



## **Wild Welfare Position Statement on Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses**

August 2019

**The use of animals in performance circuses can have a significant detrimental effect on captive wild animals, and Wild Welfare considers that the use of animals in circuses is not relevant, appropriate or educational in the modern era.**

Travelling circuses were once a historically popular method of displaying both domestic and wild animals to large audiences. Because they are a visual performance, it was unimpeded by language barriers or education levels and could be exportable around the world through extensive tours<sup>1</sup>. Circuses using animals are still a common occurrence, with estimates of between 2,400 and 5,900 individuals used within Europe alone<sup>2</sup>. However, circuses are increasingly criticised for their use of animals in performance and banned from certain regions of the world<sup>3</sup>. In 2019, the UK introduced a bill to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses which will be effective from 2020<sup>4</sup>.

Research into the use of wild animals within circuses has found that welfare standards are consistently poor<sup>2</sup>. Due to the circus requirement to be mobile, there is very little opportunity to provide a complex and species appropriate captive environment. Any physical restraint of animals also limits opportunities to perform natural species-specific behaviours, including socialisation, which can have a negative effect on psychological health and welfare, especially in social species such as elephants and camels<sup>5</sup>. Stereotypic behaviours, both anticipatory<sup>6</sup> and anxiety-related are found to be prevalent<sup>7</sup>. Abnormal and unnatural behaviours are often required during circus performances. Depending on their type and frequency, these performances may also cause discomfort, require physical exertion and increase the risk of physical harm and injury to animals<sup>5</sup>. Performances that require unnatural behaviours and interactions between dangerous species and circus staff, can require training techniques that are aversive and involve punishment<sup>5</sup>. Health problems such as a high prevalence of zoonotic diseases is also found in a wide range of species held within circuses<sup>8</sup> and can be found across a large number of performing institutions.

Circus environments cannot provide the quality of care that is required to meet animals' complex physical and psychological needs. As recognised sentient creatures<sup>9</sup>, animals have intrinsic value with the capacity to suffer. Circus performances reduce human respect for animals, devaluing our relationship with, and impression of animals. It is clear that the animal welfare and ethical concerns within circuses outweigh any potential benefits there are to human beneficiaries. Considering this welfare impact and the moral status of animals in the 21st century, the use of animals in circuses is not relevant, appropriate or educational in the modern era.

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