

ANIMALS IN ENTERTAINMENT

Throughout history, humans have used nonhuman animals for their own amusement or entertainment, including in the following: circuses, rodeos, animal exhibits at state and county fairs, marine parks or aquariums, zoos (including petting zoos, roadside zoos, larger state, county, and national zoos), carnivals, street shows, bar or restaurant shows, bullfighting, cockfighting, dogfighting, dog racing, horse racing, in the TV, film, and print media, and hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Most of us grew up seeing animals being used to entertain us. Many parents continue to support businesses that use animals as entertainment without questioning what the lives of animals held captive for this purpose are like. When humans commit crimes, they are often held in prisons. Nonhuman animals held captive for entertainment purposes have committed no crime. Human prisoners generally have the freedom to choose at least some of their daily activities and entertainment. Nonhuman animals are not permitted to engage in the activities that are most natural to them.

This fact sheet provides some background information about a few areas from the list above. Sources from which additional information can be obtained are listed at the end of the fact sheet.

CIRCUSES

Animals used in circuses include elephants, horses, lions, tigers, dogs, monkeys, apes, and donkeys.

When people visit a circus, they see only a very small part of the lives of these animals. Behind the scenes, the animals are confined to cramped cages for most of their lives, including while traveling from place to place in extreme heat and cold, often without food, water, or veterinary care. They are trained or forced, by means of violent punishment (beating, electric shocks, whipping), to perform confusing, uncomfortable, repetitious, and often painful acts. When they are no longer of use, they are most often kept in dreary surroundings with minimal care.

Circuses usually feature large animals like elephants, lions, and tigers, who are very active in their natural habitat. But the cages in which they live allow them just enough room to stand up and turn around. Some are allowed out of their cages for short periods when not performing or traveling, but elephants are chained by their legs. Many circus animals die from the harsh conditions and lack of care.

In the wild, elephants travel about 80 kilometers (50 miles) a day and have strong social ties within their family group. Bengal tigers range over an area of about 64 square kilometers (25 square miles). In captivity, they cannot engage in any of their natural behaviors and do not live in their natural habitat.

The use of animals in circuses has been restricted or banned in several cities and regions around the world, after citizens campaigned to keep circuses out of their communities. People who do not want to support circuses that exploit nonhuman animals choose to attend circuses featuring human performers instead, such as the Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize, Circus Oz, Circus Smirkus, the Mexican International Circus, and the New Pickle Circus.

ZOOS

The term "zoo" first appeared in the early 1800s, when the Zoological Society of London was founded. The number of zoos has risen worldwide as people have realized that there is profit to be made from them. Over 90% of zoos worldwide are not accredited and do not meet even minimal standards of care. Zoos claim to have a broad mission of education, conservation, and research. Many zoos now use terms like "sanctuary" or "wildlife park," which give the impression of an altruistic mission. But even under the best of circumstances, at the best of zoos, captivity does not come close to replicating wild animals' habitats. Animals are often prevented from doing most of the things that are natural and important to

them, like running, roaming, flying, climbing, foraging, choosing a partner, and socializing with others of their own kind.

Education

Studies have shown that rather than teach people about the animals they are viewing, zoos teach that it is acceptable to keep animals captive. The animals are bored, cramped, and lonely, far from their natural habitat and deprived of control over their lives. They are bred and their babies are taken from their mothers and sold to other zoos by companies who make a thriving profit from this trade in the lives of living beings. Zoos regularly contract with such companies, moving baby elephants to different mothers in various locations at will, for example, though in nature, babies would stay with their mothers for life. Babies draw visitors, which means higher profits for the zoo. Visitors to zoos are left with a distorted view of wildlife and how to care for animals.

Animals in captivity also exhibit stereotypical behaviors associated with psychological disorders. Animals who would naturally walk many kilometers/miles a day in the wild, gather their own food, and engage in social interactions become bored and can literally go mad in captivity. Some of the behaviors that visitors may witness include animals walking in circles, hitting their heads against the cage, chewing on the bars, mutilating themselves, and rocking. Visitors get a highly inaccurate view rather than an education about the behaviors that constitute who these animals are in the wild. In the wild, for example, gorillas often sing on a bright morning after a rainstorm, out of sheer joy. Gorillas in captivity rarely sing. Imagine someone of a totally different species observing humans in prison and assuming that what they witness is typical human behavior.

Research

Some zoos claim to carry out research that benefits the animals. By far the majority of zoos do not have the resources or skills to carry out research. Also, zoo animals make unreliable subjects for behavioral research because their living conditions are artificial and most zoo animals are not mentally healthy. Therefore the results of the research can be misleading as well as unproductive. An example is research on the social structure of zoo-living wolves and chimpanzees. We now know that their natural social organizations are completely different in the wild, when they are undisturbed by humans. This knowledge emerged only from field studies on wild animals.

