



The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



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Ringling Brothers Circus Brings Acts of Cruelty to Town

Monday, March 15, 2004

Use of "bullhooks" and other animal abuse cited in suit against Ringling Bros.

Media Contacts: Jo Sullivan to receive
(212) 876-7700 ext. 4512

(New York, NY) March 15, 2004 -- The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus is coming to town, and with it comes the circus's "dirty little secret" that it hits its elephants with razor sharp "bullhooks" and keeps the elephants chained for days on end, to keep the animals under control. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), The Fund for Animals, and the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) have brought a lawsuit against Ringling under the Endangered Species Act for its mistreatment of the elephants an endangered species. Earlier this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., rejected Ringling's arguments that the case should be thrown out, and the case is now going forward in the federal district court in Washington.

The ASPCA is urging New Yorkers to not patronize the circus, which is scheduled to begin performances at Madison Square Garden on March 18, 2004. "Sadly, many parents and educators view the circus as an opportunity to teach children about wild animals," said Lisa Weisberg, ASPCA Senior Vice President, Government Affairs and Public Policy. "The conditions under which these highly social creatures perform and live in the circus are a stark contrast to how nature intended. Parents should question whether they want to teach their children that it is natural and appropriate for elephants to stand on their hind legs and perform on command solely for our entertainment."

The nation's largest animal welfare organizations collaborated on a report documenting the systematic abuse of the Asian elephants in Ringling's care. The report was based on hundreds of records obtained through litigation under the Freedom of Information Act. The records show that in case after case brought to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the last five years by animal welfare organizations, state humane agencies, former Ringling Bros. employees, and even USDA's own inspectors, the



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USDA chose to ignore crucial evidence showing a clear pattern of bullhook use. The Report also shows that the agency closed investigations prematurely and overrode its own inspectors' and investigators' determinations of violations of the law --allowing Ringling to insist to the public that there is no truth to any allegations that it abuses its elephants. Tracing nine different investigations over five years, the report reveals such incidents as:

- Internal documents show that USDA investigators found that a trainer's use of a bullhook on a baby elephant named Benjamin "created behavioral stress and trauma which precipitated in the physical harm and ultimate death of the animal," yet the USDA memorandum closing the case omitted all references to this finding and instead stated that "suddenly, and without any signs of distress or struggle, Benjamin became unconscious and drowned." No enforcement action was taken by the USDA.
- USDA determined that Ringling's use of chains and ropes to forcibly remove nursing elephants from their mothers at Ringling's "Center for Elephant Conservation" caused the animals "unnecessary trauma, behavioral stress, [and] physical harm," and "was not in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act," yet the agency quietly closed the investigation without taking any enforcement action.
- The USDA has been extremely cooperative in helping Ringling keep the public from knowing that as many as eight elephants have tested positive for Tuberculosis and many more have been exposed to the disease. In one instance, although a USDA investigator originally cited Ringling for failing to provide any medical treatment for an elephant who had tested positive, a high level USDA official later "overrode" that citation when Ringling's attorneys complained.

The plaintiffs are being represented by the public interest law firm, Meyer & Glitzenstein.

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Founded in 1866, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was the first humane organization established in the Western Hemisphere and today has one million supporters. The ASPCA's mission is to provide an effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. The ASPCA provides national leadership in humane education, government affairs and public policy, shelter support, and animal poison control. The NYC headquarters houses a full-service animal hospital, animal behavior center, and adoption facility. The Humane Law Enforcement department enforces New York's animal cruelty laws and is featured on the reality television series *Animal Precinct* on Animal Planet. Visit www.asPCA.org for more information.

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As the Circus Comes to Town, the ASPCA Reminds New Yorkers of Abuse Inflicted Upon Circus Elephants

Thursday, March 20, 2003

Lawsuit pending in U.S. Federal Court Charges Mistreatment of Elephants by Ringling Bros. and Barnum Bailey Employees

Media Contacts: Jo Sullivan
(212) 876-7700 ext. 4512

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(NEW YORK) March 20, 2003 -- As Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus continues its 2003 national tour, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), is reminding the public about the abuse that circus staff regularly inflicts upon performing elephants. The ASPCA charges that to "train" and "control" its elephants, Ringling Bros. routinely keeps them in chains and beats them with "bullhooks"-clubs with sharp metal hooks on the end. In support of these claims, the ASPCA offers sworn accounts by former Ringling Bros. employees, U. S. Department of Agriculture documents that outline employees inflicting "physical harm" on their baby elephants, and video footage of Ringling Bros. employees striking elephants.

"People go to the circus because they love animals," says Lisa Weisberg, ASPCA Senior Vice President of Government Affairs & Public Policy. "What people do not realize is that they are supporting an industry that engages in animal cruelty."

The ASPCA and a former Ringling Bros. elephant worker have jointly sued Ringling Bros. under the Endangered Species Act, which prohibits "harming" any animal that is "endangered." Ringling Bros. uses endangered Asian elephants in its circus performances. The case is pending in the United States District Court in the District of Columbia.

The reports of abuse have been documented by several former Ringling Bros employees and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. According to these accounts, elephants are routinely kept in chains for as long as 23 hours a day from the time they are

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babies and are repeatedly beaten with sharp bullhooks in order to "break" them and make them perform on command.

The ASPCA also points to documentation from a USDA investigation that found Ringling Bros. inflicted "large visible lesions" on baby elephants at its "Conservation Center" in Florida. The wounds inflicted during "a routine separation process" in which baby elephants, less than two years old, were forcibly removed their mothers. After consulting an independent panel of elephant experts, the USDA informed Feld Entertainment, Ringling's parent company, that this treatment of the babies causes them "trauma and physical harm" and is completely "unnecessary." In the wild, baby elephants are not weaned until they are about four years old. Females stay with their mothers and the rest of their social units for their entire lives.

"All of this treatment violates the law and is cruelty," continues Lisa Weisburg. "Both the Endangered Species Act and the Animal Welfare Act prohibit the abuse of endangered animals used in entertainment. It is time to end this archaic practice."

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