



AnimalsAsia
Foundation

Performing Animals in Chinese Zoos **August 2010**



Compiled by

David Neale, Animal Welfare Director

Lisa Yang, Animal Welfare Officer

1. Methodology

From September 2009 to August 2010, Animals Asia investigators visited 13 safari parks and zoos across China to document wild animal performances. The information and photographs obtained from this investigation are summarised below. Video footage taken during the investigations has been used to produce a short film entitled 'The Performance' available via the Animals Asia website www.animalsasia.org

2. Executive Summary

Wild animal performances are common at captive animal establishments across China. All thirteen establishments visited in 2009/10 put on performances of one kind or another with many drawing in large crowds.

- Asiatic Black Bears are the most popular performance animal, present at 90% of parks;
- 75% of parks exhibit performing monkeys;
- 75% of parks exhibit performing tigers;
- 50% of parks exhibit performing sea-lion;
- Five parks put on bird performances; four parks exhibit performing elephants and two parks have a dedicated dolphinarium for marine mammal performances.

During the wild animal performances animals are forced through fear, intimidation and in some cases physical force to perform unnatural tricks.

- 75% of parks force bears to ride bicycles;
- 50% of parks force bears to perform acrobatics on acrobatic rings;
- three parks force bears to ride a motorbike over a high wire 30ft above the ground;
- two parks force bears to 'box' with each other;
- one park exhibits a human wrestling with a bear;
- 75% of parks force monkeys to ride bicycles;
- 50% force monkeys to perform handstands on the horns of goats, often while the goat is balancing on a tightrope some 10ft above the ground;
- the most common tiger acts force tigers to walk on their back legs, jump through hoops of fire and walk on top of large balls;
- Elephants were seen at four parks performing uncomfortable and humiliating tricks such as standing on their heads, and spinning on one leg.

Of the lesser seen animal acts, two parks force pigs off the end of 10ft high platforms into water, and one park exhibits monkeys and dogs jumping over the backs of hippopotami.

The techniques used to force such animals to perform such unnatural tricks are cruel and abusive, starting with young animal, trainers often beat animals until they perform a desired trick, and use force and fear to ensure animals continue to perform day after day. At five parks tigers and lions have had their teeth ripped out to make them defenceless. Animals were also seen with injuries, tumours and severely underweight. In between performances animals are housed in small cages which do not allow them to perform any natural behaviour.

The combined aspects of performances, abusive training methods and inadequate housing conditions are causing severe animal suffering for many thousands of performing animals across China. Animals Asia appeals to the Chinese government to ban the use of wild animals in circus-style performances where animals are forced to exhibit behaviour contrary to their natural behaviour in the wild.

3. Introduction

A large number of captive animal establishments in China provide animal performances as a form of entertainment for visitors. The scale of the performance varies from one establishment to another yet the suffering experienced by the many thousands of animals within the industry remains constant.

A host of animal species are used in these performances, the most popular being bears, monkeys, tigers and lions. In addition many establishments hold bird performances using parrots, macaws and cockatiels, and marine mammal performances with sea lions, dolphins and whales. A variety of other species are used in performances across China including elephants, wolves, dogs, and in one particular case hippopotami, flamingos, giraffes and camels.

The majority of animals are forced to perform through negative reinforcement and intimidation and show signs of fear towards the showmen.

4. Performing Bears

Asiatic black bears are used in performances at 90% of establishments visited. Bears of all ages, from cubs to adults are forced to perform. Bears generally have metal rings pierced through their noses, or a muzzle with a rope attached which are used to force the bears to perform.

4.1 Nanjing Pearl Forest Safari Park, June 2010



Bears are forced to:

- walk on top of large balls;
- skip;
- walk on their front paws;
- ride scooter's;
- perform acrobatics;
- ride bicycle's;
- pretend to play musical instruments;



4.3 Xiangjiang Safari Park, Guangzhou, September 2009



Two Asiatic black bears are forced to 'box'. The bears are muzzled to prevent them from biting the showmen; the muzzles have chains attached to the straps at the back of the bear's head. The showmen use the chains to control the bears and to drag the bears on and off the stage.

A single brown bear is made to perform a number of tricks, including spinning a hoop around its neck and performing tricks while on a platform. The bear is made to perform a handstand and catch balls. The same bear is also made to perform forward rolls and hop on the spot.



Two Brown bears are forced to ride a tricycle and another bear is forced to ride a motorbike.

