WILD ANIMALS IN ENTERTAINMENT

Frequently Asked Questions

How is entertainment defined?

When we think of wild animals in entertainment, we might picture an elephant being forced to perform in a circus, but the use of wild animals in entertainment extends much further than the circus industry. Using wild animals in entertainment might include shows in zoos (often promoted as "educational"), the use of wild animals in films, TV, or staged photography, the use of wild animals as "photo props," or as part of events or parties. In essence, the use of wild animals in entertainment is when the animal is made to carry out behaviors in front of an audience for the benefit of the audience. In recent years, the use of animals in entertainment has extended onto social media platforms. Here, we see a combination of issues coming together – sometimes exotic pets are displayed in videos for "likes" or videos of animals performing in zoos allow the industry to extend its reach beyond its visitors. These videos might include fake "rescues" where animals are placed in dangerous situations deliberately to entertain audiences.

Why are animals in live or recorded shows an issue?

In some instances, the cruelty of using wild animals in shows is obvious. For example, the use of sharp hooks, known as bull hooks, on elephants in circuses is

undoubtedly cruel. However, much of the time, there are no outward signs of suffering when we see a performing animal. Major welfare problems with using animals in entertainment is in the way in which those animals came to be there. To train wild animals to submit to human demands will usually involve them being removed from their mother at a very young age. In addition, some animal trainers use what is known as "negative reinforcement" – or punishment – to ensure the animals do what they want.

The use of animals in this way also often requires them to be transported regularly from one place to another, which can be extremely stressful. In addition, the animals might be kept in inadequate, rudimentary temporary housing and restrained regularly.

Some animals used in entertainment may even be surgically mutilated in order to make them "safer" to work around. This might mean declawing cats or removing the canine teeth of primates.

How can I tell if a video or performance is exploitative?

Of course, not all portrayals of wild animals are exploitative. For example, genuine animal rescues might share videos or photographs of the animals they care for to help raise awareness or vital funds for their work. Ethical documentary filmmakers capture videos and images of wild animals without causing suffering. Here are some ways to tell the difference between damaging and positive portrayals of wild animals. Damaging portrayals might include:

- Any situation where the animal has a live audience watching them.
- If a wild animal is in direct physical contact with a human for a reason other than their own welfare, this should be a red flag. An example of them receiving contact for their benefit includes veterinary care or other vital husbandry.
- If the animal is in a clear entertainment setting or outside of their normal home:
  - A film or television set or studio
  - A circus ring
  - A theater
  - A party or other event
- If the wild animal is performing unnatural tricks or behaviors (jumping through hoops, "dancing", balancing items on body parts, balancing on platforms).

- If the wild animal is wearing clothing or other unnatural items.
- If the animal is depicted being "rescued" from a dangerous situation but the rescue is not linked to a bonafide organization.

What can I do to help?

- Do not attend shows or events which include live wild animals, even if they promote themselves as educational.
- Boycott films and television programs which feature performing wild animals.
- Do not engage with social media posts which depict performing wild animals. Even "angry" reactions or well-meaning comments to help people understand what is wrong with the post increases their visibility and helps them to reach even more people.