

# Silk - what you don't know probably won't upset you

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By **[Louise Kate Anderson \(http://louisekateanderson.blogspot.com.au/\)](http://louisekateanderson.blogspot.com.au/)**

On my various travels, in Europe and more recently, Vietnam, I've picked up a few beautiful silk scarves over the years. Yesterday by chance I happened to google how silk is made. Although I've been to a silk factory in Lyon, I never really understood the scientific process of how silkworms produce this luxurious fabric.

Photo via Kidspot



I was... astonished, angry and saddened to learn that I can add silk to a long list of things like many household products, cosmetics, fur, cage eggs, etc that I no longer wish to buy. I was astonished because it's so commonplace to understand that something like fur comes from an "evil" place, but silk was always this beautiful, luxurious natural product that never harmed a fly. Pun intended - it actually harms the silk worms.

**[http://3things.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/blog200513\\_silk.jpg](http://3things.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/blog200513_silk.jpg)**

From several websites like **[this one \(http://www.weanimals.org/blog.php?entry=151\)](http://www.weanimals.org/blog.php?entry=151)**, and **[this one \(http://www.thebigcoverup.org.uk/silk/\)](http://www.thebigcoverup.org.uk/silk/)**,

I learnt that most silk is produced from the cocoons of silk worms (which are apparently a lot like caterpillars). The caterpillars make their cocoon in order to transform into moths, and just before they eat their way out of the cocoons, they are boiled alive, before the cocoons are pried open and harvested as that beautiful, luxurious fabric we call silk.

So that's why I was astonished. I was angry because I'm sick of it. I don't want to live in a world where I have to google every single product before I buy it to make sure it hasn't been involved in ripping someone off, treating something or someone or the earth badly, all for the glorious purpose of making someone else some money.

I'm no saint. I eat meat, I kill mosquitoes and cockroaches (or rather with the latter, I scream and run away until someone else does it). Nature has no shortage of cruelty. The frog eats the bug, the snake eats the frog, the bird eats the snake. Often in less than humane ways. I get it.

But I don't torture cockroaches before I kill them. I realise caterpillars are caterpillars. People seem to classify smaller animals as "less than alive", as "unable to feel pain". Well, just because we don't like to think about it, doesn't mean they don't.

Silk scarves for sale in Sapa, Vietnam



[http://3things.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/blog200513\\_silk3.jpg](http://3things.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/blog200513_silk3.jpg)

As (arguably), the most intelligent and powerful creatures on the planet, humans, who on a large scale, farm and kill animals for food, for fashion and even for sport, I believe we have a duty to the earth that has provided these species for us. Power doesn't come without responsibility, or at least it shouldn't. I realise that animal and environmental welfare is very much a first world problem - you do what you need to survive, and no starving society is going to be worried about the welfare of the monkeys they need to eat. What bothers me is the motivation behind everything - money.

Yes, the Great Barrier Reef is beautiful, but would anybody worry about it as much as we do if not for the billion dollar tourism industry it caters for? And even that isn't enough - I just donated to the **WWF** (<http://www.wwf.org.au/>) because turtles are washing up sick and dead on the shores for no reason anybody has yet worked out. Not only do we trick the fish onto our lines and suffocate them, we do it at a rate that will leave none of those fish for the future. It's not enough to use the fur off creatures' backs, we have to torture them to get it. We boil alive lobsters because it apparently makes them "fresher" to eat and we terrify them by chasing them around in "catch your own lobster" fork machines in pubs before we do. We turn a blind eye to the torture of animals like rabbits for industries like L'oreal that make billions of dollars a year and could very much afford to change their policies. But hey, if we make a profit from that mascara, what's the problem? It's not my rabbit being tortured.

And lastly, I was saddened. Sad that this beautiful scarf I was wearing that made me happy is no longer something I will enjoy wearing. No longer something I can say to someone "hey, check out my scarf - it's 100% silk and I got it in this cute store in Vietnam!"

Cruelty-free silk, via Earth & State



<http://www.myspace.com/earthandstate/photos>

No, to me a luxurious item is not luxurious when it's got blood all over it. The websites have told me to look for "cruelty free silk". Well I don't know about you, but I've never seen cruelty-free silk in my life. There's 20 brands of free-range eggs in supermarkets, but I imagine cruelty-free silk is harder to find than toothpaste that's not tested on animals.

I feel frustrated with this. Being human doesn't give us the power to own the world and all its species and do with them what we please just as long as it makes us some cash. Disrespecting a species you're farming to make money doesn't make your produce luxurious, it makes it dirty.

I'm on a tangent now, but I feel like humanity has misunderstood this concept of ownership. Working for money that humans created and paying for land they didn't doesn't really make it yours. Nature has been around since long before you were born, and will exist longer than you are alive. It is not owned by anyone. If anything, you are just borrowing it from future generations, and what is left of it for them is entirely up to you.

So here I am, trying to respect the silk worms that painfully died to make me this scarf. And frustrated with the world that allowed this to happen because everybody thought "hey, it's just a worm".



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**About the author...**

*Every now and then, we like to ask a guest to come onto 3things and write for us - whether they be an expert in their field, someone who's done something pretty damn cool, or a great writer who has something 3thingsy to say. This is one of them.*

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