



The show can't go on

End the suffering of wild animals at cruel visitor attractions in zoos and aquariums

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Cover: Avilon Zoo (Philippines)



Photo: Dolphin Island (Resort World Sentosa) (Singapore)

Introduction

Wild animals kept by irresponsible zoos and aquariums across the world are enduring appalling suffering for visitor entertainment.

This report documents cruel and demeaning performances and activities taking place in venues linked with the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). This includes elephant rides, wildlife 'selfies' and circus-like shows, all known to cause great physical and mental distress to animals.

During field visits to a number of WAZA linked venues, researchers observed:

- ❖ Big cats, such as lions and tigers, being placed on stage to perform tricks and stunts set to loud music.
- ❖ Dolphins being forced to perform stunts and allow trainers to 'surf' on them.
- ❖ Elephants being forced to give rides on their backs to tourists and perform in shows.
- ❖ Primates being exploited as photo-props dressed in costumes.

All this cruelty continues despite repeated calls by World Animal Protection to WAZA asking them to ensure their members are not offering these types of cruel and demeaning attractions.

World Animal Protection believes that wild animals' needs can never be fully met in captivity. We recognise modern, responsible zoos are sometimes required to protect individual wild animals and wildlife populations, but they should always prioritise animal welfare. However, today at irresponsible zoos and aquariums across the world wild animals are suffering for visitor entertainment.

WAZA is the main global umbrella organisation for zoos and other related institutions. Consequently, it is expected to lead the way with clear animal welfare standards and guidelines for its members, backed up by robust monitoring.

WAZA's stated aim is to 'guide, promote and encourage members in animal care and welfare'. But we found clear evidence that cruel and demeaning visitor attractions, that have no place in responsible modern zoos and aquariums, are slipping through the net.

The show can't go on highlights the animal suffering behind the visitor attractions being provided by irresponsible zoos and aquariums linked with WAZA, as uncovered by our desktop research. It also includes on-site field research at 12 zoos and aquariums. This on-site research was carried out in collaboration with the Change For Animals Foundation.

The venues for the field visits, and included in the case studies, were chosen from zoos and aquariums that are either direct members of WAZA or linked to it through its regional and national association members. These include venues located in nine countries across the globe; Australia, Canada, France, Portugal, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa and the USA. We have focused our research on the exploitation of big cats, dolphins, elephants and primates.

The venues included in these case studies do not represent the worst zoos in the world. However, their links with WAZA implicitly suggests they are aspiring to be modern, animal welfare-friendly zoos, but they are clearly contravening WAZA guidelines.

Our research exposes some of the worst examples of wild animal attractions that simply have no place in a modern zoo.

Whilst acknowledging that a life in captivity will always be a far cry from a life in the wild, this report maps out solutions to establishing responsible zoos and aquariums that respect the animals in their care.

We also highlight WAZA's critical role in meeting its stated aim to guide, promote and encourage its members in animal care and welfare.

The truth behind the scenes

Behind the conservation curtain

When managed properly, zoos and aquariums, through initiatives like humane research and captive release programmes, can be vital in conserving threatened wild animal species (Moss, Jensen and Gusset 2014) (World Animal Protection, 2019). But, because zoos and aquariums are also typically set up to attract visitors, who want experiences with animals, sometimes responsible and credible conservation efforts can be put on the back burner.

Advances in knowledge about animal welfare highlight the negative impact that certain visitor attractions can have on animals' mental and physical wellbeing (Schmidt-Burbach et al. 2015; Moorhouse et al. 2015). Sadly, some of these visitor attractions causing suffering to wildlife are taking place in venues that claim to be modern zoos and aquariums.

Inflicting suffering

Wild animal species are not domesticated, they still retain their wild biology and behaviours. Natural habitats are the only places they can truly lead full lives and carry out their natural behaviours and instincts. For example, dolphins are wide-ranging, deep-diving, intelligent wild animals, an aquarium can never fully replicate the complex ocean environment they have evolved to thrive in.

To make wild animals interact with, and perform for, visitors harsh training methods are frequently used that inflict appalling suffering. Depending on the species, and the type of attraction, these methods can involve premature separation of baby animals from their mothers, starvation, physical restraint, pain and fear.

Protecting zoo animals – a balancing act

To protect animals suffering for cruel and demeaning visitor attractions in zoos and aquariums, a delicate balance is needed. Fulfilling experiences can be offered for visitors, but they should never put animals at risk from unintended harm or deliberate abuse (D'Cruze et al. 2019).

