



Wild Animals in Circuses Briefing

Update on the case for a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses

RSPCA CYMRU HAS LED CALLS FOR A BAN IN WALES

Background

RSPCA Cymru has long campaigned for an end to the use of wild animals in circuses. Scientific evidence¹ clearly demonstrates that life within a travelling circus is likely to have harmful effects on animal welfare. Placing an animal in surroundings unsuitable for the species can cause serious stress and behavioural problems with potentially debilitating effects for each and every animal involved.

The complex needs of wild animals can never be adequately met in a circus environment with animals forced to endure the constant travel, cramped temporary cages, and noisy conditions which often prove an unavoidable reality for wild animals based within a circus setting. In light of this, a growing list of other European countries² have already banned animal performances in circuses, with Scotland recently announcing its intention to also legislate on the matter³.

Despite this, it remains legal for non-domesticated animals to perform in such an environment in Wales, with a circus completing a tour of the country with wild animals in 2016 including the Vale of Glamorgan, Bargoed Aberystwyth and Pwllheli.

In 2015 RSPCA Cymru launched a petition calling for a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. This followed years of waiting for action by the Welsh and UK Governments which has thus far failed to produce a ban. A licensing system, as is in place in England, offers little protection for wild animals used in a circus environment which cannot, by its very nature meet the needs of the animals (see below).

In just a few months the petition gathered almost 8,000 signatures from within Wales and was submitted in October 2015 to the Chair of the Petitions Committee. Subsequently the Welsh Government commissioned a scientific review, *The Welfare of Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses*⁴, published in March 2016. This crucially concluded that *'the evidence would therefore support a ban on using wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos on animal welfare grounds.'*⁵

Legal situation and competency

RSPCA Cymru has always believed that there are sufficient grounds with respect to animal welfare to support

¹ The welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses, Harris et al, 2016.

http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The_welfare_of_wild_animals_in_travelling_circuses.pdf

² European neighbours Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia as well as several countries further afield (Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Israel, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Singapore) have all successfully banned the use of wild animals in circuses. Slovakia, India, Czech Republic, Sweden, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Taiwan, Finland, Ecuador and Denmark also have imposed bans on key species and Portugal has banned circuses breeding their existing wild animals or acquiring any new ones. Estonia and Poland have banned the use of all wild-caught animals.

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/AnimalWelfare/Circuses>

⁴ The welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses, Harris et al, 2016.

http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The_welfare_of_wild_animals_in_travelling_circuses.pdf

⁵ Ibid, pp2-4

a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses and as such it is a devolved competency under the Government of Wales Act (since 2011).

However, primary legislation can be a complex and lengthy process. Whereas the Animal Welfare Act 2006 offers an ideal route, just as it did for the ban on shock collars. Indeed this legislation was designed as a framework for the later introduction of regulations under section 12 and a ban on wild animals in circuses was suggested as part of the purpose of the Act during the pre-legislative process in Westminster.

After the Act came into being, Defra commissioned a report which concluded that, at that time, insufficient scientific evidence existed in terms of supporting the argument of how animal welfare was compromised and as such rendering the Animal Welfare Act unuseable for this specific purpose. However, the 2016 Report submitted to the Welsh Government by Professor Harris et al. conclusively states that, “[the] *available scientific evidence indicates that captive wild animals in circuses and other travelling animal shows do not achieve their optimal welfare requirements, as set out under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and the evidence would therefore support a ban on using wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos on animal welfare grounds.*”⁶

Therefore all objections to the use of the Animal Welfare Act as a means for enacting a ban are now removed. The introduction of regulations via this method is also far less burdensome on both Government and the National Assembly for Wales and allows the Animal Welfare Act to be utilised for its intended purpose.

Political position

A ban on the use of wild animals in circuses featured in the 2016 National Assembly for Wales election manifestos of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru. While Welsh Labour’s 2016 manifesto made no specific reference to a ban, in 2015 the then Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, Rebecca Evans, also backed RSPCA Cymru calls for a ban⁷. The UK Labour manifesto for the UK Parliamentary elections that year also committed to a ban⁸.

The public in Wales are also supportive with 74% of those questioned in favour of a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses⁹.

Conclusion

RSPCA Cymru is eager to see Wales implement a ban on this practice, which is so damaging for animal welfare, as quickly as possible and wrote to the Cabinet Secretary in October 2016 to outline the case.

The Welsh Government has the necessary legislative tools backed by a sound, independent scientific basis and overwhelming public and political support to introduce a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses, and can continue to set a gold standard for animal welfare across the governments of the UK. The only acceptable outcome which protects the welfare of wild animals in circuses is a ban. However the Welsh Government has announced there will be a consultation in 2017 on a series of new proposals - with the suggestion a ban on wild animals in circuses may not be included.

Acknowledgement that action is required on Mobile Animal Exhibits is a positive one. The welfare of animals in these circumstances - like bringing animals to a school or birthday party - is at risk - and we'll work closely with the Welsh Government to ensure they are regulated, where appropriate, and the animals involved are given the protection they need. However the Welsh Government’s own independent scientific report leaves no room for confusion that using wild animals in circuses is bad for welfare. As such, RSPCA Cymru believes the only acceptable solution to protect the welfare of wild animals in a circus environment is to implement an outright ban on this practice.

⁶ The welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses, Harris et al, 2016. p4

http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The_welfare_of_wild_animals_in_travelling_circuses.pdf

⁷ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/circuses-wild-animals-could-banned-10307878>

⁸ http://action.labour.org.uk/page/-/A4%20BIG%20_PRINT_ENG_LABOUR%20MANIFESTO_TEXT%20LAYOUT.pdf

⁹ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,036 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th–22nd August 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).