

March 2009 topic: The Canadian Seal Hunt

When I was nine years-old, I bought a poster at a school book fair of a baby harp seal pup. With its big black eyes and glorious, fluffy white coat, that seal pup lying on its ice floe stared at me from my bedroom wall for well over a decade, and it truly changed my life. I began reading all I could find about harp seals and discovered that each March, when the pups are only a few weeks old, these beautiful creatures are slaughtered with clubs and guns off the coast of Canada—just so people can feel the texture and luxury of that snow white fur around their own skin. It all seemed so terribly wrong.



Before that time, I didn't think much about animal welfare; I knew it was morally wrong when an animal was mistreated or neglected, and I would tell my parents or a teacher if someone left their dog tied to a tree all day or if someone threw pebbles at an injured bird. Taking action was easier when it was close to home, and looking at the map, I had no idea how a kid could do something about the inhumanities taking place as far away as Canada. But I could not let the massacre of these animals go ignored, so I began to write—first to several animal welfare organizations, and then as part of a letter-writing campaign to politicians in the U.S. and Canada asking for their help to stop the annual hunt. Like many others, I spread the word of the horrors whenever I had the opportunity.

In 1972, the U.S. enacted the Marine Mammal Protection Act, protecting all marine mammals, including a ban on the import and sale of seal fur. There has been much publicity throughout the years by the media and animal welfare organizations about the horrors of the annual hunt, resulting in a decrease in international demand for the furs. Sadly, however, some countries have been slow to consider a ban on seal fur, and the Canadian seal hunt continues, with 275,000 baby harp seals to be killed this year alone.

But times are finally changing. With all the years of education campaigns, many people today are aware of the inhumanities that occur on the Canadian ice floes and believe that killing harp seal pups is unethical. The European Union is finally considering a ban on seal products. Once the worldwide demand for seal products disappears, there will be no money to be made by killing the seals, and the hunt will end. We can speak out to help our fellow creatures who are mistreated, and respect animals not only near to our homes but also farther away.

Three things you can do to help:

- Write to elected officials asking them to help support an end to the killing of harp seal pups. Also, you can write polite but passionate letters to the Prime Minister in Canada asking him to put an end to the brutal slaughter.
- You can read more about harp seals and help spread word of their plight to family and friends and at school by teaching what you've learned, through conversation, essays, and art.
- Contact local TV and radio stations and newspapers alerting them to the annual seal hunt and explaining your concern as well as your hopes that the media will continue to educate the public about the hunt.

For more information on the Canadian Seal Hunt, visit the links below:

Allied Whale: [click here](#)

Humane Society International: [click here](#)

IFAW: [click here](#)

Marine Mammal Protection Act: [click here](#)

New England Aquarium: [click here](#)

photo of harp seal courtesy of National Geographic