Most people are drawn to wild animal entertainment, including zoos and aquariums, because they love animals. They want to see live wild animals in person, interact with them and learn more about them (Kreger et al. 1995; Hosey 2005).

However, captivity in zoos and aquariums will always compromise wild animal welfare, as they can never fully replicate conditions that wild animals truly need to live full lives.

Consequently, zoos and aquariums should always strive to meet conservation goals, and attract and educate visitors, while also placing wild animal welfare at their core and respecting the animals in their care.

It is vital that visitors are aware that cruel and demeaning animal visitor attractions simply have no place in modern zoos and aquariums.

Leading the way – WAZA's expected role

Currently there is no single global body regulating all wildlife tourism. This is a confusing situation that means visitors can sometimes unknowingly take part in harmful attractions that actually cause pain, fear and suffering to the very same wild animals they came to see (Moorhouse et al., 2017). However, there are a number of bodies operating at a global level that can help visitors to make more humane, animal friendly choices.

In the case of zoos and aquariums, WAZA was founded in 1935 to help venues maximise their conservation impact and look after the animals in their care to the highest standards. It considers itself the global alliance of regional associations, and national federations representing "the world's leading zoos and aquariums" (WAZA, 2018). The alliance has approximately 282 direct members and approximately 1,200 associated member venues through 24 different national and regional associations (WAZA, 2018).

WAZA guidance states that members should not involve animals "in animal shows, displays or interactive experiences where animals perform demeaning and unnatural behaviours" (WAZA, 2015). Yet, our research for this report shows this guidance is not being fully recognised and followed. WAZA guidelines are not being properly communicated, and adherence is not being properly implemented by the zoos and aquariums, or by WAZA itself.

Tourists visiting a WAZA-linked venue should be able to trust they are not inadvertently supporting cruel animal attractions. Sadly, currently this is not the case.

Photo: Puy de Fou (France)



Researching the scale of the problem

Stage 1 – desktop research

Initially, our researchers led on a desktop survey focussing on more than 1,200 venues located around the globe. All had some form of membership link to WAZA – 23% were direct WAZA members and 77% were members of WAZA via regional or national association members.

Table 1: Animal-visitor interaction (AVI) definition criteria used during this study.

Number	AVI type	Contact type	Definition criteria
1	Hand feeding	Direct	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity to a captive wild animal, provide food and water by hand, with or without a physical barrier between them and with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively high expectation of direct contact.
2	Non-Hand feeding	Indirect	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity with a captive wild animal, provide food and water, although not by hand, with or without a physical barrier between them and with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively low expectation of direct contact.
3	Petting	Direct	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity with a captive wild animal to hold and touch them, with or without any physical barrier between them and with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively high expectation of direct contact.
4	Riding	Direct	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity with a captive wild animal, which will carry them, with or without a harness or equivalent and with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively high expectation of direct contact.
5	Walk with or swim with	Direct or indirect	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity to a captive wild animal, which is typically restrained by a harness or equivalent, without any physical barrier, with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively moderate expectation of direct contact.
6	Walk or swim through	Indirect	Interaction where visitors can experience close proximity to a captive wild animal without any physical barrier, with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively low expectation of direct contact.
7	Drive through or cage dive	Indirect	Interactions where visitors can experience close proximity to a captive wild animal with a vehicle or device acting as a physical barrier, with or without official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively low expectation of direct contact.
8	Show and performances	Indirect	Interactions with trained staff and or visitors where a captive wild animal provides a demonstration of either natural or non-natural behaviour for visitors, with or without a physical barrier between them, under official staff supervision. Visitors are likely to have a relatively low expectation of direct contact.

Of the 1,200 plus zoos and aquariums we included in our study, 75% offered at least one type of animal visitor interaction. These are summarised below

%	Type of animal visitor interaction
43%	petting experiences
33%	walk or swim through enclosure experiences
30%	shows / performances involving wildlife
28%	indirect/non-hand feeding experiences
23%	hand-feeding experiences
8%	drive-through or cage dive experiences
5%	riding experiences
5%	walking with wildlife experiences

When conducting our research, we maintained objectivity and awareness that not all animal-visitor interactions have negative impacts on wild animals. Positive and negative impact depends on factors, including the species involved, the type of animal attraction and how they are managed.