Zoo officials across the U.S. admit that gorillas in zoos are dying from heart disease at an alarming rate, possibly because of a diet deficient in essential nutrients. To learn enough about captive gorillas to at least keep them alive, zoo officials are turning to scientists who observe them in their natural habitat in the wild. (See lesson plan: Nutritional Wisdom.)

Conservation

Animals do not need help breeding; they have been doing it successfully for a very long time. Species are threatened because of a variety of environmental factors—usually the destruction of their habitat by humans. Protection of a habitat and the animals who inhabit it has been shown to be the swiftest and most cost-effective way of reversing any decline in a species. Most species of animals housed in zoos are not endangered, and those that are will most likely never be released into natural habitats.

While a few zoos do take part in conservation and education efforts, the large majority of animals in these facilities are there for display and profit, and most zoos do not take part in efforts to restore habitat and reintroduce species to their natural environments. One notable exception is the case of California Condors. Their numbers declined dramatically in the 19th century because of poaching, lead poisoning, pesticide residue, collisions with power lines, and habitat destruction. Eventually a conservation plan was put in place by the U.S. government that led to the capture of the remaining 22 wild condors in 1987. These birds were bred at the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the Los Angeles Zoo. Their numbers rose through captive breeding and, beginning in 1991, condors were reintroduced into the wild. This project is the most

expensive species conservation project ever undertaken in the U.S. As of November 2007, there were 302 live condors, including 155 in the wild.

Surplus animals

"Surplus" animals are a problem for zoos. In many cases, zoo animals are bred so their cute babies will attract visitors. Under the guise of species preservation, breeding programs routinely trade, lend, sell, or barter adult animals who no longer attract visitors.

Investigations have shown that some of these surplus animals end up in "canned hunts," where patrons pay large sums of money to shoot animals held in an enclosed area, where they can be easily found and shot. Others are sold to filthy sideshows and unregulated roadside zoos and circuses.

Some zoos and safari parks have supplied animals for invasive experiments and (in some countries) for human consumption. The London Zoo has experimental facilities on site, and zoo experiments have included the decapitation of conscious wallabies in an attempt to understand "winter depression" and jet lag in humans.

Where do they come from?

Wild animals destined for zoos are still captured in the wild. In 1998, 30 infant wild elephants were taken from their mothers in Botswana by an animal dealer to be sold to European zoos. In 2003, the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the Lowry Park Zoo captured 11 African elephants, a species designated as threatened, from their natural habitat in Swaziland.

RODEOS

Rodeos are big business. Events include calf roping, steer wrestling, bull riding, and riding bucking horses ("bronco busting"). Many of the animals are not aggressive by nature. They are provoked into displaying "wild" behavior with the use of electric prods, spurs, and bucking straps, which irritate and enrage them to make the cowboys look brave. In bucking events, a flank strap or rope is tightly cinched around the animals' abdomen, and it causes them to buck violently in an attempt to rid themselves of pain and torment. Their frenzied efforts put on a "good show" for the crowds. Often burrs and other irritants are placed under the flank strap. The strap can cause open wounds and burns when the hair and skin are rubbed off. Often, horses and bulls are given electric shocks in the pen to upset them just before they enter the arena.

Many animals discarded from rodeos are sold for slaughter. A veterinarian witnessing the animals brought to slaughter from rodeos described them as being so extensively bruised that the only areas in which their skin was attached to their flesh were the head, neck, legs, and belly. He described seeing animals "with 6–8 ribs broken from the spine, and at times puncturing the lungs." He saw animals with "as much as 2–3 gallons (8–11 liters) of free blood accumulated under the detached skin." These injuries were a result of animals' being thrown in calf-roping events or being jumped on by people from the backs of horses during steer wrestling.

A terrified, screaming young horse burst from the chutes at the Can-Am Rodeo, and within five seconds, slammed into a fence and broke her neck. Bystanders knew she was dead when they heard her neck crack, yet the announcer told the crowd that everything would "be all right" because a vet would see her. Injuries and deaths like this are common sights at rodeos.

Calves roped while running routinely have their necks snapped back by the lasso, often resulting in serious, painful, and usually fatal neck injuries. They are not immediately euthanized.

Rodeo cowboys voluntarily risk injury by participating in events; the animals they exploit do not have that choice.

The law permits rodeo animals to be confined or transported in vehicles for up to 24 hours without being fed, given water, or unloaded.

HORSE RACING

Worldwide, the horse racing industry causes thousands of horses to be born only to be slaughtered or abandoned to an existence of neglect, starvation, and suffering.

