

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus: Cruelty Under the Big Top

Ringling has much to hide: animals beaten bloody, babies torn from their mothers, animals—even those who are ill or disabled—forced to perform under the threat of punishment, animals locked in small cages or chained for most of their lives, elephants sickened with a highly contagious bacterial lung disease, and many painful deaths.

Animals in circuses don't perform because they want to; they perform because they're afraid not to.

- Video footage shows Ringling employees aggressively hooking elephants with a sharp, steel-tipped bullhook—an elephant-training tool that resembles a fireplace poker.
- The use of bullhooks results in pain, suffering, trauma, and injuries, including lacerations, bloody puncture wounds, swelling, and abscesses.
- Former Ringling employees describe violent beatings and daily abuse of elephants, tigers, horses, camels, zebras, and other animals.
- Animals are routinely beaten behind the scenes, and no government or other agency monitors training sessions.

Cages, chains, and tethers replace green pastures, jungles, and forests.

- Elephants in circuses spend most of their time chained by two legs, which only gives them enough space to move 3 feet forward or backward.
- Chaining causes potentially deadly foot problems, arthritis, colic, and stereotypic behavior.
- About a third of the more than two dozen elephant deaths at Ringling have been attributable to either osteoarthritis or chronic foot problems.

- According to former Ringling veterinarian Gary West, “Foot-related conditions and arthritis are the leading cause of euthanasia in captive elephants in the United States.”
- In the wild, elephants are active for about 18 hours a day and can walk up to 30 miles daily.
- Other animals, including tigers, zebras, and horses, fare no better. Most are only allowed out of their cages or off their tethers during the short periods of time when they must perform.

Animals live miserable lives on the road.

- Animals are transported in filthy, poorly ventilated boxcars and trailers and exposed to temperature extremes for more than 11 months out of every year.
- Emergency veterinary care is typically unavailable to animals who become sick in transit.
- A young lion named Clyde died of apparent heatstroke in a sweltering boxcar on a Ringling train as it crossed the Mojave Desert in temperatures exceeding 100°F.
- Ringling's own documents show that elephants are chained by two legs *up to 100 hours at a time* (an average of 26 hours) when traveling between cities.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has issued penalties, warnings, and citations to Ringling.

- Ringling paid \$20,000 to settle USDA charges of failing to provide adequate veterinary care to a baby elephant who was forced to perform while sick; the elephant later died.
- The USDA warned Ringling following the shooting death of a caged tiger and after two baby elephants were injured when they were prematurely taken away from their mothers.
- The USDA has cited Ringling repeatedly for noncompliances with the Animal Welfare Act, including failure to provide adequate veterinary care to animals, causing physical harm and behavioral stress to animals, unsafe handling practices, insufficient space, inadequate exercise, and failure to maintain veterinary records, just to name a few.

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Captive breeding does nothing to conserve endangered species.

- Despite the intensely close bond between female elephants and their offspring, Ringling shatters the social network that is vital to elephants' well-being by separating families.
- Baby elephants who are still nursing are often pulled from their mothers using violent methods.
- Scientists report that early disruption of an elephant's bonding and rearing process produces lifetime emotional scars and dysfunctional behavior in offspring.
- At least four baby elephants have died and others have suffered serious injuries during training or performances.
- Ringling only breeds elephants to perform in its circuses. None of its elephants will ever be released in the wild.

Many elephants are infected with a highly contagious bacterial lung disease.

- *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, a human strain of tuberculosis (TB) has been diagnosed in 12 percent of captive Asian elephants in the U.S., including many at Ringling.
- In 2006, Ringling had to pull three female elephants out of its traveling show because they had been exposed to a diseased elephant.
- An official with the Zoological Society of San Diego warns, "The possibility of an epidemic exists and reciprocal transmission between humans and elephants could have devastating consequences."
- While many elephant handlers have tested positive for exposure to TB, the risk that TB-infected elephants pose to the public has never been studied.

Experts denounce the use of animals in circuses.

- Industry experts, scientists, law enforcement officials, clergy, veterinarians, and child psychologists have all spoken out against the cruel treatment of animals used in circuses.
- A group of 14 acknowledged leading experts in the field of elephant research—with a combined experience representing almost 300 person-years of work with wild African elephants—issued a joint statement condemning the use of elephants in circuses, in which they stated the following:

"Elephants in circuses are bought and sold, separated from companions, confined, chained and forced to stand for hours, and frequently moved about in small compartments on trains or trucks. They are required to perform behaviors never seen in nature. ... In order to keep elephant behavior under tight control in the close proximity, 'hands-on' conditions of circuses, it is necessary for a handler to establish and maintain supremacy. Domination of such a large animal must unavoidably involve an element of cruelty, often including the liberal use of an ankus—a bullhook euphemistically termed 'guide' by those in the business, a whip, or an electric prod. ... The totally unnatural existence of captive elephants in a circus, which includes significant physical and emotional suffering, is a travesty. To allow this practice to continue is unjustified and unethical."