4.4 Xionsen Bear & Tiger Mountain Village, Guilin, September 2009



Bears are forced to:

- ride bicycles;
- ride on the back of horses;
- ride a motorbike on a tightrope 10m above the ground;
- crawl under and jump over obstacles;
- skip;

4.5 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



Bears are forced to:

- roller skate;
- skip;
- balance on a board on top of a cylindrical object;
- 'box' each other;
- spin objects above their heads;



4.6 Shenzhen Safari Park, Shenzhen, March 2010



A bear is forced to 'wrestle' with a performer;



Bears are forced to carry a carriage around an arena;



Bears are forced to perform somersaults on acrobatic rings;

5. Performing Tigers and Lions:

75% of safari parks and zoos exhibit performing tigers and 50% performing lions. As large and dangerous wild animals these species pose a particular threat to the showmen. Therefore in an effort to prevent injuries to the performers, many of the animals have had their teeth removed or cut back to gum level, and their claws ripped out rendering them defenceless. Below are a few examples of the type of 'tricks' tigers and lions are frequently forced into performing at Chinese captive animal establishments.

5.1 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



- A horse is forced to carry a tiger on its back;
- A lion is swung on a raised platform;
- Tigers and lions forced to walk over a showmen on a high bar;
- Tigers balance on top and inside a large circular metal ring.

5.2 Nanjing Pearl Forest Safari Park, June 2010



- A performer places strips of meat in his mouth and feeds them to a 'toothless' lion;
- A tiger is forced to balance and walk on top of a large ball;



5.3 Shenzhen Safari Park, March 2010



- A showman places his head inside the mouth of a tiger which has had its teeth ripped out;

5.4 Xiangjiang Safari Park, Guangzhou, September 2009



- Tigers forced to jump through burning hoops and paper hoops;

6. Performing Monkeys

75% of safari parks and zoos exhibit performing monkeys. The monkeys are generally restrained by chains around their necks. Below are a few examples of the type of ‘tricks’ monkeys are frequently forced into performing at Chinese captive animal establishments.

6.1 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



6.2 Xiangjiang Safari Park, Guangzhou, September 2009



- walking on stilts;
- riding bicycles;
- riding on the back of piglets;
- performing handstands on the horns of a goat;

