Restricting the use of wild animals in circuses: the economics

Congress is urged to protect wild animals

Animal Welfare in U.S. Traveling Circuses: Restriction on wild animal use is economically beneficial

Economic benefits of a restriction on the use of wild animals in traveling circuses include: restriction is a cheaper option than regulations and inspections; saving taxpayers' money; circuses with human performers can create more jobs.

Number of animals in US circuses and establishing the cost

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for regulation and licensing of circuses and enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Licensed exhibitors are required to comply with AWA standards and APHIS conducts inspections, investigates cruelty complaints and performs an educational and enforcement role[1].

In order to establish the cost of licensing and inspections, Animal Defenders International (ADI) made a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the USDA for the costs of APHIS inspections of animal circuses for the years 2007, 2008 and 2009. The USDA was only able to provide general animal inspection data (not specific to circuses). General animal (non-circus) inspection costs for 2010 showed an average cost of *"an Animal Welfare inspection"* was $1363 and the average of *"issuing licensing and registrations"* was $665[2]. We were told *"The program office does not keep records specific to one circus for the records you have requested (…) the records are not specific to the circuses"*[3]. Furthermore, the USDA *"do not keep financial records broken down by individual circuses"*[4].

USDA records show, for example, that the animals with Carson & Barnes Circus were inspected 42 times from 2007 to 2010[5]. If the average cost of an animal welfare inspection is in the region of $1363[2], the total cost of the 42 inspections is around $57,246.

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Government studies have shown that regulation, licensing and inspection of animal circuses are just as costly worldwide. The UK Government recently carried out a feasibility study which concluded that the annual cost to the UK for the inspection of just four circuses with thirty animals would be approximately $13,000 to $19,000[6].

A restriction on the use of wild animals in traveling circuses would be the most economic option. Given that the animal protection organizations have stepped in and rehomed unwanted animals in the past, it is likely that a prohibition would carry little to no cost to government or circuses.

ADI made another FOIA request for the total number of animals traveling with each circus for 2008, 2009 and 2010[7]. The USDA responded with access to the inspection reports carried out in each of the animal circuses during these years, however, it failed to provide an overall number of animals. We were advised that animal circuses are responsible for keeping updated records of their animals. Although this data is reviewed by the USDA's Animal Care Inspectors (ACI) at the time of the inspection: *"that information is not taken by the ACI and Animal Care and/or APHIS do not typically make or keep copies of those records (thus they cannot be gotten through FOIA)"* [8].

Therefore, the USDA does not possess records showing the total number of animals per circus and *"Each inventory count only reflects the animals seen by the ACI during that particular site inspection"* [8]. The USDA also explained *"The number of animals at an inspection may vary for a number of reasons: animal deaths, animals loaned out, animals bought and sold, animals shifted between multiple sites of the same licensee, animals not seen during a focused inspection"*[8].

The USDA inspection reports also fail to identify, on a consistent basis, whether animals that are present in the site at the time of the inspection, were inspected previously. For example, the inspection of George Carden Circus showed that on February 25, 2010 there were seven elephants then, on March 18, 2010 four elephants were present, but on June 25, 2010 there were two Asian elephants[5]. Such data is not sufficient to establish the total number of animals with this circus.

Animal-free circuses save taxpayer money

Although there is a deficiency of accurate information available, it is clear that the licensing system currently in place in the US comes at a high cost. This is not recovered through the license fee, which is nominal; the Code of Federal Regulations shows a small to medium-sized circus, with between six and twenty-five animals, could pay as little as $85 a year for their USDA license[9]. If the average cost of issuing licensing and registrations is $665[2], the US taxpayer effectively pays for 87% of the licensing costs whereas the circus only pays 13%. Less than the cost of a single high-end ticket to a Ringling Circus performance[10,11].

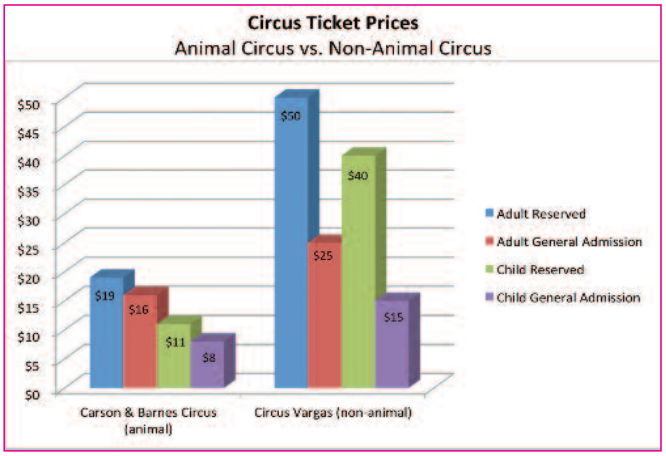
The cost of regulatory oversight goes beyond the federal level. Local animal control officers, state wildlife agencies and other local and state authorities are often called upon to investigate animal welfare and human safety concerns when a traveling circus comes to town. According to a July 28, 2009 statement issued by Ringling Bros. in defense of their staff, following the release of video evidence of elephants being beaten with bullhooks[12], the circus had been visited by 12 different state, local and federal inspection authorities within a six-month period[13]. All of this inspection and oversight is costly and would be eliminated if there were no wild animals in circuses[14].

