

Reports and Comments

Wild animals in circuses

The use of wild animals in circuses and other travelling shows has been debated for many years. Although the number of animals used in such shows is very small, when compared to the many millions used in the farming sector or research industry for example, the majority of people within the United Kingdom (UK) strongly feel that the use of wild animals in circuses should be banned (as evidenced by various public opinion surveys).

A number of reports have been written concerning the use of wild animals in circuses and the latest to be published was commissioned by the Welsh Government. Three scientists, Jo Dorning, Stephen Harris, and Heather Pickett, were required to undertake: “an impartial literature review and an analysis of the scientific evidence available as to whether captive wild animals in travelling circuses and other animal shows achieve their optimal welfare requirements as set out under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and any other relevant legislation.”

The Welsh review gives a background to the complex issues involved and considers relevant legislation and licensing, as well as the current situation, both within the UK and globally. In 2015, two circuses were licensed to operate within the UK using a small number of wild animals (1 ankole, 3 camels, 1 fox, 1 raccoon, 7 reindeer, 3 snakes and 3 zebras). However, as well as these animals, there was also an estimated 3,570 wild animals used in 188 mobile zoos, and 7 mobile ‘farms’ (the most popular animals were reported to be African land snails, bearded dragons, corn snakes, hedgehogs, hissing cockroaches, millipedes, royal pythons, scorpions and tarantulas). It is noted that: “In recent years there has been an increasing trend to use wild animals in a diversity of travelling animal shows”.

Attention is drawn to the lack of clarity over what constitutes a wild species and a domesticated species and also the lack of regulation of mobile zoos (considered by the report as any travelling animal show other than a circus). According to the report, two-thirds of mobile zoos were not registered with a local authority (as required under the Performing Animals [Regulation] Act 1925), largely due to ambiguity over what is considered to be a ‘performance’ (and which would, therefore, require a licence).

To understand the key welfare concerns for wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos, a survey of 658 people and organisations from around the world was carried out using two questionnaires. Respondents were categorised into one of the following five groups: animal trainers and circuses; zoo and sanctuary staff; lawyers and veterinarians with expertise in animal welfare; scientists; and people working for relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The first questionnaire asked people to list up to 10 indicators/factors, for the following three questions:

- Indicators of (good and bad) welfare of wild animals in circuses;

- Factors that affect the (good and bad) welfare of wild animals in circuses; and

- Factors unique to non-domesticated animals used in circuses/entertainment.

The second questionnaire involved 42 statements and participants were asked to what extent they agreed with each statement (where 0% = strongly disagree, and 100% = strongly agree). Statements were generated using the 10 largest response categories from the first questionnaire. For example, two statements seeking views on training and performance were:

Statement 25: To what extent do you agree with the statement that “Frequent handling and training of performing animals makes veterinary procedures less stressful for the animals, thereby contributing to welfare”;

Statement 32: To what extent do you agree with the statement that “Frequent training and performances are stressful for animals and contribute to poor welfare”.

The results of the surveys illustrate how polarised opinions may be, for example, frequent travel, performance and regular changes of scenery were seen by some to have a positive influence on animal welfare (due to mental and physical stimulation and reduction of boredom), whilst others considered that it would compromise welfare (due to excessive disturbance, disruption and unpredictability). Likewise, training (when carried out using positive reinforcement and promoting natural behaviours), was considered by some to offer mental and physical stimulation, thus improving welfare, but others had concerns over the frequency and duration of training sessions and performances: “overwork or overstimulation could interfere with natural behavioural time budgets, deprive animals of rest and cause excessive disturbance and stress”.

As well as seeking expert views on the welfare of zoo animals, an extensive literature review was undertaken. The last UK review that comprehensively considered relevant literature was published in 2007 and carried out by the Circus Working Group (established by Defra in 2006 to address concerns of the time). The Academic Panel of the Circus Working Group concluded that a ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses would not be legal due to there being insufficient evidence of poor welfare: “There appears to be little evidence to demonstrate that the welfare of animals kept in travelling circuses is any better or worse than that of animals kept in other captive environments”.

However, since the publication of the Circus Working Group report, the Welsh review observes that there “has been a substantial increase in the amount of information available since the last review of the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses”, but it also says: “Since very little research has been done on animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos *per se*, we used studies on how wild animals respond to changes in environment, husbandry and/or transport in other captive situations to identify key indica-

tors of good welfare, how particular experiences affect welfare, and whether travelling circuses and mobile zoos can fulfil their welfare requirements of wild animals.”

