

Circus Inspection Project

Miranda F Stevenson and Michael Fielding

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the potential of an inspection system for circuses keeping wild animals. This included both winter quarters i.e. the base where the circus animals may be held during a non-performing period such as winter and when on tour.

It should be noted that the brief of the inspectors was to assess welfare, therefore health and safety issues have not been addressed unless they were felt to be relevant to the welfare of the species kept on the premises.

The definition of 'wild animal' used was that in the Zoo Licensing Act. Animals of 'wild species are those not normally domesticated in Great Britain'.

Guidelines used are the Secretary of States Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (SSSMZP), Performing Animals Welfare Standards International (PAWSI), European Circus Association Proposed Model Regulations and Association of Circus Proprietors Standards. The latter are more difficult to use as they appear to be specifically designed for 'circus animals on tour'. The report covers the main areas from these guidelines that the inspectors consider relevant and transferable to a circus licensing inspection regime.

The SSSMZP has been used as the framework document and this report follows the headings of those Standards, with comments as to requirements and particular problems experienced in the circus environment. There has been considerable debate about the ability to compare circus and zoo standards. Radford (2007) concluded that *'the environment in circuses is too different from those of farms or*

zoos for helpful comparisons of research findings to be made'. The group also stated that '[performance and training] accounts for a significant part of the time budget of animals and makes circus animals different from other animals in captivity'. These factors raise significant questions, e.g.. do training and performance constitute good welfare and do these activities compensate for the smaller living spaces in circuses compared with zoos? Such questions make evaluation of the welfare of many species difficult and we would strongly support funding of research that adds evidence based data to this subject.

It is our opinion that a process could be devised following much of the ZLA inspection process. The PAWSI (2006) system appears to use the SSMZP as its basis and it should be possible to use this system, with appropriate adaptation, for both checks on winter quarters and spot checks when travelling.

We feel that if an inspection process is to be set up, because of the controversial nature of the principle of the use of wild animals in circuses, the process would need to be seen as transparent. Self regulatory systems such as are at present in use can be sometimes viewed by the public as inconsistent and lacking in rigour. However, costs are an important aspect of the process, and it would be counter productive to introduce a complex and expensive system of inspection which might reduce the available monetary assets of the circus to an extent that this adversely affected investment in facilities for improved welfare

A suggested form is appended, based on that used for Zoo Licensing which is also the basis for the PAWSI inspection form. Please note that the conditions that the animals are maintained in when travelling must be part of this inspection, as travelling (in most circuses) continues for some nine months of the year then these conditions must be satisfactory.

This form would accompany standards, for which those drawn up by PAWSI appear to be an excellent basis, and could be cross-reference with the two sets of standards produced by circuses associations.

There are common areas as well as some variation in the two sets of standards of the two main Circus associations. It would seem logical that these should be replaced by one uniform set blending the best of the two with additional material as necessary. This could prove difficult as the one set is European wide and the other U.K. centric, but the principal of two differing sets of standards in such a relatively small industry seems anachronistic.

This report outlines a possible inspection system, the appendices cover three inspections: (I) that of the Great British Circus in Winter Quarters on 24 January 2008, (II) The Great British Circus on 28 August 2008 while on tour. III) Peter Jolly's Circus on 31 July 2008 while on tour.

'Five Principles'

Provision of food and water: there should be no difference in the requirements for circus animals and zoo animals or methods of presentation. Diets should also be kept in written form for each species and regularly updated. Staff should be familiar with the latest information on nutrition of the species maintained. Regular checks must be kept on the availability of water, especially when animals are in unfamiliar territory.

Provision of a suitable environment: circus animals' environments change, mainly in three situations (a) in winter quarters when not being transported (b) when being transported between sites (c) when on site where the circus is performing. All areas have to be examined but each environment must include shade, shelter, temperature and ventilation control. Animals must be provided with sufficient space and substrates appropriate to the species. The environment must be designed to minimise the risk of injury and for animals to be able to get away from each other, have suitable separate accommodation when giving birth and rearing young. Social species should be housed with other animals. In most cases animals must have access to additional accommodation to that they are travelling in, when not being transported.