Given the circumstances of constant travel, the need for animal accommodation to be small, lightweight, collapsible and capable of fitting onto a trailer, it is simply not possible for circuses to provide their animals with the space, environment and companionship they need, to remain psychologically and physically healthy.

Workers employed to care for the animals are poorly paid and mostly untrained – this in itself can cause suffering. Circuses cannot afford the high costs associated with the necessary environmental enrichment and specialized veterinary care.

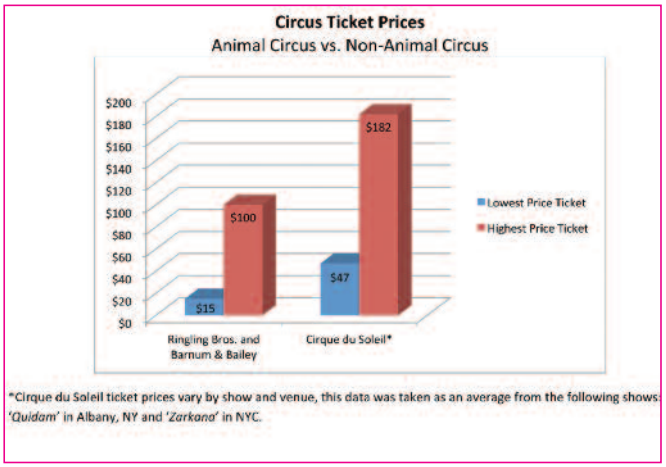
The UK Government examined a regulation and licensing scheme and found that the cost to circuses would be in the region of $152,000-$244,000 for training and licensing staff to normal welfare standards. And the cost of bringing animal facililties up to regulatory standard would be in the region of $49,000-$53,000[6].

Thus, an end to the use of wild animals in circuses will both prevent suffering and eliminate these costs. The surplus could be used to upgrade the circus infrastructure or to hire new human performers, creating more jobs.



Human-only circuses more profitable

ADI's research in the US has found that an adult ticket for an animal circus ranges from $14 to $100, with most ticket prices below $30. Some animal circuses offer incentives such as free or reduced price children's tickets, or will offer 'buy one get one free' deals[16]. In contrast, adult tickets for circuses with only human acts range from $25 to $300, with most ticket prices over $35. For example the average adult ticket price for Carson and Barnes Circus (animal) was $19, while the average adult ticket price for circus Vargus (non-animal) was $42.50.



An educated public prefers to see human acts. Following a study that revealed the suffering of circus animals, a survey in the UK established that a sharp decline in animal circuses (from 22 to 11) was matched by a steady rise in animal-free circuses (from 9 to 23)[15].

Traveling circuses are not wholly reliant on the use of wild animals, even in major animal circuses; animal acts usually represent less than 50% of the entire show[17].

In 2008 The Fercos Brothers Show (a US magic act featuring big cats) planned a tour of Bolivia, including cities that had banned the use of wild animals in circuses – the show toured without its animals[18].

Cirque du Soleil has shown that there is still an expanding market for the traditional human circus performance. In Los Angeles the company is now opening more shows and staying in venues for longer, offering substantially more revenue and employment to the city than the current, transient, wild animal circus shows offer. Guy Laliberté, founder and director of Cirque du Soleil said, *"I'd rather feed three artists than one elephant."*

The US enjoys an abundance of free or inexpensive entertainment options such as community theater productions, concerts, town festivals, fairs with carnival rides, movies, TV, games, Internet, sports, and shows.

No job losses in circuses

ADI's investigations of working practices in circuses has found that the majority of circus workers fulfill more than one role.

Those involved in animal care are also involved in selling concessions, setting up tents, equipment, promotions, advance posters, etc. Therefore there is no reason that job losses should arise from the transfer to human-only perfomers.

There is some evidence that bringing in new acts can increase employment opportunities, as non-animal circuses have increased where use of animals has ended.

