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# 'This is not normal': Ontario mink farm charged with animal cruelty after activists go undercover

By **JULIEN GIGNAC** Staff Reporter

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A Los Angeles-based animal rights group says its yearlong undercover investigation into “filthy” conditions at an Ontario mink farm is behind animal cruelty charges laid by the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals last week.

The SPCA on Friday said it had laid 14 charges against a mink ranch in southwestern Ontario, including for neglect and failing to provide medical care. The Provincial Offences Court in Guelph separately verified that the charges had been laid against the owners of Millbank Fur Farm, north of Guelph.



U.S.-based advocacy organization Last Chance for Animals says it went undercover at Millbank Fur Farm, near Guelph. (LAST CHANCE FOR ANIMALS)

A worker with Last Chance for Animals went undercover at the farm starting in February 2017, said Hayden Hunter, director of investigations at the animal rights group. Hunter said the worker took photos and video that show unsanitary conditions, a lack of veterinary care and animals with lesions “all over” their bodies, especially “the head, the neck, the face, the tails.”

The group filed a complaint to the Ontario SPCA earlier this year based on its investigation, she said.

None of the allegations has been proven in court.

The Star presented Millbank Fur Farm with detailed questions about what Last Chance for Animals saw. Ted Parkinson, who said he owns the family-run farm, declined to comment, and directed the Star to Nancy Daigneault, vice-president of the International Fur Federation, who he said was speaking on his behalf.

“As an industry, and the fur farmers in general, they do want to provide excellent care for their animals. There’s no question about that,” Daigneault said.

“It appears something went wrong here,” she said. A veterinarian, Daigneault said, has been to the farm and will work there over the coming weeks and months.

The farmers “are going to be working with animal welfare authorities. They want to co-operate fully with the OSPCA to find out what happened in this situation. They want to work to improve everything.”

The undercover worker saw nesting boxes that were wet, full of feces and covered with maggots, Hunter said.

Last Chance for Animals provided the Star with photos and video it said were taken at the farm. They appear to show minks with lesions on their heads and backs. Some of the animals appear to be in pain, and their pens appear dirty.

Daigneault said the family is “shocked and upset” by what the images show.

“They want an investigation as well, and they want to co-operate with outside investigators and veterinarians to find out how this happened,” she said. “This is not normal. This is not what you would see on a farm, to see wounds like that. It is shocking.”

Last Chance for Animals was established in Hollywood in 1984, [according to its website](#), and has campaigned against China’s dog meat trade, the treatment of captive marine mammals, including at Marineland in Niagara Falls, and animal testing.

Hunter said the group would like to see fur farming in Canada abolished, “but for now what we would like to see is regulations and standards implemented and enforced.”

“It’s heartbreaking to see that these animals are going to spend anywhere between seven months to several years if they’re used for breeding stock,” she said. “This is their life: being fed and bobbing up and down in these cages all day long, just stir crazy.”

Hunter did not disclose the identity of the undercover worker.

The Ontario SPCA found several “deficiencies” after it investigated a complaint about the treatment of animals at the facility, Jennifer Bluhm, deputy chief inspector, told the Star.

“We did uncover evidence that revealed sick animals with injuries and large lesions and some evidence of rough handling of animals, unsanitary conditions and a lack of general care,” she said. “We have taken steps to ensure those concerns were addressed.”

The farm was charged with five counts of permitting an animal to be in distress; two counts of causing an animal to be in distress; three counts of failing to provide adequate and appropriate

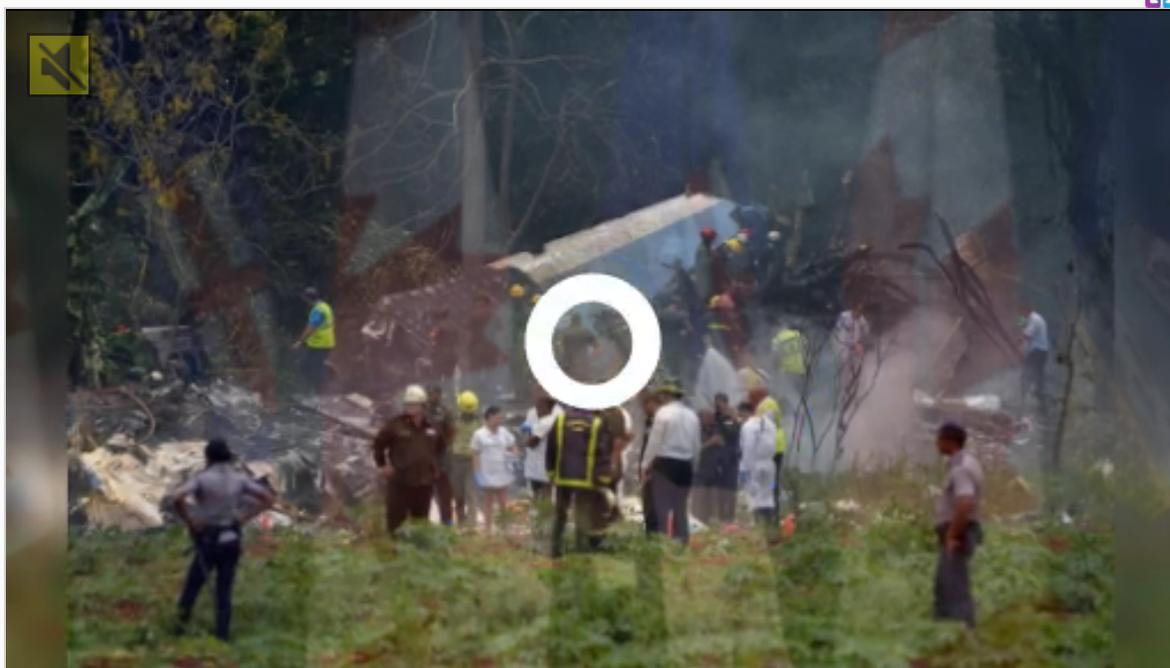
medical attention; three counts of failing to provide care necessary for general welfare; and one count of failing to provide adequate and appropriate sanitary conditions, according [a release posted to the Ontario SPCA's website](#).

Bluhm would not confirm that Last Chance for Animals' complaint had led to the charges.

"I think it's important to note that there's no excuse for failing to treat animals humanely," Bluhm said. "No one is exempt from the law, when it comes to providing for the animals in their care."

Millbank Fur Farm's owners are set to appear in court on July 18.

With files from the Guelph Mercury Tribune



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