

# Index of Commonly Used

## Fur Types

Several animal furs were used in the Belgian fur industry. These animals and their coats were categorized in a certain manner, which could influence their worth. Based on several Belgian catalogues, the most used furs were from the caracul sheep, several types of martens, otters, weasels, skunks, furrets, hermine, mink, foxes, wolves, chinchillas, beavers, the Siberian squirrel, muskrats, and all sorts of felines (including the domesticated cat!). The following section will focus on how these animals were classified and described, as well as the characteristics and uses of their furs.

### 1. Caracul sheep

This type of curly, black fur comes from the caracul lamb, a sheep that originates from Persia, but was later also kept in Afghanistan and southern West-Africa.

A difference was made between what is called “Breitschwanz” and “Persianer”. The unborn, or premature, lamb was called “Breitschwanz”, whilst “Persianer” lambs were those that were five to fifteen days old before being killed. These furs are usually black, but can also be brown or gray.

These furs were used to make all kinds of coats. The price of items made from these furs could vary depending on their quality.

### 2. The marten: the Mustelidae family

These predators come from all corners of the world. Their bodies are long, with short paws, short, rounded ears and dark, thick fur coats. The classification of this animal family changed in the past century; we will use the current classification and mention the differences. Otters, weasels, martens, hermine, mink etc. are all part of this family. Skunks were once considered part of the Mustelidae, but after DNA analysis it was discovered they form another family.

#### 2.1. Subfamily Lutrinae (otters)

Alaskan, Canadian and Virginian otters were considered as the most valuable, whilst those from Norway or Sweden were seen as the best European otters.

The hairs on the back-side tend to be dark brown to black, while those on the stomach tend to be soft brown-grayish. The clothes that are made with otter furs tend to be coats, hats, manchons etc.

Some of the otters used in the fur industry are the following. First, there is the otter (*Lutra lutra*) which was originally classified as the *Lutra vulgaris*. This otter lived in the Asian and European rivers and lakes. A second type, the

Northern American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), also called the Canadian otter (Loutre du Canada), is considered to have darker and softer hairs than the previously mentioned otter. In the *Enhydra* genus, we can find the sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*), which was previously classified as the *Lutra marina*. This otter can grow to 150 centimeters and tends to be of a dark brown colour. The black variant is considered as more valuable, because of its rarity.

## 2.2. Subfamily Guloninae (martens)

This family was previously called the Martinae. The following martens are used the most by the fur industry.

The European pine marten, called boommarter or edelmarter in Dutch, is currently classified as *Martes martes* – previously also as *Mustela martes*. Its brown fur is considered to be very valuable; especially the darkest coats, as they come from the northern European countries.

The stone marten or fouine (*Martes fouina*, previously classified as *Mustela fouina*) looks a lot like the pine marten and lives in the same regions. Compared to the pine marten, the stone marten has a lighter colour. Due to this animal having a less fine fur than the pine marten's, its value is lesser. Sometimes, their furs were prepared and polished to look like the pine marten.

The sable, also known as zibeline, is currently classified as the *Martes zibellina*. Previously,

this marten was called the *Mustela zibellina*. This smaller animal's hair is longer, shinier and finer than the pine and stone martens'. Its colour is brown to black, darkening in the winter. The sable from the Jenisej, a Siberian river, was the most sought after. However, the albino sable was even more valuable, due to its rarity.

These animals were killed in the winter for their darker and longer fur coats and used for coats, stoles and colliers. Due to its coat being soft, lustrous and a beautiful golden brown colour, this animal was in high demand.

The fisher, also known as pekan, Canadian marten or vismarter in Dutch, belongs to the Pekanian genus. Currently classified as the *Pekania pennanti*, its Latin name used to be *Mustela Canadensis* and *Mustela pennanti*. It lives at the Canadian Great Slave Lake and the Alaskan Great Bear Lake. Its dark coat was very sought after and considered to be very valuable.

## 2.3. Subfamily Mustelinae (weasels, ferrets, and mink)

This subfamily previously also contained several types of martens, which is why they were called *Mustela*. DNA-analysis proved that there are too many differences between the animals, which resulted in the subfamily being split in two.

The *Mustela* genus contains several types of weasels, such as the Indonesian mountain weasel, also known as the Javaanse wezel in

Dutch or marte de Java in French. This animal is classified as the *Mustela lutreolina* and looks like the sable. Despite them looking alike, the Indonesian mountain weasel is less valued than the sable.

The weasel, or belette in French, is currently called *Mustela nivalis* – it used to be called *Putorius gale*, as it was considered to be a kind of skunk. Its back has a reddish coat, whilst the stomach is white. In northern countries, the weasel's coat becomes (partly) white. Except for the Siberian weasel, these furs are not seen as valuable. Their furs were sometimes dyed dark brown and called "martre lustrée", to drive up prices.

Ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*) were also occasionally used for their furs.

