

## ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES

### THE RSPCA'S conclusions from the report.

The RSPCA UK concluded from a report commissioned in 1990 that :

#### 1) Evidence of stress and suffering.

The RSPCA sees in the data clear evidence of widespread stress and suffering by circus animals. All species examined showed abnormal behaviour patterns, indicative of prolonged stress or suffering. In the case of elephants, these abnormal behaviours occupy up to 25% of the animal's time; for bears, just one abnormal behaviour-prolonged or undirected pacing-occupies 30% of time, a figure described in the report as "very high".

Accommodation for the animals is clearly shown to be grossly inadequate, providing extremely cramped space and a highly impoverished environment. The data shows that the big cats are still confined to their transport wagons for over 90% of the time. Elephants are shown to be leg-shackled fore and hind for over 60% of the time, where "they are able to lie down with difficulty"

#### 2) Evidence of benefits.

Circuses exist to provide a form of public entertainment. The RSPCA can see no possible benefit to animal welfare or conservation to be derived from the use of animals in circuses. Although the report expresses the view that circuses offer conservation, education and scientific benefits, there is no data to support this.

The RSPCA is not primarily a conservation organisation; but we know of no reputable conservation body, either in Britain or internationally that would support the view expressed in the report concerning species conservation. Neither so far as we are aware is any circus actively involved in any captive breeding programme for reintroduction or conservation of any species.

Assessment of education benefit (which can in the long term benefit animal welfare) is perhaps best left to those experienced in education work. An assessment of education benefit from animals in a performing environment is contained in the Government's Review of Dolphinarium, by Klinowska and Brown. This report states that a panel of education experts were:

"...concerned that the unnatural, anthropomorphic exhibition of animals as performers may be merely showing the majority who witness the displays (particularly children) that the animals' existence is legitimised only by their ability to meet the demands for human entertainment. This is considered to be anti-educational."

#### 3) Conclusions.

Since there is evidence of suffering, and no evidence of animal welfare benefit of any kind, the RSPCA concludes that there is no justification for the use of animals in circuses.

The RSPCA can see no way in which suffering associated with the keeping of animals in circuses can be totally eliminated; the very nature of the circus business imposes such constraints on the way in which animals are kept that there must always be significant levels of stress.

It should be noted that abnormal behaviour occurs in all species of circus animals, and in some cases this behaviour can occupy a considerable proportion of the animal's time. It is generally accepted by animal behaviour scientists and animal behaviour keepers that such behaviour is indicative of stress and indicates inadequate or undesirable characteristics of the captive environment.

**Abnormal behaviour** – including only those patterns of behaviour which are not part of the species' natural behaviour, such as undirected pacing, head-weaving, bar biting etc.

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(Excerpts taken from the full report.)