

# Wild Animals in Circuses

Congress is urged to protect non-domesticated (exotic/wild) animals in traveling circuses and make public safety a priority



## Animal Welfare in U.S. Traveling Circuses

The welfare of an animal can be assessed by whether it has control over its environment and can move about to exercise its body and mind. The 'Five Freedoms'<sup>1</sup> defines good animal welfare as: freedom from hunger and thirst; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury or disease; freedom to express normal behaviors; freedom from fear and distress.

Many non-domesticated animals studied in U.S. traveling circuses by ADI and PAWS endure restrictions on most, and sometimes all, of these basic freedoms. A worldwide study of traveling circus practices shows<sup>2</sup>:

- Tigers and lions spend between 75% and 99% of their time in severely cramped cages on the backs of trailers.
- Elephants spend 58% to 98% of their time chained by at least one leg, and generally, both a front and hind leg.

In the U.S., non-domesticated animals in traveling circuses endure confinement, physical and social deprivation, long, arduous journeys, brutal control methods and physical violence. Studies have shown<sup>2</sup>:

- Severe confinement, lack of free exercise and restriction of natural behaviors causes suffering among all species observed including elephants, tigers, monkeys and ponies.
- It is known that restriction of ability to move around and existing in deprived and barren environments causes mental suffering to animals; this oftentimes



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results in abnormal, stereotypic behaviors that indicate that the animal is unable to cope with its environment.

- Studies of animals in traveling circuses have shown these abnormal behaviors to be present in all species.
  - Animals that would normally live in a herd or family group live alone, for example zebras.
  - Chaining of elephants for most of the day, restricting their movements to a few steps backwards or forwards and worse, lack of free access to water.
  - Long, arduous journeys and excessive periods in trailers, before, during and after the journey. For example, lions and tigers remained in their cages and elephants in their trailer for 19 hours for a 5½ hour journey. One circus started a tour in Mexico before heading into the U.S. and did not return to their permanent quarters for almost eleven months.
  - Large animals spending their lives in small 5'x7' cages on trailers – barely larger than the animal itself.
  - Elephant hooks (also known as a bull hook or ankus, which are heavy bars with a sharp hook) were used to punish elephants.
  - Electric shocks were used on elephants during training sessions and while being walked to the performances.
  - Elephants were beaten with a hosepipe and broom handle.
  - A tiger cub was smashed in the face to make him “behave.”
  - An elephant was dragged down and kicked in the face as she lay on the ground; the worker had got into a temper.
  - Often, casual workers who do not understand the species they are handling use screaming, punching, kicking and beatings to move the animals around if they perceive a difficulty.
- These examples show restrictions of all the basic freedoms of non-domesticated animals in traveling circuses in the U.S. and are indicators of poor animal welfare overall.

There has been growing public concern and outrage at the treatment of wild and exotic animals – non-domesticated species – that suffer particularly badly from the severe confinement and daily brutality of life on the road with a traveling circus. This is evidenced by the thousands of letters generated to the USDA, Congress, and the President, requesting urgent action be taken to ban these traveling shows.



Chained by a front and a back leg, barely able to move.



When not chained, circus elephants generally have small enclosures, frequently on hard standing (which can harm feet).



A sharp elephant hook is the common way of controlling circus elephants.



Despite the best intentions, given the circumstances of constant travel with most of the year spent in temporary, collapsible accommodation, animal welfare in traveling circuses and the public's safety in the U.S. will inevitably be compromised.

All too frequently, the extreme stress to which these animals are subjected, can cause them to react in ways that can present a danger to the public.

Such incidents contravene the intent of the Animal Welfare Act on humane care and treatment of animals used for traveling circus and exhibition purposes.

## Public Safety

Around the world, circus workers and members of the public, including children, have been killed and maimed by circus animals. Practices in U.S. traveling circuses bring people into dangerously close proximity to non-domesticated animals by displaying animals in areas that are inappropriate, unnatural and unsuitable for the exhibition of these wild animals simply to make a profit.

Recent incidents in the U.S. demonstrate that traveling circuses pose a serious threat to public safety:

- In February 2010, a zebra escaped from Ringling Brothers Circus in Atlanta and ran into the city. Police had to chase it for 40 minutes until it was recaptured on a busy interstate. A few weeks later, the animal was euthanized.
- Two weeks earlier, during a pre-show at the same circus in South Carolina, an elephant broke through a main door and ran into the arena. It was reported that there were about 100 people on the floor.
- On November 4, 2009, an elephant escaped from the Family Fun Circus in Enid, Oklahoma and was truck by an SUV on U.S. Interstate 81.
- In March 2008, three zebras with Ringling Brothers Circus in Baltimore escaped from their temporary enclosure and ran onto the traffic lanes. According to press reports, the same three animals had previously escaped in June 2007 in Colorado Springs.
- A lifelong animal trainer was clawed by a tiger during a performance at Hadi Shrine Circus in Evansville, Indiana, in November 2006. The trainer suffered injuries to his hand and leg.



Circus tigers and lions spend most of their lives in cages on the backs of trucks.



Circus animals are frequently moved through inappropriate public areas.



A three month old tiger cub is hit in the face to teach him to obey.



## Action Request

It is essential that Congress support legislation to prohibit the use of exotic and non-domesticated animals in U.S. traveling circuses.

The ban will protect public safety of workers and audiences.

The ban is the only and best way to protect animal welfare. The use of animals of domesticated species in traveling circuses will not be affected by the legislation.

There is no significant public appetite for non-domesticated wild animal acts.

Removing non-domesticated animals from traveling circuses lowers costs and animal-related accidents.

## Countries around the world have recognized the importance of banning non-domesticated animals from traveling circuses:

National measures to prohibit the use of wild animals, or selected species, have been adopted in: Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Malta, Slovakia, Sweden, Portugal, Taiwan, Singapore, Bolivia, Costa Rica, India and Israel. Similar laws are being discussed in: United Kingdom, Netherlands, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Norway, and Peru. Due to public concerns, local town and city bans are in place in the US, UK, Brazil and many other countries.

ADI and PAWS recently worked with the Bolivian Government on the relocation of circus animals following Bolivia's ban on the use of all animals in traveling circuses. ADI assisted the Bolivian Congress from the inception of the new legislation.



### Animal Defenders International

With offices in Los Angeles, London and Bogota, ADI is an international campaign and animal rescue organization with a commitment to securing progressive animal protection legislation around the globe. ADI has a worldwide reputation for providing video and photographic evidence exposing the behind-the-scenes suffering in the circus industry and supporting this evidence with scientific research on captive wildlife and transport.



### Performing Animal Welfare Society

PAWS operate three captive wildlife sanctuaries in California, providing lifetime care for hundreds of exotic animals. Having worked inside the performing animal industry and now specializing in the care of abused, abandoned or retired performing animals, the PAWS founders are acknowledged experts on the impacts on these animals and the suffering they endure in the name of entertainment. They have provided expert evidence to Congress, State Legislature, and city and county hearings across the United States.

1. FAWC Five Freedoms. Farm Animal Welfare Council, press statement, 1979, <http://www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/livelifreedoms1979.pdf>.  
2. Animal Defenders International. Animals in Traveling Circuses: The Science on Suffering(2008).

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