Angelo Andres Olaya, the lead artist of the Peruvian animal free circus 'Circo Cuenta Teatro' commented, *"[...] we must fire the animals so that the clowns can get hired"* [19].

Action Request

It is essential that Congress support legislation to prohibit the use of exotic and wild animals in U.S. traveling circuses.

The ban will protect public safety of workers and audiences.

The ban is the only and best way to protect animal welfare. The use of animals of domesticated species in traveling circuses will not be affected by the legislation.

There is no significant public appetite for wild animal acts.

Removing wild animals from traveling circuses lowers costs and animal-related accidents.

Countries around the world have recognized the importance of banning non-domesticated animals from traveling circuses:

National measures to prohibit the use of wild animals, or selected species, have been adopted in: Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, India, Israel, Malta, Peru, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia, Sweden and Taiwan. Similar laws are being discussed in: Brazil, Chile, Netherlands, Norway and United Kingdom. Due to public concerns, local town and city bans are in place in the US, UK, Brazil and many other countries.

Animal Defenders International

With offices in Los Angeles, London and Bogota, ADI campaigns across the globe on animals in entertainment, providing technical advice to governments, securing progressive animal protection legislation, drafting regulations and rescuing animals in distress. ADI has a worldwide reputation for providing video and photographic evidence exposing the behind-the-scenes suffering in industry and supporting this evidence with scientific research on captive wildlife and transport.

1.http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/content/printable_version/fs_anexhit.pdf Accessed on 19 July 2011
2.USDA. Letter 8 March 2011. Attached document ref: FOA 11-152_000001
3.Email from Kacie Lynn Edwards, FOIA Program Specialist USDA APHIS LPA FOIA (Kacie.L.Edwards@aphis.usda.gov) to Animal Defenders International. RE: FOIA 11-226 Response. 4 April 2011
4.Email from Kacie Lynn Edwards, FOIA Program Specialist USDA APHIS LPA FOIA (Kacie.L.Edwards@aphis.usda.gov) to Animal Defenders International. RE: FOIA 11-226 Response. 31 March 2011
5.Email from Deborah L. Leilich FOIA Information Analyst to Animal Defenders International. FOIA response to your recent FOIA request FOIA 11-238. Document attached titled: "USDA APHIS Animals Inspected at Last Inspection".
6.Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Impact Assessment of the Regulation of wild animal acts in travelling circuses. 21 December 2009. Page 4. The conversions from US dollars to GB Pounds were done through the website www.xe.com accessed on 21/08/2011
7.Our records show 20 US based circuses: a) Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey, b) Bailey Brothers Circus, c) Clyde Beatty Cole Brothers Circus, d) Shrine Circus, e) Circus Royale, f) UniverSoul Circus, g) Sterling &Reid, h) Hanneford Circus, i) Carson & Barnes Circus, j) Bentley Bros. Circus, k) Circus Gatti, l) Circus Pages, m) Clupepper & Merriweather Circus, n) Franzen Bro Circus, o) George Carden Circus International, p) Hawthorn Corporation, q) Hendrick Bros Circus, Kelly Miller Circus, s) Liebel Family Circus, and t) Tarzan Zerbini Circus.
8.USDA. Letter 30 March 2011. FOIA 11-238
9.Code of Federal Regulations, Title 9, Volume 1,Revised as of January 1, 2008, section 2.5, pg. 16-18
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/downloads/awr/awr.pdf ,
10.Ringling website tour schedule http://www.ringling.com/TourSchedule.aspx?action=details&engagementId=102834 Accessed on 19 July, 2011
11.Ticketmaster Ringling ticket sales webpage http://www.ticketmaster.com/event/1D0046CFD2D66BF8?artistid=1556906&majorcatid=10003&minorcatid=29 – accessed 24 August 2011
12.http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECspj0daAIE Accessed on 19 July, 2011
13.http://www.feldentertainment.com/Press/PressRelease.aspx?id=31856 Accessed on 19 July, 2011
14.A 2007 report titled "Detailed information on the animal welfare assessment", provided that the number of inspections conducted in 2007 was of 18,343. However, the report does not specify the type of establishment or exhibitors inspected making it difficult to assess how many were carried out in animal circuses http://www.financingstimulus.org/detail/10000436.2007.html accessed 24 October 2011
15.ADI 2001, Parliamentary briefing: Animal Circuses, Time for a Ban
16.http://www.thefuncircus.com/ -accessed 18 July,2011
17.ADI observations
18.http://www.ad-international.org/publications/go.php?id=2004&cat=23&si=98 accessed 21/08/2011
19.Speech of Angelo Andres Olaya during a performance in Lima, Parque La Familia. 8 December, 2010.

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