

# INDUSTRY FACT SHEET

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# PYTHON LEATHER

Python leather, used for clothes, bags, shoes, belts, and other accessories, is a USD1 billion-dollar industry involving over 500,000 animals annually<sup>1</sup>. Traceability schemes for python skin are inadequate, the welfare of farmed pythons is often appalling, and imports of skins from species including the Reticulated Python (*Malayopython reticulatus*) are primarily sourced from wild-caught animals<sup>2</sup>.

An international YouGov poll commissioned by FOUR PAWS in 2021 shows that almost 75% of people are concerned about the welfare implications of the exotic leather industry. This increases to 87% in markets such as Austria<sup>3</sup>. 86% of people agree that companies should make animal protection a key priority alongside environmental protection and social standards within their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies and policies, with 51% of respondents strongly agreeing<sup>4</sup>.

## Brands taking a stand against exotic reptile leather:

ADIDAS	PAUL SMITH
KARL LAGERFELD	PHILLIP LIM
CHANEL	PUMA
DIANE VON FURSTENBERG	SELFRIDGES
HUGO BOSS	TOPSHOP
GUESS	VIVIENNE WESTWOOD
MULBERRY	VICTORIA BECKHAM
NIKE	

INDUSTRY ACTION

*"The challenge of achieving transparency, particularly in python supply chains, presents a significant risk of inhumane practices in both the keeping and culling of animals."*

Selfridges spokesperson on the decision to ban the sale of exotic reptile leather

## LARGEST EXPORTERS<sup>5</sup>



## LARGEST IMPORTERS<sup>6</sup>





### Replace

With low traceability, cruelty is rife throughout the trade, and the only way for brands to have confidence that they are helping to safeguard the welfare of pythons, and the conservation of their wild populations, is to ban the use of the products altogether. There is simply no way to source python skin without contributing to animal suffering and likely the capture of wild animals.

Only by banning the use of python skin can brands successfully help to protect and safeguard the welfare of these animals. Replace python skin with a humane alternative such as Piñatex made using pineapple leaves<sup>10</sup>, or with leather made from apples<sup>11</sup>, mushrooms<sup>12</sup>, or coffee<sup>13</sup>. Or look to cutting-edge technology for the latest in leather alternatives and source bio-fabricated leather<sup>14</sup>.



### Be transparent

With consumers increasingly demanding transparency<sup>15</sup>, communicating the steps you take to improve your supply chain has never been more important. It demonstrates your animal welfare and environmental credentials and helps consumers make an informed choice.

Ensure to transparently communicate your current use of animal derived materials and your timeframe for supply chain improvements. Ideally this information would form part of a robust and comprehensive overarching animal welfare policy, which is clearly communicated to suppliers.



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Most python leather is used in the luxury fashion industry, but behind its luxury label is an ugly truth and a growing number of consumers are turning away from the product, concerned about its animal welfare and environmental impacts<sup>7</sup>. Responding to changing consumer expectations, some governments are banning the sale of exotic leather, in 2019, for example, California became the first US state to ban the sale of products containing exotic animal skins<sup>8</sup>, and leading brands are banning the use of exotic leather in their products<sup>9</sup>.

### Animal welfare issues

- Wild caught pythons are usually captured at night using snares and sticks in a process that is traumatic for the animal and often leaves them injured and distressed.
- Pythons are put in plastic bags and transported to slaughterhouses, a journey that can take several days. The welfare of the animal is rarely considered during this time, and they are only kept alive because of a locally held belief that this preserves the quality of the skin<sup>16</sup>.
- Farmed pythons are kept in barren wooden or metal cages devoid of both the hiding places and branches necessary for pythons, and the cooling and basking zones critical for regulating the animal's body temperature and the space to stretch out<sup>17, 18</sup>.



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- Slaughter methods are often brutal, prolonged, and cause great pain, fear, and stress to the animals<sup>19</sup>. Slaughter methods include decapitation, drowning and bloating which involves the python's mouth and anus being taped shut and the alimentary canal is filled with air using an air compressor. It is not entirely clear how the pythons die; however, death may occur due to rupturing of the vital organs or suffocation. Nevertheless, pythons remain conscious for approximately 15 minutes before death occurs<sup>20</sup>.
- The lack of transparency and traceability across the industry enables the unregulated exploitation of wild animals<sup>21, 22</sup>. According to TRAFFIC, the leading international organisation working to stop the trafficking of wild animals and their body parts, most python skins sourced from Indonesia are from wild-caught animals and are purposefully declared as captive-bred so that they can be exported<sup>23</sup>.

### Environmental concerns

Tanning animal skin to produce leather is a toxic process that can harm both the environment, and the people involved. 90% of leather production globally uses chromium tanning<sup>24</sup> which produces a highly toxic mix of chemicals and gases, including the carcinogenic chromium (IV)<sup>25</sup>. In developing countries that do not have adequate environmental protection laws, the untreated toxic wastewater, potentially containing chromium, lead, arsenic, and acids, is often discharged directly into local waterways<sup>26</sup> with disastrous impacts.

### Human health impacts

The adverse health impacts caused to workers by exposure to such toxic chemicals are well documented and include a high incidence of cancer<sup>27</sup>,

respiratory<sup>28</sup>, skin, and eye problems<sup>29</sup>. These issues are compounded by a lack of adequate legal protections for tannery workers, low rates of pay, use of minors, inadequate or non-existent workplace health and safety protocols, and inadequate healthcare.

**FOUR PAWS** calls on fashion companies to stop using python leather; to reduce the number of animal derived materials used overall, in favour of sustainable animal-free alternatives; and to ensure that the animals which continue to be used within domesticated animal supply chains experience an excellent state of welfare.

For more information, review the **FOUR PAWS policy development guidelines**.

**“ Together we can drive an animal-friendly fashion future, and create a world where people treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. ”**



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