However, our desktop research found a variety of different animal visitor attractions being offered, representing a clear and present threat to the welfare of the wild animals involved. These included circus-like performances, the use of wild animals as photo-props and elephant rides (D’Cruze et al.2019).

Stage 2 – 12 on-site visits

We used the data from our desktop review of more than 1,200 zoos and aquariums to identify venues of particular animal welfare concern. Based on these findings, our researchers, and those from Change For Animals Foundation, visited 12 different zoos and/or aquariums between February and June 2019.

Five zoos and aquariums are direct members of WAZA, and seven belong to national or regional associations that are in turn members of WAZA. The zoos and aquariums are in different countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania and North America (Table 1).

The researchers were briefed to:

1. confirm that activities of concern were taking place
2. gather data on the negative animal welfare impacts
3. gather images and footage as evidence.

Table 2: List of WAZA linked direct and indirect member zoos and aquariums visited:

Direct WAZA Members

Dolphin Island (Resort World Sentosa) (Singapore)

Zoo d’Amneville (France)

Jungle Cat World (Canada)

African Lion Safari (Canada)

Cango Wildlife Ranch (South Africa)

Indirect WAZA Members

Sea World (Australia) – Indirect via the Zoo and Aquarium Association

SeaWorld (San Antonio, USA) – Indirect via the Association of Zoo and Aquariums

Zoomarine (Portugal) – Indirect via the Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquaria & the European Association of Zoo and Aquaria

Puy du Fou (France) – Indirect via the Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques

Avilon Zoo (Philippines) – Indirect via the Southeast Asian Zoos and Aquariums Association

Mystic Monkeys & Feathers Wildlife Park (S. Africa) – Indirect via the Pan African Association of Zoos and Aquaria

Ichihara Elephant Kingdom (Japan) – Indirect via the Japanese Associations of Zoos and Aquariums



Photo: Ichihara Elephant Kingdom (Japan). Credit: Fernando Carniel Machado / World Animal Protection

Results: Clear suffering caused to wildlife by WAZA venues

Big cats

What demeaning and unnatural animal-visitor interactions are happening, and how does this contradict WAZA's own guidelines?

Despite their reputation as some of the world's fastest and strongest predators, some zoos exhibit big cats as little more than cuddly toys. Our field investigations into four WAZA-linked zoos in Europe, North America and South Africa have revealed that supposedly 'modern' zoos still present their lions, tigers and cheetahs in demeaning and unnatural ways. These include shows and visitor interactions where the animals can be petted and cuddled while leashed to a platform.

One show paraded tigers around a small circus ring while a trainer poked them with sticks, so they would perform stunts. Another gladiator-style show made lions and tigers appear in scenes with actors in a decorated amphitheatre. Other venues offered direct encounters where visitors can stroke, kiss and cuddle the cats, or use them as photo props for selfies. To place these wild animals in such artificial contexts directly contradicts the animal welfare strategy that WAZA claims to promote to venues it is linked with.



What are the welfare issues?

Big cats are wild animals, keeping them in captivity will always lead to severe restrictions on their welfare. They are crepuscular and nocturnal, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk or during the night⁽¹⁾. Zoos and aquariums are open during the day, so the animals are expected to perform contrary to their natural biological rhythms. This can have dire effects on the animals' physical and mental wellbeing.

Stress can cause behavioural abnormalities and recurring health issues in captive big cats⁽²⁾. Studies investigating the impact of performing on circus tigers have shown an increase in pacing, which is often considered a stress response, prior to performances, concluding that the behaviour was most likely in anticipation of the show⁽³⁾. Wild tigers are solitary creatures, so performing in confined spaces with other big cats, and contending with spotlights, loud music and large crowds, is likely to feel very unnatural for them.

Big cats used as photo props in demeaning visitor interactions can feel crowded by the many visitors who pet them throughout the day. Some venues keep the animals on a leash, so that they are unable to escape the social intrusion if they want rest or space. Cubs are typically separated from their mothers for these 'petting' attractions, and this can cause great stress to both the adult and the infant. Additionally, some big cat venues boast 'rarer' breeds of white lions and tigers. White big cats are relatively rare in wild populations, and the majority of those in captivity have been inbred to retain their unique colouring. This inbreeding often causes genetic mutations which can lead to severe health consequences^(4,5).

Photo: Jungle Cat World (Canada)



Photo: Zoo D'Amneville (France)

What are the wider implications and how should a responsible venue handle these species?

