosion and environmental degradation and deplete other wildlife species as well if it results in an increase in use by domestic livestock.

As the largest importer of kangaroo products, the United States provides a huge incentive for the continued slaughter of kangaroos.

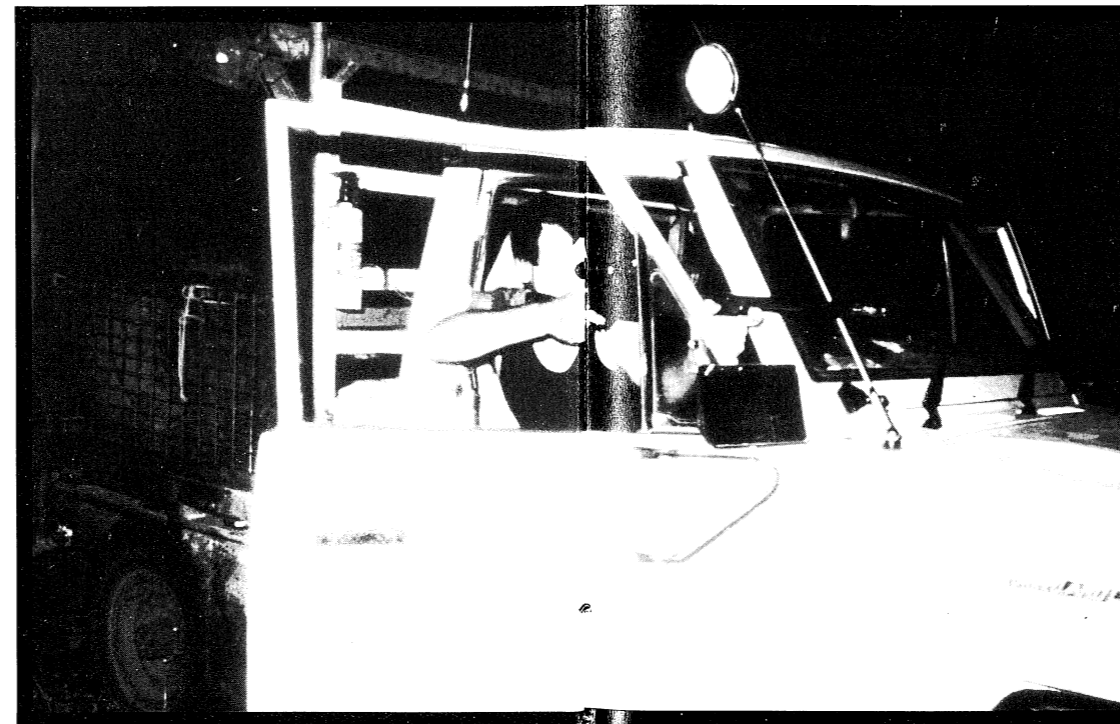
Without the international market in kangaroo products, the price of kangaroo skins would plummet. Shooters already make very little profit, and if the value of kangaroo skins were to fall, they would not make enough money to make it worth their while to kill kangaroos.

Kangaroos, like elephants, are indigenous to only one continent of the world. Many individuals within these far-away countries are working hard to protect and preserve their unique animals—our shared wildlife heritage. But they are fighting a losing battle so long as the rest of the world, separated from the daily slaughter by thousands of miles, continues to fund their decimation and destruction. ■

Dr. Susan Lieberman is associate director of wildlife and environment for The HSUS. Natasha Minsker is a student at Cornell University and was a summer intern at The HSUS.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Rep. Robert Mrazek has introduced the Kangaroo Protection Bill (H.R. 1356) to ban all kangaroo-product imports. Write your representative and ask him/her to co-sponsor this excellent bill. Please also ask your representative to push for hearings on this vital issue. Write to: Hon. _____, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.
- Don't purchase *any* products containing kangaroo leather.
- Ask the U.S. Department of Interior to rescind the Special Rule on kangaroo imports (17.40a). Please write to: The Hon. Manuel Lujan, Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Department of the Interior, 18th and C Streets, NW, Washington, DC 20240.
- Write the Australian embassy of your opposition to the commercial kangaroo slaughter: Australian Embassy, 1601 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036. ■



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Left, a professional kangaroo killer takes aim at night in New South Wales, Australia. Above, the skinned carcass of a kangaroo is all that remains after the hide has been taken.