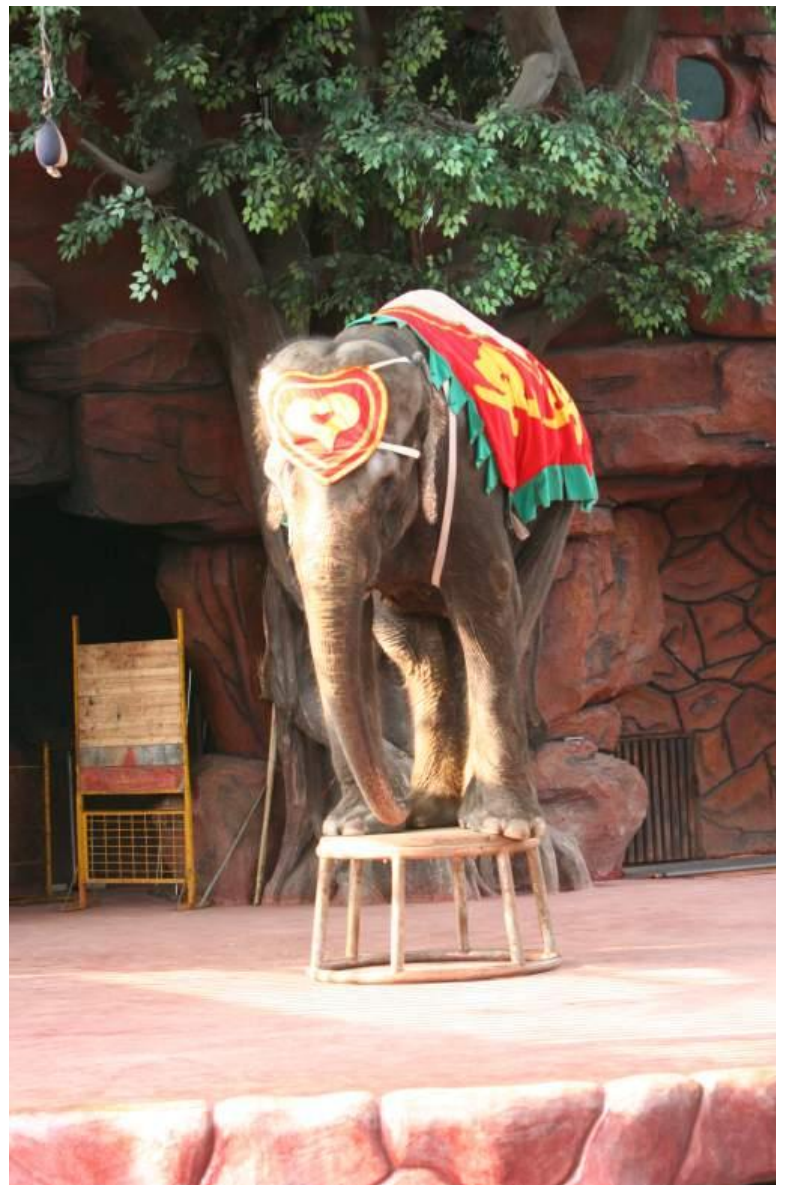
7. Performing Elephants

30% of safari parks and zoos exhibit performing elephants. The elephants are controlled through the use of sharp 'jab sticks'. Below are a few examples of the type of 'tricks' elephants are forced into performing at Chinese captive animal establishments.

7.1 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



- standing on their heads;
- standing on two legs on a small platform;
- pirouetting on top of a small platform;
- sitting down and playing the harmonica;
- carrying members of the public;
- pretending to walk over members of the public;



7.2 Xiangjiang Safari Park, Guangzhou, September 2009



- bowing to the public;
- walking on front legs only;
- walking on back legs only;
- walking on top of a rolling barrel;
- standing on their heads;
- playing football and basketball;
- pretending to walk over a person lying on the ground;
- using feet to pat the chest and groin of audience members lying on the floor in front of them;



8. Performing Pigs

Two parks exhibit terrified pigs forced off the end of a platform several metres high into a pool of water. At Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park two platforms are used, a smaller one for piglets and a larger one for adult pigs.

8.1 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



9. Marine Mammal Performance

54% of safari parks and zoos exhibit marine mammal performances. Seven parks hold sea lion performances, two parks hold dolphin performances and one park includes a beluga whale performance. Below are a few examples of the type of 'tricks' marine mammals are frequently forced into performing at Chinese captive animal establishments.

9.1 Guangzhou Zoo, June 2010



Two Sea lions perform a variety of tricks including:

- clapping and bowing;
- retrieving a ball;
- balancing a ball on their nose;
- walking on their front flippers;
- rolling over while balancing a ball;
- dancing with the performer;
- catching and throwing a frisbee;
- balancing on one flipper while balancing a ball on their nose.

Three dolphins perform the following tricks:

- leaping out of the water;
- spinning with their bodies vertical and heads out of the water;
- spinning a hoop on their beaks while spinning their bodies in the water;
- swimming upside down;
- pulling a dinghy around the tank, containing a member of the audience;
- waving their tail flukes.



Two Beluga Whales perform a variety of tricks including:

- spinning with their bodies vertical and heads out of the water;
- swimming on their sides;
- pushing a performer out of the water and through a suspended hoop;
- leaping out of the water to touch a ball suspended from the ceiling;
- swimming with performers standing on their backs;
- waving their tail flukes.

10. Bird Performances

40% of safari parks and zoos exhibit performing birds, the most popular being macaws, cockatiels, and parakeets. Birds are restrained via chains around their legs tied to perches until they are required to perform. Below are a few examples of the type of ‘tricks’ birds are frequently forced into performing at Chinese captive animal establishments.

10.1 Chongqing Safari Park, Chongqing, Jan 2010



- balancing and walking on a moving cylindrical object.
- pushing small trucks.
- playing skittles.
- walking on a tightrope.



- pedalling on a metal ‘bike’ while on a tightrope.
- roller skating
- pulling a trailer

11. Mutilations

Many big cats used in animal performances have had their canine teeth either removed or cut back to gum level and are de-clawed to make them defenceless. Detoothed lions and tigers are evident at 5 of the 13 parks surveyed. The practice of “de-toothing” causes severe and chronic pain owing to the exposure of the pulp and nerve endings, and leads to potential infection of the surrounding area, including gums, jawbone and nasal region. Many animals also appear to have been de-clawed; a practice which causes significant pain owing to the removal of the third phalanx and leads to an inability for the animals to perform natural behaviour.

11.1 Shenzhen Safari Park, September 2009



11.2 Nanjing Pearl Forest Safari Park, June 2010



11.3 Hongshan Forest Zoo, Nanjing June 2010



12 Physical condition of performing animals

Animals were observed in very poor physical condition during the observations of the animal performances.