Direct interactions with big cats mislead people into thinking that these species are 'domesticated'. This could potentially fuel other problematic industries such as the global [exotic pet trade](#). The use of wild animals as photo props is also a [huge problem](#) that could lead to species and biodiversity loss, as well as the inhumane treatment of wild animals⁽⁶⁾. Given the vast majority of these big cats are bred in captivity, and some are genetically inbred, the animals are typically unsuitable for reintroduction to the wild. As such, these unnatural interactions are largely being carried out in the name of exploitation rather than conservation.

Concerningly, big cats kept for entertainment have also been linked to illegal international trade. Specifically, several international NGOs have raised concerns that the captive lion industry in South Africa may be illegally breeding animals to export to South East Asia for use in traditional medicine⁽⁷⁾.

Responsible venues should not offer any direct interaction between visitors and big cats. Big cats in captivity should be treated with respect, as in WAZA welfare guidelines. Emphasis should be placed on educating the public about the natural biology and ecology of these wild species, and the animals should be free to move and behave as they want to.

Where did we go and what did we find?

Throughout April and May 2019, World Animal Protection visited several WAZA-associated venues offering animal-visitor interactions. Puy du Fou (France) displays lions, a tiger and a leopard during a gladiator-style spectacle in an amphitheatre for thousands of spectators. At Zoo d'Amneville (France), six tigers perform in a circus-style show set to music. Jungle Cat World (Canada) offers 'behind the scenes' visits where visitors are able to pet lion cubs and servals on leashes. There are also images on social media of visitors to this venue petting tigers and tiger cubs leashed to platforms. Congo Wildlife Ranch (South Africa) offers visitors the chance to pet cheetahs and servals in an enclosed yard, taking selfies with the animals under the supervision of staff members.

Zoo d'Amneville (France), Congo Wildlife Ranch (South Africa) and Jungle Cat World (Canada) are directly associated with WAZA. Puy du Fou (France) is indirectly associated with WAZA via its membership with the Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques (AFdPZ).

Dolphins

What demeaning and unnatural animal-visitor interactions are happening, and how does this contradict WAZA's own guidelines?

Our field investigations into four WAZA-linked venues in Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania confirmed that dolphins are being exploited for entertainment. We witnessed these intelligent marine predators performing choreographed 'tricks' for noisy crowds. We found them being treated as nothing more than selfie props as visitors hugged, stroked and kissed them. We even saw them being made to exhibit human actions such as 'waving' with their flippers. We also observed dolphins 'beaching' on surfaces around the tank – laying disabled on land in the hope of a reward when they returned to the water.

World Animal Protection believes that holding dolphins' captive in tiny enclosures constitutes a life devoid of naturalness.

WAZA states that animal welfare is a core responsibility of all modern zoos and aquariums. They say any venues linked to them should not offer displays or experiences where animals perform demeaning and unnatural behaviours. There is clearly nothing natural about a dolphin balancing people or props on its face, or a human 'surfing' on the back of a dolphin as it swims in circles around a small tank.



What are the welfare issues?

Keeping dolphins in captive facilities will always lead to severe restrictions on their welfare. The main concern for marine mammals, like dolphins, is the artificial and barren nature of their captive environment, particularly the limited amount of space provided. No facility can simulate the vast reaches of the ocean these animals' traverse.

Circus-like performances often require controversial training methods. Some techniques involve withdrawing food and social stimulation from dolphins, then later using these as rewards. Food rewards are also used during shows, meaning the dolphins' diet is informed by their performance schedule rather than when they are hungry.

Research shows that captive dolphins can be physically affected by their expectation to perform⁽⁸⁾. Commercial pressure means they are likely to be encouraged to train and perform even when they do not show willingness. As some venues expect dolphins to perform several times every day, performing can become a considerable source of stress⁽⁹⁾. Evidence also shows that sustained stress can lead to illness and death⁽¹⁰⁾. Their high level of sentience means dolphins can suffer psychologically too⁽¹¹⁾.

During performances, dolphins spend much time near the water's surface, looking up at their trainers for commands and rewards. Extended surface time and direct eye exposure to the sun is unnatural for dolphins and can cause eye lesions, infections and premature cataracts⁽¹²⁾. Dolphins rely heavily on sound for many important life functions, so noise levels in crowded stadiums could have an adverse impact on their swimming, feeding and breathing patterns. Excessive noise could also inflict stress and cause hearing damage⁽¹³⁾.

