

ELEPHANTS IN CIRCUSES – ANIMAL ABUSE

We awoke yesterday morning to more snow and to the news that the elephants were coming to town. Having elephants nearby is usually a cause for joy, but yesterday our hearts sank: This was not our elephant research camp in Amboseli National Park, Kenya, but below freezing Sandefjord, Norway.

If you haven't spent years with elephants in the wild, you will be forgiven for thinking that elephants in the circus are having fun. Nothing could be further from the truth. Elephants in circuses undergo a life of duress for your entertainment, knowing that there will be unpleasant consequences if they don't comply with the unnatural behaviors that they are expected to perform.

Amboseli Elephant Research Project is the longest study of wild elephants in the world. Our research forms the basis of what is currently known about the emotional and cognitive abilities of elephants, their conservation status and welfare needs. The earth's largest land mammal, elephants are enormously social and intelligent. They need vast areas of space and a large social network of relatives and friends in order to thrive. With this background, we felt ashamed to be in Sandefjord yesterday. Sandefjord and Norway is not a suitable climate for elephants. And circuses do not make an appropriate home for elephants: confined in small spaces, in cold places, behind bars, in barns, transported from town to town on trains and in trucks, stored on chains, moved with electric prods and bullhooks and kept in socially deprived conditions, elephants in circuses become dysfunctional, unhealthy, and depressed.

Norway is known around the world for its progressive and fair society, but sadly this does not extend to the care and concern for the well being of other living creatures. When it comes to the welfare of non-human beings Norway is strangely out of touch with other developed countries and even with many developing countries. The exploitation of elephants – and other exotic species – in Norwegian circuses is one example of an unethical practice right on your doorstep that you can do something about.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The greatness of a country can be measured by how it treats its animals". Norway, it is time to ban elephants from your circuses.

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