12.1 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



A severely underweight lion.

12.2 Xionsen Bear & Tiger Mountain Village, Guilin, September 2009

A tiger with a large tumour on its front right leg.



12.3 Badaling Safari Park, Badaling, March 2010



A monkey with facial injuries

13 Treatment of Animals:

All of the performances observed were based upon fear and intimidation. To force animals to perform unnatural tricks circus showmen frequently engage in negative reinforcement, whipping and striking the animals repeatedly, forcing them to carry out tricks that go against their natural behaviour and demonstrating to the audience that the animals can only be “controlled” by pain and fear.

13.1 Xiongsen Bear & Tiger Mountain Village, Guilin: September 2009



Throughout the performance, the showmen kick and punch the bears and were observed jabbing the bears with sticks.



13.2 Chuanlord Manor Holiday Park, Foshan, September 2009



Showmen brandish sticks at animals which threaten and keep them under control to ensure they perform.



13.3 Xiangjiang Safari Park, Guangzhou, September 2009



Performers use a small white ‘sharp’ stick to jab the elephants to control them.

13.4 Nanjing Pearl Forest Safari Park, June 2010

Performers drag bears by the ropes attached to their nostrils. Performers were also seen hitting the bears with their fists, beating the bears with metal sticks, kicking the bears and hitting them with the ropes. The bears were seen holding the end of the rope to prevent the performer pulling on the nose rings.



14 Animal housing conditions:

Performances take place two or more times per day depending upon the number of visitors expected. One zoo has a continual performance taking place throughout the day. Due to the high frequency of performance at all zoos, animals are required to live close to the performance arena and be readily accessible for the performance staff to bring into the performing area. This result in animals being housed in small, barren, concrete enclosures often in darkened rooms at the back of the performance areas away from the visitors.

14.1 Badaling Safari Park, Badaling, March 2010



Tiger cubs, wolves, a domestic dog, and monkeys all housed in small cages in a darkened room. The monkey was observed performing stereotypic somersaults.





Brown bears housed in separate barren cages; all with chains around their necks.

14.2 Beijing Wild Animal Park, Beijing, March 2010



A series of 2ft² cages house 4 monkeys all with chains around their necks, the monkeys were observed rocking backwards and forwards.

Two lions housed in 5ft x 3ft cages with wooden boards to lie upon



14.3 Bi Feng Xia Safari Park, Ya'an, March 2010



Bears in small cages housed in an 'off-limits' area of the park

14.4 Chongqing Safari Park, Chongqing, March 2010



Tigers with chains around their necks and Asiatic black bears are housed in small cages adjacent to the 'animal performance arena'



15 Training

All animals require intensive training to perfect the tricks they are forced to perform. Training is difficult to observe as it is often carried out in private areas of the park away from the public eye. However, training was observed at one park with both negative and positive training techniques noted such as the negative brandishing of sticks and positive reinforcement, including the provision of food rewards.

15.1 Badaling Safari Park



A monkey is tied to a goat and the goat is forced to climb a ladder and walk along a thin plank of wood. The goat refused to perform numerous times and fell off the plank of wood on a number of occasions.

A monkey is trained to stand up straight and hold a small wheelbarrow frame.

A muzzled bear is made to perform the following tricks:

- somersaults on a high bar
- walking backwards on two legs on top of a high bar
- crawling underneath a low bar