During 'swim with dolphins' interactions, visitors' fingernails and jewellery can damage dolphins' delicate skin⁽¹⁴⁾. The presence of people in their enclosures can also increase the animals' stress levels⁽⁹⁾.

Since dolphins carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans and vice versa, direct interactions can transmit pathogens and leave visitors, staff and animals all susceptible to the spread of disease⁽⁹⁾.

Photo: SeaWorld (USA)



Photo: SeaWorld (USA)

What are the wider implications and how should a responsible venue handle these species?

This irresponsible use of dolphins for entertainment presents a misleading view of the species⁽⁹⁾. For example, much of the behaviours portrayed as ‘playful’ during shows are actually displays of aggression or disturbance⁽¹²⁾. Similarly, venues offering direct contact with dolphins perpetuate the idea that it is completely safe for humans to interact with them. In reality, dolphins are incredibly strong wild animals that, when aggravated, can pose safety risks to people.

The conservation value of these types of interactions are questionable, as the majority of dolphins in captivity are species that are not endangered in the wild⁽¹²⁾. Responsible venues should comply with WAZA’s animal welfare guidelines that state that they should: “avoid using animals in any interactive experiences when their welfare may be compromised”.

Instead of commerce-driven public performances, these venues should eliminate these harmful attractions and instead offer proper enrichment for the dolphins, with no direct contact with people and no circus-like tricks.

More widely, dolphinariums and aquaria cannot even begin to simulate the natural habitats of these species. World Animal Protection maintains that in the long-term, it is vital that venues phase out their use of dolphins and retire current animals to seaside sanctuaries that would aim to provide a much-improved environment.

Where did we go and what did we find?

Between August 2018 and May 2019, World Animal Protection and Change For Animals Foundation visited several WAZA-associated venues offering animal-visitor interactions with dolphins. Dolphin Island (Resort World Sentosa, Singapore) offers ‘meet the dolphins’ experiences, and Sea World (Australia), SeaWorld (San Antonio, USA) and Zoomarine (Portugal) all offer shows and ‘meet the dolphins’ experiences. Visitors can enter pools with the dolphins to swim, pet and pose with them, while trainers demonstrate the commands used to demand behaviours from the animals.

Shows at these venues saw dolphins performing choreographed routines set to music while trainers command tricks. Trainers often enter the water with the dolphins during the shows to perform stunts with them and ride around on their fins. At Zoomarine (Portugal), staff stand on the back of the dolphins and ‘surf’ them around the water. The show also involved the dolphins towing a small boat carrying children around the tank. At SeaWorld (USA), the dolphins perform the shows with other species of cetacean (Beluga whales).

Dolphin Island (Singapore) is a direct WAZA venue. Sea World (Australia) is indirectly linked to WAZA via a membership with the Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA). SeaWorld (USA) is indirectly linked to WAZA via its membership with the Association of Zoo and Aquariums (AZA). Zoomarine (Portugal) is indirectly linked to WAZA via its membership with the European Association of Zoo and Aquaria (EAZA) and the Iberian Association of Zoos and Aquaria (AIZA).

Elephants

What demeaning and unnatural animal-visitor interactions are happening, and how does this contradict WAZA's own guidelines?

Elephants housed at WAZA linked zoos are being cruelly exploited for entertainment. They are forced to endure tourists and staff riding on their backs and necks, while they are coerced into performing. The elephants paint pictures with their trunks, play basketball, wear costumes, sit upright on chairs and use props such as tambourines to 'entertain' the crowd. Shows are filled with artificially-contrived behaviours such as 'bowing' to the crowds. These attractions directly contravene WAZA's position that zoos should not condone 'unnatural or demeaning' situations for their animals.



What are the welfare issues?

Venues offering any form of visitor interaction with elephants are likely to be associated with cruel practices and unnecessary suffering. Activities such as petting or riding the elephants require the trainer to establish dominance, and this often involves painful and traumatic training techniques. Such training can have a significant negative impact on an elephant's physical and psychological welfare and may also cause post-traumatic stress disorder⁽¹⁵⁾.

Shows and rides can be physically demanding for the elephants and leave little opportunity for social interaction with other elephants, or to graze for food. For these sociable animals, who would spend 12 to 18 hours per day consuming food in close-knit family herds in the wild,⁽¹⁵⁾ this 'entertainment' schedule is likely to take its toll. Given that elephants can live up to 80 years, any suffering experienced as a result of the entertainment industry is likely to be extensive and long lived⁽¹⁶⁾.