Provision of animal health care: a programme of veterinary medicine needs to be provided for each individual. The most appropriate system would appear to be to have main or consulting veterinary surgeon who would be the one who sees the animals when in winter quarters and he should have CPD in exotic species. Vets attending the animals while on tour should, when necessary, refer to the consulting vet by telephone. It is essential that good veterinary records are kept for each individual animal, including treatment when ill and prophylactic treatments. This should include a list of drugs. Animals should be inspected at least four times a year by a veterinary surgeon with

appropriate “species skills” and at least one of these inspections should be in winter quarters.

Provision of an opportunity to express most normal behaviour: much behavioural expression takes place during training sessions, training should be geared to take account of the individual likes and dislikes of each animal. However training sessions probably do provide animals with exercise, which allows a full range of locomotion and considerable stimulus but this would need to be observed and tested. All animals must be provided with facilities to allow for regular exercise in addition to performances. Social species should not be kept on their own, but with other animals preferably of the same species. When this is not possible they should be kept with similar species with which they can carry out normal behavioural interactions. It is important that grazing animals have access to pasture when on tour and that all animals are given sufficient ‘safe’ areas where they can retreat from other animals and people.

Provision of protection from fear and distress: as for zoo animals the enclosure design should allow for the expression of normal behaviour and provide areas of escape from other animals and from the public.

It is accepted that some species are not suitable for the circus environment (PAWSI, 2006). It is imperative that minimum standards are drawn up for each of the wild species that are currently used in circuses in Europe, thus making it easier for inspectors to ensure that the animals are being kept in recommended conditions.

Other significant matters.

Animal records: this is a very important area, especially so when the animals are on tour. Records of each individual animal must be kept. The suggestions for record keeping (PAWSI, 2006) are excellent and should be followed.

Staff training: it is recommended that all staff looking after animals undergo a recognised training course such as that run by PAWSI and Sparsholt College (Sparsholt College Hampshire, 2004)

Transportation and movement of live animals: The Welfare of Animals During Transport EU Regulation transposed as The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 and parallel legislation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and other MS, does not apply to circus animals when they are travelling in their housing. A check needs to be made on what constitutes 'housing'. However all transporting vehicles need to provide the animal with the necessary environment regarding temperature, safe travelling conditions and ventilation. The duration of travel must be such that it does not compromise the animals/ health and welfare. Animals should be unloaded and allowed access to their outside accommodation as soon as possible after arrival at a new site.

Conservation and education: in a circus licensing system it should be decided if these areas are relevant. The PAWSI guidelines suggest that they are. The ethics of keeping wild species purely to perform and entertain with out any conservation or positive educational messages needs to be seriously questioned. The inspectors consider that it would be reasonable to expect some degree of conservational and educational input in a circus environment, and certainly some behavioural traits could be well illustrated in such environments and included as a part of the performance. This is also a legal requirement for CITES species especially those listed in Annex A.

Health and safety: as previously stated this was not part of the brief of the inspectors, but would obviously have to be included in a full inspection process. This would also help ensure that Local Authorities, unsympathetic to circuses, did not use H&S issues unreasonably to prevent them carrying out at legal trade. This would be an important aspect where the public are allowed in to see the animals 'behind the scenes'.

Training methods: these are difficult to inspect, but training methods must be appropriate for the species and the individual animal's capabilities. Records should be kept of all training sessions, length and names of trainers and any relevant information about the "animals" concerned.

Compliance Check: this must be part of any inspection process. On the visits undertaken only CITES documents were checked.

References

PAWSI (2006) Animal Welfare (Circuses) Code of Welfare 2006

Radford, M. 2007. Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses: report of the chairman of the circus working group

Sparsholt College Hampshire (2004) Animal Training in the Audio Visual Industries