This is a different stance to the one taken by the 2007 circus report which stated: “The opinion of the Academic Panel is that the environment in circuses is too different from those of farms or zoos for helpful comparisons of research findings to be made. Legitimate comparisons could possibly be made with animals transported regularly to shows or competitions involving a high degree of training and human contact but the data are not available at present although even this could be problematic as these are usually domesticated animals”.

However, upon reviewing the responses from the two questionnaires, and considering the latest literature, the Welsh review ultimately comes to a different conclusion: “The scientific evidence indicates that captive wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos do not achieve their optimal welfare requirements set out under the Animal Welfare Act 2006”.

The Welsh Government will now use the review as an advisory document on legislative changes regarding the use of wild animals in circuses.

The Welfare of Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (April 2017). A4, 177 pages. A review, commissioned by the Welsh Government undertaken by Jo Dorning, Stephen Harris, and Heather Pickett. The report is available at: <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/performing-animals/?lang=en>.

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (October 2007). The report of the Chairman of the Circus Working Group by Mike Radford, Defra, London, UK. Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/pdf/circus-report.pdf>.

E Carter,

UFAW

Welfare of working equids

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) is an intergovernmental organisation with 180 member countries. The objectives of the OIE are to: Ensure transparency in the global animal disease situation; Collect, analyse and disseminate veterinary scientific information; Encourage international solidarity in the control of animal diseases; Safeguard world trade by publishing health standards for international trade in animals and animal products; Improve the legal framework and resources of national veterinary services; and, To provide a better guarantee of food of animal origin and to promote animal welfare through a science-based approach.

One way in which the OIE works to satisfy its objectives is through the publication of the ‘OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code’. The Terrestrial Code is a comprehensive set of standards that have been formally adopted by the World Assembly of OIE Delegates and are published annually.

The importance of animal welfare within the OIE was initially recognised as a strategic priority in 2000 (3rd OIE Strategic Plan 2001–2005) and the first OIE animal

welfare standards were published in 2005 (covering the transport of animals by land, sea and air, and the slaughter and killing of animals for human consumption and for disease control). During the last 10 years, further animal welfare standards have gradually been developed: Stray dog population control (2009); Use of animals for research and education (2010); Animal welfare and beef cattle production systems (2012); Animal welfare and broiler chicken production systems (2013); Animal welfare and dairy cattle production systems (2015); and, most recently, Welfare of working equids.

The Code is now in its 25th Edition and the new chapter (7.12) covering the welfare of working equids seeks to address the welfare of ‘horses, donkeys and mules that are destined, used for or retired from traction, transport and generation of income’. It is estimated that there are over 100 million working equids worldwide.

Within chapter 7.12, the responsibilities of various authorities and organisations towards working equid welfare are outlined. For example, veterinary authorities are considered to be responsible for the implementation of animal health and welfare legislation, policies and programmes, whilst the role of private veterinarians involves: provision of services and advice; disease surveillance; and dealing with cases of neglect (including the necessary liaison with police or other local authorities).

How working equid welfare may be assessed is then outlined using various criteria and outcome-based measurables under seven headings: Behaviour; Morbidity; Mortality; Body condition and physical appearance; Handling responses; Complications due to management practices; Lameness; and Fitness to work. Within this section it is advised that people have a good understanding of the species-specific behaviour of horses, donkeys and mules due to the differences between the three species, for example donkeys are likely to show subtler behavioural signs than horses.

Under ‘Complications due to management practices’, attention is drawn to practices that fundamentally compromise welfare, including firing, nasal slitting, lampas cutting and applying harmful substances to wounds. There is no evidence that these practices work but working equids may be traditionally ‘treated’ using these methods in some areas.

A number of recommendations are then made, covering: Feeding and provision of water; Shelter; Management of disease and injuries; Handling and management practice; Behaviour; End of working life; Appropriate workloads; and Farriery and harnessing. Each recommendation also includes a list of the relevant outcome-based measurables. For example, within Farriery and harnessing, it is recommended that owners and handlers should routinely clean and check the hooves of working equids both before and after work and that hoof-trimming and shoeing is only performed by persons with the necessary knowledge and skills. The outcome-based measurables listed to assist with welfare assessment are: behaviour, body condition and physical appearance, lameness and fitness to work.