

*The Nation's First  
Elephant Sanctuary*



**PAWS**  
PERFORMING ANIMAL  
WELFARE SOCIETY

Founded in 1984  
PROTECTION  
EDUCATION  
ADVOCACY  
SANCTUARY  
pawsweb.org

July 12, 2013

### **Statement by elephant professionals in opposition to elephant rides**

PAWS has invited professionals in science, conservation and elephant care to join us in endorsing the following statement that addresses the use of elephants for rides.

We, the undersigned, are opposed to the use of elephants for rides at county fairs, carnivals, circuses, zoos and other recreational activities, for the following reasons:

- It is wrong to allow our children to think that elephants used for rides are living an acceptable life, when evidence for the opposite is overwhelming.
- Reducing elephants to the equivalent of a carnival ride distorts the public's understanding of elephants and of their endangered status in the wild.
- Elephants are highly intelligent, curious and socially complex animals who possess a range of emotions, and are empathetic and self-aware. It is appalling to see these astonishing animals reduced to walking in small circles for hours as they give rides.
- Elephants used for rides were traumatically taken from their mothers as calves. Female elephants, those typically used for rides, would naturally remain with their families for life.
- Elephants used for rides are deprived of what is natural to them, including the ability to move freely in a vast natural environment, to be part of a family and extended social network, and to have choice and control over their lives.
- Elephants are wild animals. They are not domesticated, so they retain their innate wild natures, which are often brutally suppressed.
- The extreme training that is necessary to dominate and control elephants for providing customers with "safe" rides is abusive. It is well documented that elephants are trained to comply with commands through use of the menacing weapon called the bullhook and fear of painful punishment.
- Elephants used for rides are under a great deal of stress from being held in conditions to which they are unsuited, including prolonged chaining, confinement in cramped trucks and pens, extensive travel, and ongoing threat of punishment. There are many documented incidents in which elephants have "snapped," and have injured or killed people.



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- The interests and well-being of elephants used for rides will always be secondary to the profits the company needs to maintain itself.
- Elephant rides do not contribute to the conservation of elephants, or to an awareness of the plight of wild elephants. On the contrary, elephant rides may divert funds from genuine, and deeply important, conservation work.
- Conservation is a noble cause and it is demeaned by unethical companies that use it as a public relations ploy to distract the public from this inhumane, unsafe and outdated use of elephants.
- It is wrong to keep alive an outdated practice that we know is brutal for elephants.

Given current knowledge, it is unjustifiable to use elephants for recreational rides, and it is wrong to allow elephants to suffer just so they can entertain us.

The times are changing. More and more county fairs and other community events are eschewing elephant rides due to public safety and humane concerns.

We advise event organizers to reject elephant rides, and we strongly urge the public to refrain from riding elephants, to oppose elephant rides if they are proposed for a community event, and to support legitimate conservation organizations that are making a real difference for elephants.

Sincerely,



**Ed Stewart**

President and Co-founder, PAWS

**Cynthia Moss**, Director, Amboseli Trust for Elephants (Kenya)

**Joyce H. Poole, Ph.D.**, Co-Founder, Co-Director, ElephantVoices

**Petter Granli**, Co-Founder, Co-Director, ElephantVoices

**Peter Stroud**, Independent Zoological Consultant, Member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission Asian Elephant Specialist Group

**Phil Ensley**, DVM, DACZM, Former associate veterinarian with the San Diego Zoo

**W. Keith Lindsay, Ph.D.**, Conservation Biologist & Member, Scientific Advisory Committee, Amboseli Elephant Research Project (Kenya)

**David Hancocks**, Former Director at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, Arizona, Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, Australia's Werribee Open Range Zoo and Melbourne Zoo

**Scott Blais**, International Elephant Consultant

**Professional statement in opposition to elephant rides**

**Carol Buckley**, founder and CEO of Elephant Aid International and founding director of The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee

**John W. Freeze**, Retired Animal Husbandry Supervisor (Elephants), North Carolina Zoological Park

**Gary Kuehn, DVM**, Former veterinarian with the Los Angeles Zoo

**Henry Melvyn Richardson, DVM**

**Will Travers OBE**, CEO The Born Free Foundation, UK and Born Free USA

**Margaret Whittaker**, Animal Behavior Consultant, Active Environments, Inc.