Where facilities offer elephant rides as a means to provide exercise to their animals, it is recommended that rides be replaced with enrichment programs in the elephants' enclosures, that do not involve direct contact with visitors or circus-like tricks. Enclosures should be of sufficient size and the animals should be kept in natural groupings to enable healthier living conditions.

It must be noted, that keeping elephants in captive facilities will lead to severe restrictions on their welfare. Carrying heavy contraptions and multiple people can cause damage to an elephant's skin and back muscles. Less physically demanding activities, such as trunk kissing, petting or feeding the elephants can still have severe consequences. Direct contact can also facilitate the spread of diseases between humans and elephants⁽¹⁵⁾.

Photo: Ichihara Elephant Kingdom (Japan).

Credit: Fernando Carniel Machado / World Animal Protection



Photo: African Lion Safari (Canada)

What are the wider implications and how should a responsible venue handle these species?

Tourists often pay for elephant rides or shows because they love the animals and are not aware of the suffering they endure, or the risk the activity poses to them. Venues should build on visitors' affection for the species by educating them on behavioural and welfare needs and offer them the opportunity to watch elephants display their natural behaviours.

Any interaction with visitors should be avoided to prevent unnecessary stress on the elephant. There is no place for elephant shows, rides or interaction in any modern venue. In the absence of commerce-driven performances, the welfare of these elephants can be improved through positive reinforcement training. But the elephant participation must be completely voluntary with no commercial incentive or performance element to the activity⁽¹⁵⁾.

Where did we go and what did we find?

World Animal Protection and Change For Animals Foundation visited two WAZA-linked venues that offer elephant-visitor interactions to tourists. Ichihara Elephant Kingdom (Japan) was visited in April 2019 and was found to offer circus-style performances where elephants play basketball, paint pictures, 'play' with tourists and spin hoops on their trunks. The elephants wore costumes and gave rides to tourists and staff.

African Lion Safari (Canada), visited in May 2019, offers elephant rides to tourists, as well as the opportunity to pet the elephants and to watch performances featuring tricks. The elephants here have contraptions strapped to their backs as they walk in circles on a gravel track for around four hours, giving rides to up to four tourists at a time. Each elephant can give up to 120 rides per day, during which they pause and stop for photo opportunities in forced posed positions. The elephants are also paraded through the venue to a bathing hole, where they are trained to squirt water through their trunks at crowds of visitors.

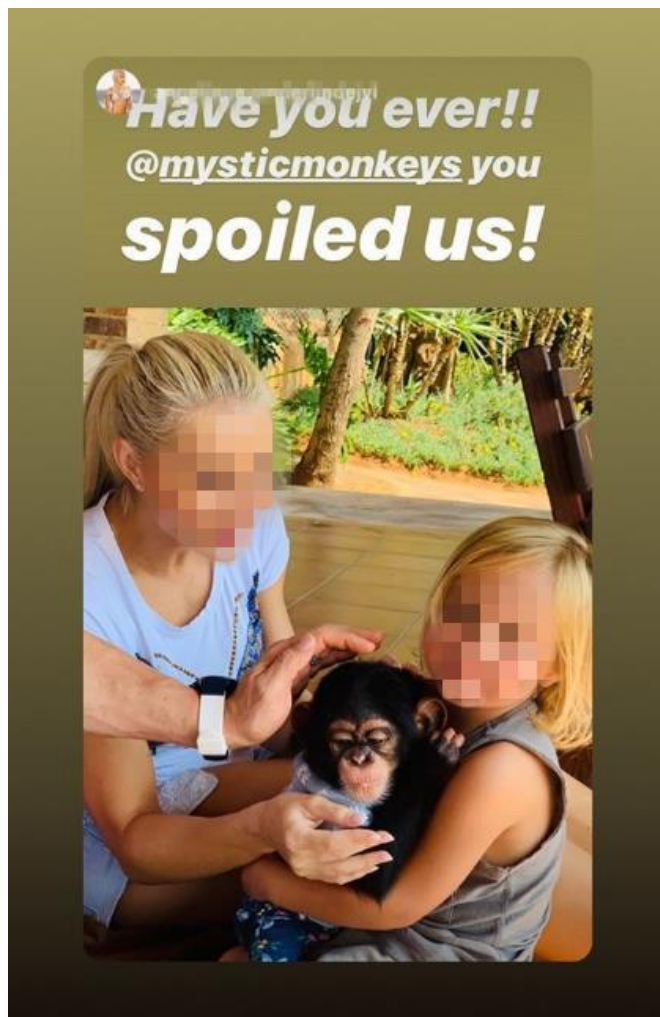
African Lion Safari (Canada) is directly related to WAZA. Ichihara Elephant Kingdom is indirectly related to WAZA via its membership with the Japanese Association of Zoo and Aquaria (JAZA).

