

PERFORMING ANIMAL  
WELFARE SOCIETY



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## Exotic and Wild Animal Attractions Are They Coming to Your Local Fair?

It's that time of year again, the start of the fair season, when throngs of fairgoers will be eating fried just-about-anything, riding roller coasters and enjoying loud music at local, state and county events across the country. Amid all this, you might find another kind of "attraction", one that includes exotic animals. Although county and state fairs traditionally have a basis in local agriculture, many offer wild animal attractions ranging from elephant rides to photos with tiger cubs.

**Traveling animal shows present serious animal welfare problems**, including intensive confinement during both traveling and exhibition, cruel training methods, constant transport from site to site, and exposure to excessive heat and loud noises. They also present serious concerns in terms of public safety, as potentially dangerous wild animals are often confined in unsafe temporary enclosures.

### Elephant rides and shows

Elephant rides and shows can be found at many fairs, including Renaissance faires. This inhumane amusement is only possible because the elephants have been broken down, both physically and mentally, through the use of circus-style training. Handlers use a bullhook – a weapon resembling a fireplace poker with a sharpened steel tip and hook at the end – to control the elephants through fear and painful punishment. The limited movement elephants are allowed while giving rides does not come close to meeting the needs of these naturally active and far ranging animals.

Safety is always a serious concern when you have a wild animal as intelligent and powerful as an elephant in direct contact with the public. Elephants used for rides have been involved in incidents that have resulted in injuries and deaths – yet these attractions still exist. (PAWS was instrumental in ending elephant rides in California, including through a state-wide ban on the use of bullhooks enacted in January 2018.)

## Bear and big cat shows

Though presented as “educational”, wild animal shows do not promote conservation or educate the public. Instead, they distort our perception of wildlife and teach children that it is acceptable to exploit animals for profit. In these shows bears are made to ride tricycles, walk on narrow planks, and perform ridiculous and unnatural behaviors. Big cats are dominated by their “tamers” who force them to perform tricks on cue. In both cases, handlers use painful training methods to instill fear and helplessness in the animals. Bears and big cats will spend their time in small holding and transport cages, sometimes during extremely hot weather.



**Fairgoers can pay \$30 to have their photo taken with a tiger cub.**

Photo courtesy of the *Willamette Week*.

## Cub petting

Some fairs may offer the opportunity to play with or have a photo taken with a baby wild animal for a fee. Travel and constant handling is stressful for these young animals, who come from facilities that are constantly breeding big cats and bears with no concern for the fate of these animals. Cubs can only be handled for a short period of time. Once they are older, larger and more dangerous they may be sold to

roadside zoos, private owners, or possibly killed and sold on the black market for their parts. Cubs are separated from their mothers at a young age, so they can be bottle fed and made more docile. Because their immune systems are still developing, they are prone to getting sick, including with diseases that are transmissible to humans.

### **Other wild animal attractions**

Some fairs host sea lion shows that are sold to the public as educational, even though it is difficult to fathom how anyone can learn anything about sea lions when they are confined in a tiny tank and made to perform tricks. Many fairs, including Renaissance faires, offer camel rides. These exotic animals are subject to extensive travel and intense confinement, as well as abusive treatment. Other traveling exhibitors simply put a variety of wild animals on display, usually in small, barren cages. They may offer photo or play sessions with cubs as a way to make more money. The animals used for these exhibitions are transported from fair to fair in different states, constantly confined to small cages that inhibit natural behaviors.

The use of wild animals for entertainment in fairs is cruel and unnecessary, and it's time to put an end to them. Where does that start? **With you!** Your voice is critical to bringing about change, starting with your local fair.

### **Here's what you can do to help if your local fair features wild animal rides or shows:**

**Do your research:** Find out about the acts at your local or state fair and who owns them. Investigate any history of animal welfare or public safety problems. PETA provides comprehensive lists of wild animal incidents; you can find them [here](#).

**Speak out:** Contact the fair organizer or fair board and politely tell them that wild animal acts have no place at the fair. Some fair boards have meetings that are open to the public and provide time for public comment. Bring like-minded people with you to speak. Always be concise, informative and courteous in your spoken or written comments.

**Fair sponsors:** If the fair board or organizer is not responsive, contact sponsors of the fair and let them know they are supporting cruel and unsafe animal attractions and may want to reconsider their sponsorship.

**Write a letter to the editor of your local paper:** Do so in advance of the fair, and again during it, explaining why wild animal shows and rides are inhumane and unsafe.

**Share information:** Tell your family, friends and colleagues what you've learned, including through social media. Urge them to shun the wild animal acts and to never ride an elephant or camel.

**Skip the fair:** Let fair organizers know that you will not be attending this year and why, and that you are encouraging your friends and family to do the same.

**Want to do more?**

**Support the Big Cat Public Safety Act.** Make just one phone call to your member of Congress urging her or him to champion this important federal bill (HR1818) that would end the private possession of big cats as pets, end cub petting, and limit exhibitors to those who do not repeatedly violate the law. **Make the call of the wild [here!](#)**