



The age of extinction

'Ridiculous' ban on exotic animal skins at London fashion week criticised by experts

Trade can help protect species – and real skins are often more sustainable than synthetic alternatives, say conservationists

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Conservation experts have criticised a decision by London fashion week to ban exotic animal skins from its 2025 shows as “ridiculous”, warning that it is ill-informed and could harm the protection of many snakes, crocodiles and reptile species.

Last month, the British Fashion Council's deputy director for policy and engagement, David Leigh-Pemberton, told parliament that next year's fashion shows would prohibit the use of skins from alligators, snakes and other animals. In a statement, the council said the ban was part of a wider range of standards to promote sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

But scientific experts from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one of the world's leading conservation bodies, have condemned the decision, saying exotic skins are often far more sustainable choices than leather and synthetic materials. They say a ban would undermine economic incentives for communities to conserve species – warning that claims the decision was made for sustainability reasons were “wrong”.

Luxury bags made from exotic skins can sell for tens of thousands of pounds, with some of the money going to the conservation of the species from which they are made.

Daniel Natusch, chair of the IUCN snake specialist group, questioned the basis of the decision. He pointed to examples of community groups in Papua New Guinea and along the Zambezi River that had developed sustainable harvesting systems for exotic skins that benefited communities and wildlife overall.



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▲ Shoes at the Dries van Noten menswear show at Paris fashion week in 2020. Photograph: Peter White/Getty Images

“If you don't like using animals to produce a skin or whatever it may be, that's fine. But don't tell the world that it's because you care about sustainability. All of the life cycle analysis has been done. There is not a single raw material that we know of, apart from pineapple leather, that is more sustainable than exotic skin, particularly python. It's ridiculous. If designers were serious and informed themselves, we'd all be wearing snakeskin underpants,” he said.

In making the decision, London become the first of the “big four” fashion weeks – Paris, Milan, New York and London – to ban exotic skins. It attracted praise from animal rights campaigners who said their use was unnecessary and unethical. Fur has previously been banned from the event.

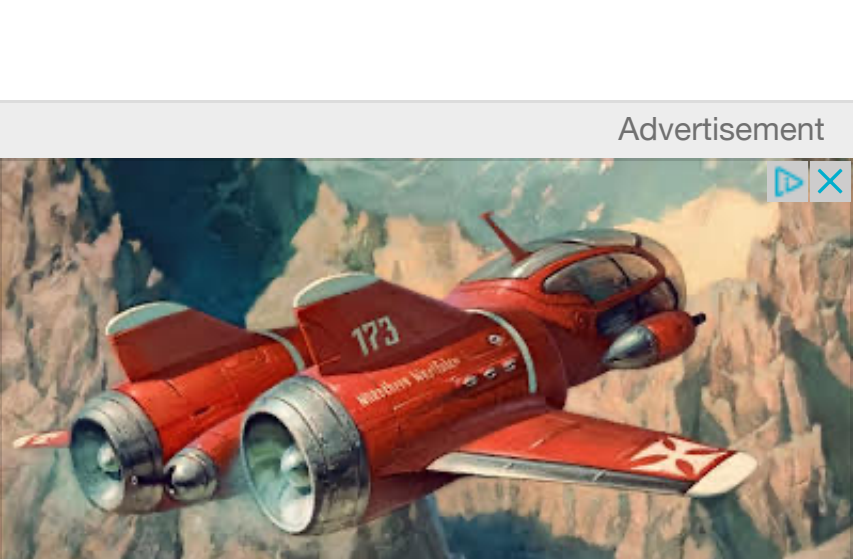
Dr Dilys Roe, chair of IUCN's sustainable use and livelihoods specialist group, said London fashion week organisers were misguided.

“There is an assumption that it's unethical because it's wild. If they are concerned about animal welfare, what's the difference with a domestic animal? The snakes are not endangered. For some species, such as crocodiles, the fact that people can get money for collecting eggs ... creates an incentive to protect them,” she said.

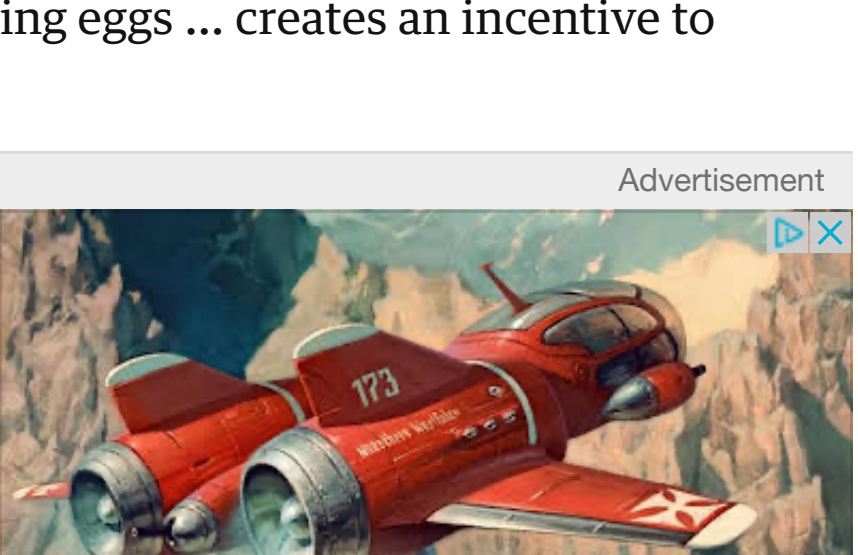
“From an overall sustainability perspective, it's a false assumption that fake fur, fake skin is somehow better. If you look at what goes into them, you've still got the carbon emissions and chemicals associated with that. I think there is a kneejerk reaction.

“If you buy a Hermès crocodile skin handbag, you're not going to buy it and chuck it in a landfill. The opposite to all this is fast fashion,” she said.

The British Fashion Council did not respond to a request for comment.



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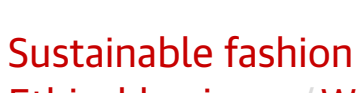
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