Primates

What demeaning and unnatural animal-visitor interactions are happening, and how does this contradict WAZA's own guidelines?

We found primates being exploited as photo-props and petting attractions at WAZA-linked zoos in South Africa and the Philippines. Orangutans and chimpanzees are dressed in human clothes while they cling to strangers who pay to pet them. Monkeys also wear nappies and are given toys to play with while they interact with human children. Chimps are passed between visitors to be cuddled and kissed, while an orangutan is stationed on a bench ready to pull faces for harmful selfies and ride on a tricycle through the zoo.

Wild animals like primates should not be clothed, trained to perform tricks or be used as props in tourist attractions. These unnatural and demeaning behaviours contravene WAZA's animal welfare guidelines.



What are the welfare issues?

Keeping primates in captivity will always lead to severe restrictions on their welfare.

Young chimpanzees reared in human surroundings are not able to fully express their natural behaviours. Research has shown that chimps raised by humans exhibit different behaviour in social groups⁽¹⁷⁾ which can negatively affect their ability to form strong social bonds with their own species. Furthermore, infant chimpanzees usually receive 24-hour attention from their parents, including constant physical contact with their mothers⁽¹⁸⁾. As this kind of care is not often feasible from human surrogates, infant chimps are likely to receive insufficient care.

Primates are incredibly intelligent animals and they can be difficult to keep stimulated in a human environment⁽¹⁸⁾. They are likely to become bored and frustrated, which could lead to psychological problems and abnormal behaviours such as self-mutilation⁽¹⁹⁾.

Using any animal for selfies [can inflict stress](#), especially when that animal has no choice whether to engage or not. It is certainly not natural for a primate to ride a tricycle or strike 'humorous' poses, and they will have most likely been trained into doing so through force.

In addition to poor mental welfare, these animals are at risk of physical problems. Non-human primates, particularly orangutans and chimpanzees, are susceptible to human diseases⁽²⁰⁾ and direct contact with tourists puts them at risk. Physical injuries caused by repeated mishandling by untrained members of the public are also likely to occur.

Photo: Mystic Monkeys (South Africa)



Photo: Avilon Zoo (Philippines)

What are the wider implications and how should a responsible venue handle these species?

Direct handling of primates poses a danger to everyone involved. In addition to the adverse welfare consequences for the animals, people are in danger of catching diseases and being physically harmed, as chimps, orangutans and monkeys are very strong and can be aggressive.

Presenting monkeys and apes as 'tame' or 'cute' can encourage people to view them as suitable 'exotic' pets^[21], which they are absolutely not. This is particularly detrimental for species that are already threatened with extinction in the wild, including Bornean orangutans^[22] and chimpanzees^[23].

To ensure non-human primates are able to express their natural behaviours, and form social bonds with their own species, they should have no direct contact with visitors. Zoos should be acting to educate visitors on primate conservation issues and the complex needs of primates rather than using them as photo-props.

Where did we go and what did we find?

World Animal Protection visited two WAZA-associated venues that offer animal-visitor interactions with primates. Avilon Zoo (Philippines) was visited in May 2019, where an orangutan named Trixie was observed being used as a photo prop for tourists. Trixie was wearing human clothes and shoes and was playing with a children's toy scooter. She was stationed on a bench where visitors could join her to have their photos taken. She was encouraged to exhibit 'human-like' behaviours such as kissing visitors on the cheek and pulling 'funny' poses for the camera.

Mystic Monkeys and Feathers Wildlife Park (South Africa) was also visited in May 2019. Here, visitors are offered the opportunity to interact with chimpanzees and monkeys. World Animal Protection did not participate in this attraction and could therefore not collect visual evidence, but the venue's social media posts show tourists cuddling and petting chimpanzees. Infant chimps are also often dressed in baby's clothing or nappies, playing with children's toys.