16 Conclusion

- 16.1 Animal performances portray the animal to the public in such a way which is humiliating and contrary to the principles of promoting empathy and respect;
- 16.2 There is little educational value for people to see animals that are not housed in conditions resembling their natural habitat. Teaching animals to perform inappropriate tricks does nothing to educate the public or foster respect for animals. There is no evidence to indicate that training and performance make up for the lack of stimulation provided by impoverished living accommodation. Experts attest that exhibiting such animals in fear and stress leads to a miss-representation of the species in the public eye and teaches them nothing except the animals' size, shape and colour;
- 16.2 Loud music used during animal performances and crowd noise cause stress and severe welfare problems;
- 16.3 The physical condition of the animals used in the performances is often appalling. Tigers and lions are frequently detoothed. This practice causes severe and chronic pain owing to the exposure of the pulp and nerve endings, and leads to potential infection of the surrounding area, including gums, jawbone and nasal region;
- 16.4 The appalling treatment of many animals by the performance staff is inexcusable and demonstrates gross negligence, disrespect and a woeful lack of compassion. Such treatment passes on a message to visitors that it is acceptable to dominate and harm animals in the name of entertainment;
- 16.5 The welfare of an animal includes its physical and mental state, good animal welfare implies both fitness and a sense of well-being. Any animal in captivity must, at the very least, be protected from unnecessary suffering. An animal's welfare should be considered in terms of the internationally recognised 'Five Freedoms'
- **Freedom from hunger and thirst:** Both food and water are basic needs. The method of food presentation, the frequency of feeds and the nutritional balance must be taken into account. Food should be presented in a manner and frequency commensurate with the natural behaviour of the species, (where appropriate) as well as its nutritional requirements, which may vary according to season. Access to clean drinking water must be provided at all times.
 - **Freedom from discomfort:** An environment consistent with species requirements must be provided. This should include shade and shelter from rain, heat and cold as appropriate. For example, animals that dig and root must be provided with suitable substrates, and climbers with appropriate three dimensional environments. A balance must be struck between hygiene and the species' biological requirements.
 - **Freedom from pain, injury or disease:** enclosures should be of sufficient design to prevent animals being injured. Curative and preventive veterinary medicine should be provided, and every effort must be made to provide a correct diet and suitably hygienic environment from which pathogens are excluded or controlled.
 - **Freedom to express normal behaviour:** animals should be provided with the opportunity to exhibit most normal behaviours. Enclosure design and management should reduce abnormal behaviour such as begging, pacing or head swaying.

- **Freedom from fear or distress:** interaction with keepers, visitors and other animals should be positive and rewarding. Particular areas to consider include: group composition, sex ratios and numbers of animals in an enclosure and space and furniture in both indoor and outdoor areas. Zoo animals are often confined for long periods in indoor areas and the group composition should reflect this situation. Enclosure design should allow for as much normal behaviour as possible, and provide areas of escape from other animals and the public.

The welfare of many of the animals observed falls far below acceptable standards;

- 16.6 The living conditions for performing animals fail to meet these basic welfare needs. Many of the animals have no visible access to water. Animals have no access to a shelter to hide from individuals within their enclosure, and no attempts are made to meet the behavioural needs of these species;
- 16.7 The effect of housing animals in sterile enclosures leads to animals performing stereotypic behaviours and appearing bored and unhappy,
- 16.8 Zoos and safari parks are ideally placed to foster compassion for animals and raise awareness and understanding of the welfare and conservation needs of individual animals and species. Parks which abuse animals in performances in the name of public entertainment make no attempt to provide this knowledge and to educate its visitors for the benefit of welfare and conservation.

17 Recommendations

- 17.1 **Animals Asia appeal to the Chinese government to ban the use of wild animals in circus-style performances where animals are forced to exhibit behaviour contrary to their natural behaviour in the wild;**
- 17.2 Animals Asia recommends the implementation of the following additional measures to improve the management of captive animal facilities and the health and welfare of wild animals in captivity in China:
 - Ban the practice of feeding live prey to large predators and reptiles for entertainment;
 - Ban the use of wild animals for photo-taking with members of the public;
 - Implement a state licensing system for all captive wild animal facilities and subsequent periodic audits and assessments;
 - Develop a code of practice/standards for captive animal establishments to include provision for the five freedoms of animal welfare. Codes should include details for the following areas:
 - Provision of food and water;
 - Provision of a suitable environment;
 - Provision of animal health care (including minimum veterinary facilities);
 - Provision of an opportunity to express most normal behaviours;
 - Provision of protection from fear and distress;
 - Transportation and movement of live animals;
 - Animal acquisition;

- Use of animals in public performances;
 - Conservation and education;
 - Research;
 - Public safety;
 - Record-keeping;
 - Staffing and training;
 - Provision of public facilities;
 - International co-operation;
- Encourage and facilitate captive wild animal facilities to adopt welfare assessment and enrichment working groups to encourage the provision of conditions and facilities above any minimum animal welfare standards set by a licensing system.
- 17.3 Animals Asia recommends a licensing scheme is administered via a ‘Central Zoo Authority’ which will monitor, regulate and close substandard captive animal facilities as well as provide advice and support. A Central Zoo Authority will also administer inspections and subsequent re-issuing of licences;
- 17.4 Animals Asia recommends a Central Zoo Authority works in cooperation with the China Association of Zoological Gardens to administer workshops based on the topics within the codes of practice;
- 17.5 Animals Asia recommends every captive wild animal facility adhere to the basic principles within a code of practice to obtain a license;
- 17.6 Animals Asia recommends the Chinese government provide support for zoos and safari parks to meet the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA): Codes of ethics and animal welfare.

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