The hermine (*Mustela erminea*) used to be classified as *Putorius herminea*. Originally from Armenia, the animal also migrated to the northern regions. Its summer fur looks like that of the weasel's, but turns white during winter, with the tip of the tail staying black. The hermine's winter coat is very rare and considered to be among the most beautiful. However, its fur could also be imitated using white rabbit fur, while the black tail tips could be mimicked with the skin of the Lombardian lamb.

Previously called *Mustela vison*, the European mink, Europese nerts in Dutch, vison d'Europe in French, is known as *Mustela lutreola*. Its soft dark fur was highly sought after and made into manchons, étoles, borders for

clothes etc. It looks a lot like the American mink, although the American mink does not tend to have white fur above its lips.

Unexpectedly, the American mink is placed in a different genus than the European mink's: the *Neogale* genus. Thus, its Latin name is *Neogale vison*. In the past, it was also classified as *Mustela lutrecephala*. Its colour ranges from chocolate brown to black. It is taller than the European mink.

### 3. The skunk

Since a DNA-analysis separated the skunk from the Mustelidae family (the marten), it became part of the Mephitidae family, along with the stink badger.

In French also known as the putois commun or putois fétide (*Putorius communis*), its name is derived from the strong smell it spreads to deter predators. The skunks' fur is dark brown to black, with yellowish sides; its stomach is a darker colour than its back. Compared to the marten, its fur coat is less sought after.

In France, this fur was sometimes dyed as black and brown and sold as "vison" or "marte du Poitou", to drive up the prices.

### 4. The Canidae family

#### 4.1. The fox

The *Vulpes* genus is a part of the Canidae, the canines and comprises several types of foxes. In the fur industry, the different fox furs were

very popular. The following three types are considered as the most important.

The red or common fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) was previously known as *Vulpes vulgaris*. Its albino variant (*Vulpes alba*), which mostly lives in Canada and Siberia, is more valued.

The silver fox, which is also known as the black fox, previously described as *vulpes argentata*, is a silver-coloured mutant from the red fox, mostly bred in northern countries.

This colour was seldom found in the wild. Its expensive fur is very fine. The colour is black, mixed with white hairs, and more sought after than the blue fox. When the colour is black mixed with yellow instead of white hairs, the furs are considered lesser in value.

Also known as *renard bleu* or *renard isatis* in French, the arctic fox (*Vulpes lagopus*) is sometimes placed in the *Alopex* subgenus. As its name implies, this fox lives in the arctic. Its long coat is very soft and thick; it was very expensive. The blue fox, a variant of the arctic fox, has a grayish brown colour that becomes bluish during the winter.

Foxes were mostly worn as coats, stoles, manchons etc.

## 4.2. The wolf

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is, like the fox, a part of the *Canidae* family. Its back fur is a yellowish red, mixed with black hairs, while the stomach is a yellowish white. However, the wolf's colour differs depending on where he lives: in northern regions it is whitish,

whilst his fur in the south tends to be black and less long.

The Siberian furs were considered to be the pretties: they tend to be a silver white and are very soft to the touch.

Wolf coats from Russia, Sweden, Poland and other northern countries were used for clothes, manchons, blankets and carpets.

## 5. Rodents

### 5.1. The chinchilla

Chinchilla is a rodent genus from the *Chinchillinae* subfamily (chinchillas and viscachas), which is a part of the greater *Chinchillidae* family. These rodents live in Chili and Peru – the southern Andes. Though their furs are very small and need to be used in great quantities to make garments, it is very fine, soft and warm. This genus comprises two species: the *Chinchilla chinchilla* or short-tailed chinchilla – also known as *koningschinchilla* in Dutch or *chinchilla ordinaire* in French – and the *Chinchilla laniger*. The *Chinchilla chinchilla*, or short-tailed chinchilla, was previously called *Callomys vulgaris*. Its coat has a silver colour and it ranges from light to dark gray; its stomach and paws are white. The chinchilla's fur is used to make manchons, boas, fillings and borders of clothes. Due to the animal being small and lots of its fur needing to be used to make one garment, the chinchilla's fur is very expensive.

The second chinchilla species, the chinchilla laniger, is also called the long-tailed chinchilla or chinchilla laineux in French. Its colour can be described as ashgray with darker spots; its stomach is a grayish white. Compared to the short-tailed chinchilla, the long-tailed chinchilla's fur is softer and more sought after than the former species. This second species is the one which is often kept as a pet.

## 5.2. The beaver

The beaver is among the greatest rodents in the world, right after the capybara. It is classified in the Castoridae genus.

It has a flat tail, short paws and a dark coloured coat. On the stomach, its fur is light brown. Its duvet is thick and soft to the touch. There are variants in the colour of the coat: some beavers are gray, beige, black and most seldom white. Though the white is the rarest colour, the black coat holds more value.