Avilon Zoo is a member of the Southeast Asian Zoos and Aquariums Association (SEAZA) and is linked to WAZA through this regional association member. Likewise, Mystic Monkeys and Feathers Wildlife Park is a member of the Pan-African Association of Zoos and Aquaria (PAAZA) and is linked to WAZA through this regional association member.

Urgent action needed for wild animals in zoos and aquariums

The 12 zoos and aquariums identified in this report, both through desktop research and on-site investigations, are clearly failing to adhere to WAZA guidelines and respect the animals in their care.

By failing to properly address the cruel and demeaning visitor attractions being provided by these venues, WAZA itself is failing to adhere to its own animal welfare guidelines. These guidelines state modern zoos and aquariums should not “undertake, contribute or participate in animal shows, displays or interactive experiences where animals perform unnatural behaviours”.

Our research found zoos and aquariums linked with WAZA are offering visitor attractions, including elephant rides, photo-prop opportunities with wild animals in costumes, and circuslike public shows. These activities inflict intense suffering and involve behaviour that would never be observed in the wild. They have no place in any modern zoo that puts the best interests of wild animals at its heart.

Without WAZA's urgent action to protect wild animals within venues that they are linked with, the scale of animal suffering and the numbers condemned to cruel captivity are certain to increase.

Taking responsibility – WAZA's next steps

We are demanding WAZA stand up and fulfil its role as the global alliance of “the world's leading zoos and aquariums”. WAZA is responsible for ensuring harmful cruel and demeaning attractions have no place in any modern zoo or aquarium.

WAZA should clarify and communicate its position on this issue and review and revoke membership status from any venues refusing to shift away from providing irresponsible wild animal visitor attractions. It needs to make its interventions public with clear, time-bound action plans which the zoos and aquariums in question can be held accountable.

Tourists visiting any venue displaying the WAZA logo must be confident they are not inadvertently supporting cruel visitor interactions with wild animals.

You can help

Your support is critical in moving WAZA to stand up for the wild animals in its members' care.

Never visit the zoos and aquariums we have featured in this report, or any that offer cruel animal attractions, and ask your friends and family not to either.

Email WAZA directly demanding they stand up for the animals suffering in WAZA member zoos.

About World Animal Protection

From our offices in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, India, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Thailand, UK and USA, we move the world to protect animals. During 2018 we gave more than 3 billion animals better lives through our campaigns that focus on animals in the wild; animals in disasters, animals in communities and animals in farming. Since the launch of our Wildlife not Entertainers campaign in 2015, more than 1.6 million people have joined our campaign to protect wild animals from abuse and cruelty in the name of 'entertainment'.

About Change for Animals Foundation

Change for Animals Foundation works with local and international partner organisations throughout South East Asia to raise public and political awareness of the plight of the region's wildlife in captivity. In Indonesia, Change for Animals Foundation's project has exposed the exploitation and suffering of wildlife housed in zoos and safari parks throughout the country. In Vietnam it has worked to improve the welfare of wild animals housed in zoos and government-run rescue centres. It has also assisted with the provision of essential staff training to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to protect wildlife.

Wildlife not Entertainers campaign

World Animal Protection believes wild animals should live in the wild where they belong. But one of the biggest barriers to this natural freedom is global tourism. Up to 550,000 wild animals worldwide are suffering at the hands of this cruel and relentless industry. Elephants are beaten and abused to be ridden. Tigers are chained in barren concrete cages, so tourists can take selfies with them. Lions are torn from their mothers for a lifetime of captivity.

We are moving the world – people, governments, businesses and international policy forums and organisations – to address the plight of wild animals.

Since the launch of our Wildlife not Entertainers campaign in 2015, more than 1.6 million people have signed up to protect wild animals from abuse and cruelty. TripAdvisor has removed nearly all wild animal entertainment attractions of concern from their site, and Instagram has issued a content advisory page, educating users about the issues that selfies cause to wild animals.

Over 226 leading travel companies worldwide have now joined our elephant-friendly pledge, meaning they no longer promote elephant rides and shows.

For more information visit: www.worldanimalprotection.org/wildlife-not-entertainers

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We are World Animal Protection.

We end the needless suffering of animals.

We influence decision makers to put animals on the global agenda.

We help the world see how important animals are to all of us.

We inspire people to change animals' lives for the better.

We move the world to protect animals.

Photographs in this report come from World Animal Protection staff visiting the venues and freelance photographers working on behalf of World Animal Protection who did not wish to be named.

These photos are shared for public interest.

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