Thousands are bred annually, the few fastest chosen to compete, many of the rest sent to slaughter. Forced to train and race at just 2 years, before their skeletal system has stopped growing, catastrophic injuries are common. Injured horses are typically euthanized because treating them is expensive and most often unsuccessful. Drugging horses to enhance performance or so they can race even while injured is common, as is bleeding in the lungs, which can be fatal, and chronic ulcers. When race horses have finished their career, usually by 6 years old, though Thoroughbreds can live to 25, even champions often end up in the slaughterhouse or are sold from hand to hand in a downward spiral of abuse. A small number are kept for breeding and a very small number are placed in one of the few humane retirement facilities. Some are subjected to painful experiments.

In every country where horse racing exists, the same number of horses leave racing as enter it each year, so horses must be constantly bred and disposed of. England ships many ex-race horses to France and Belgium to end up on dinner plates. One Colorado State University study found that of 1,348 U.S. horses sent to slaughter, 58 were known to be former racehorses. Most horses who are sent to slaughter facilities endure days of transport in cramped trailers. The majority are shipped with no access to water or food, and injuries are common. A University of California, Davis, study of 306 horses destined for slaughter found that 60 of them sustained injuries during transport. While veterinarians recommend that horses be offloaded for food and water every four hours while traveling, the U.S. Department of Agriculture allows horses to be shipped for 28 hours without a break.

MARINE MAMMALS

Marine mammals include whales, dolphins, polar bears, sea lions, manatees, and seals. Like land mammals, marine mammals are warm-blooded, breathe air, and their young drink their mother's milk. In the wild, whales and dolphins live in large groups called pods. The bonds between families last for many years, and in the case of orcas, a lifetime.

In the wild, marine mammals face many threats, including ingesting toxic fish, water pollution, disappearing ice flows, stranding, predators (including humans), oil spills, human waste (including medical waste and plastic bottles and bags), human disturbance and harassment (including boats, jet skis, populated swimming areas, and sound pollution), and fisheries that deliberately catch them to sell as food, or accidentally catch them in large fishing nets intended for other species.

Capture for the entertainment industry

Dolphins and whales do not successfully reproduce in captivity, and the mortality rate of any babies born to captive animals is high. To keep the entertainment industry supplied, these animals must be continuously caught in the wild and shipped thousands of miles by truck and plane. The process by which wild dolphins and whales are captured is violent and disruptive to families, communities, and the entire ecosystems in which they live. Animals captured for display and profit are separated from their families and forced to live in an environment that is alien to them.

Capture methods for dolphins include chasing them with high speed boats until the animals are exhausted, then netting them and dragging them aboard a ship and tossing the old, weak, sick, or very

young back overboard. They may also be herded into enclosed bays and trapped in pens. In Japan, thousands have also been slaughtered for meat using this method.

Undercover video showed a typical capture of a pod of orcas, including a pregnant female and a baby whose terrified cries could be heard as he was separated from his family, hoisted up in a sling by a crane, unloaded into a truck, and taken away. His mother watched helplessly, her body twisting and her tail violently slapping the water. Within months, two of those captured and placed in a Japanese aquarium had died.

Their life in captivity

Facilities that display captive marine mammals for profit claim this activity has educational value, but the behavior of these animals in captivity is so different from their behavior in the wild that experts agree it is impossible to have a sense of who they are and what their lives are like in their natural state.

Whales and dolphins use echolocation (sonar) to communicate, navigate, and hunt for food. In the ocean, they swim up to 100 miles a day in a varied, stimulating environment, experiencing close social relationships. In captivity, it is legal to confine them in tanks that are approximately 7x7x2 meters (24x24x6 feet), in which they can only swim endlessly in circles. Their sound waves bounce off concrete walls, which can literally drive them mad. In the wild, marine mammals spend only 10–20% of the time at the surface. In captivity, because of the shallowness of the tanks, they forced to spend more than half their time at the surface.

Wild dolphins can live 40 years and wild female orcas 90 years, but in captivity, their lifespans are less than half that of their wild counterparts. They suffer high mortality rates from physical and psychological problems, including blindness and skin problems caused by living in heavily chlorinated water, pneumonia, accidents, and injuries that are self-inflicted or the result of confrontations with other confined dolphins and whales. Separated from their families, social groups, and habitat, forced to be idle in tiny tanks in an atmosphere of unusual noises, strange odors, and sometimes other species, allowed no freedom to choose their food, reproduction, and activities, and given drugs, their behavior is vastly different from that of their wild cousins.

Europe and Canada are moving away from the practice of confining whales and dolphins in marine parks and aquariums, but the practice continues in the U.S. and in developing countries, especially in Asia.

Resources

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