Two species of beaver exist today: the Eurasian/European beaver or *Castor fiber* and the Canadian/North American beaver or *Castor canadensis*. The latter lives in Northern America and was introduced to Europe and Asia.

The beaver fur has many uses and makes for very warm, thick coats.

## 5.3. The grey squirrel or petit-gris

The Eastern gray squirrel or grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is classed in the *Sciurus* genus, or the genus of the tree squirrels, from

the *Sciuridae* family, which comprises the squirrels. It is native to Northern America and is regarded as an invasive species in Europe.

Its winter coat is highly sought after, especially from grey squirrels from Siberia and Lapland, which is called **petit-gris**. The term "petit-gris" is used when only the fur from the squirrel's back was used. When the entire fur and skin were utilized, it was sold as "vair".

The grey squirrel's fur was mostly employed to make coats, manchons and the borders for clothes.

Its fur colour has many variants and were commercially classified as such:

- Petit-gris bleu: when the colour is a greyish blue;
- Petit-gris noir: when the extremities are black;
- Petit-gris blanc: when the colour is a greyish white.

The grey squirrel is mostly gray, but has a reddish colour on its sides, while its stomach is a yellowish white.

## 5.4. The muskrat

The muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) – or muskusrat and bisamrat in Dutch, rat musqué in French – is a species from the *Ondatra* genus, from the *Arvicolinae* rodent subfamily, which is placed in the greater *Cricetidae* family. The muskrat is the only species from the *Ondatra* genus which is not extinct.

This animal is named muskrat due to the musky smell it exhales. It originates from

Canada and Siberia, and was later imported to Belgium for its fur. Due to the damage it causes, it is considered an invasive species.

Its fur coat resembles the beaver's, though it has a shorter and thinner duvet. Usually, its colour is mostly brown, while the stomach is gray with a ginger reflection. There can be three variations in colour: it can be entirely white, speckled or entirely black.

Its fur was sold under the names "bisam" or "musquash".

## 6. The Felidae family

### 6.1. The tiger

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is a species in the genus *Panthera*, which contains the largest living members of the cat family. Its highly valuable fur has a dark orange colour and is marked with black stripes. While the tiger's back is darker in colour, its fur on the stomach, jaws and lips are white.

Sometimes, the tiger's fur was used for coats, but it was usually handled to make carpets and the interiors for cars.

### 6.2. The leopard and panther

The leopard, or panther, also called *Panthera pardus*, used to be classified as *Felis pardus* or *Felis leopardus*. Like the tiger, this predator is classed in the genus *Panthera*.

Its fur can be a sandy colour and has six to ten rows of black spots. Its stomach fur tends to be a white colour and is also covered in the

same dark spots. Furriers were inclined to sell the leopard's coat as "peaux de tigres". With its fur, coats, couvre-pieds, car seats and other items were made.

According to the book *Industries des poils et fourrures cheveux et plumes*, written by Francis J.-G. Beltzer (1928), the fashion industry tried to utilise these furs to make manchons, stoles etc., but without success.

The black panther was considered as the most beautiful cat. Its fur was employed to make carpets, caparisons for horses, helm fillings etc.

### 6.3. The (house) cat

The house cat is a feline from the genus *Felis*. Its domesticated variant is classified as *Felis silvestris catus*, while the wild counterpart is *Felis silvestris*.

Cat furs were, perhaps surprisingly, often used in the fur industry, also to imitate the rarest of furs. These furs were sold for high prices. Especially the furs of domesticated cats! These were considered to be very sturdy. They could be dyed and polished, sometimes also shaved. Even though cats were kept as pets, their coats seemed to be ideal to create the best imitations of rare furs. White cat furs were mostly altered to imitate the white fox's fur.

## 7. Seal

The fur seal comprises nine species of pinnipeds from the subfamily *Arctocephalinae*

in the family Otariidae. These animals have a dense underfur, for which they were hunted. These animals live in the Arctic zones. Seals that live in warmer conditions have a very thin skin and fine hairs: their furs were particularly sought after. These were used for luxurious coats and other fashion items.

Finer-appearing peltries with (semi)flat hair were selected for fur coats; these were usually dyed black.

## 8. Hoofed mammals

### 8.1. The horse

The horse (*Equus ferus caballus*) is a domesticated, one-toed, hoofed mammal belonging to the Equidae family.

Horse fur coats were seldom used. However, foal furs were much more popular to process in fur items. Especially stillborn foals were seen as valuable, as the drawings on their fur were rather unique. Foals that were killed for their furs would be dyed to resemble the stillborn foal's coat.

Foals are labeled as such until they are one year old.

### 8.3. The goat

The (domestic) goat is classified as *Capra hircus*. This species of goat-antelope is a member of the Bovidae family. It is closely related to sheep.

The furs and skins were considered to have a great commercial value.

This species is originally from Southwest Asia and Eastern Europe. The goat fur was mostly provided by the Kid – the goat's young.