



## BRIEFING

# Why Ireland needs to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses

### KEY FACTS

- The ISPCA believes that the complex welfare needs (both physical and psychological) of wild animals cannot be met in the travelling circus environment and therefore advocates a complete ban on the practice<sup>1</sup>.
- Travelling and sleeping quarters (beast wagons) are used for up to 10 months of the year and are completely unsuitable for wild animals such as tigers.
- Regular transportation, training, performance and unnatural social groupings mean that travelling circuses are not able under any circumstances to provide a suitable environment.
- Over the last three years, wild animals used in Irish circuses included elephants, tigers, sea lions, camels, crocodiles and zebras. In recent years, lions have also been used.
- In 2017, only one circus in Ireland continues to use wild animals in shows.
- The most recent (and most comprehensive) research concluded that the available scientific evidence indicates that captive wild animals in travelling circuses do not achieve their optimal welfare requirements and the evidence would therefore support a ban on using wild animals in travelling circuses on animal welfare grounds<sup>2</sup>.
- More than two thirds of the Irish Public do not believe that circuses can provide a suitable environment for wild animals.
- The ISPCA's Big Stop campaign launched in 2016 attracted over 27,000 signatures.
- 19 EU Member States have banned wild animals from travelling circuses or introduced restriction, the most recent being Estonia and Italy.
- 15 non-EU countries around the world have banned the use of wild animals in circuses.
- 17 Irish local authorities have banned wild animal circuses from publically owned land in
- In addition to animal welfare concerns there are significant public safety concerns<sup>3</sup>.
- In 2016, Veterinary Ireland stated "Veterinary Ireland is of the opinion that the physical and psychological needs of wild animals cannot be met in travelling circus environments".

### Welfare concerns for wild animals in circuses

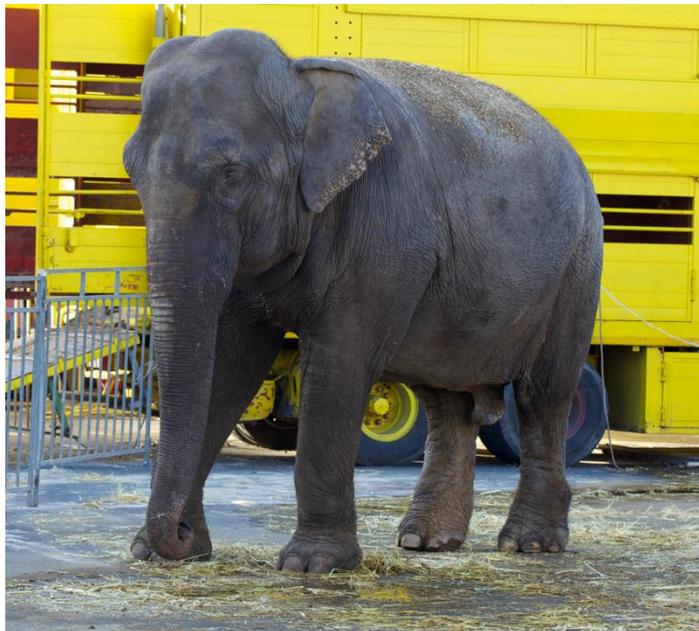
Animals used in travelling circuses are subjected to constant travelling, cramped and barren accommodation, forced training and regular performance, as well as being denied the natural space, climate and social opportunities that their species requires. Research has shown that the species of wild animal used most commonly in circuses are those least suited to such a life<sup>4</sup>. The ISPCA, supported by expert and veterinary opinion from around the world, believes that the complex welfare needs of wild animals cannot be met in a travelling circus environment.

### Public opinion

A poll carried out in 2014 showed that 88% of the Irish public agree that the welfare of animals (both wild and domesticated) is an important issue. Meanwhile only 28% of people thought it was acceptable to use wild animals in circus shows. Only a third felt that the welfare needs of wild animals could be met in travelling circuses<sup>3</sup>.

## The situation in the UK

In 2012, the English government promised to introduce a ban by the end of 2015 but it has not yet been implemented. In Scotland, *The Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill was debated in the Scottish Parliament on 5 October 2017 and was unanimously passed, despite no circuses with wild animals being based there.* The Welsh government is currently considering a ban following a recent public consultation. Northern Ireland has indicated that it will follow the Republic of Ireland's lead.



## The situation in the EU and the rest of the world

Currently 19 EU Member States and 15 non-EU countries have implemented full or partial nationwide bans on the use of wild animals in circuses. In addition, hundreds of municipalities or local authorities have introduced bans on the use of wild animals in circuses, most recently the Spanish region of Murcia banned wild animal circuses, becoming the fourth Spanish region to do so. In Ireland, Donegal became the 17<sup>th</sup> local authority to ban wild animals from circuses from publically owned land earlier this year.

## Public Safety concerns

Within the EU, between 1995 and 2017, 11 people were killed and 86 injured in incidents involving wild animals in circuses. A total of 305 incidents involving 608 wild animals were recorded<sup>3</sup>.

## Impact of a ban on existing circuses

Animal circuses in Ireland are now in the minority, with an increasing number of all-human shows thriving and growing year-on-year. There is every opportunity for circuses to permanently remove wild animals from their show and continue to attract (if not increase) audiences. Currently only one Irish circus features wild animals, although others have indicated an intention to do so in the future. A ban would therefore be proportionate and would not affect the vast majority of travelling circuses.

## Implementation of a ban

The ISPCA supports the call for an amendment to the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which would result in a ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses.

## References

<sup>1</sup>ISPCA 2014. Wild animals in travelling circuses. Commissioned Report.

<sup>2</sup>J. Dorning, S. Harris and H. Pickett 2016. The welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses. Report to the Welsh Government.

<sup>3</sup>Eurogroup for Animals 2017. Wild animals in EU circuses: problems, risks and solutions.

<sup>4</sup>G. Iossa, C. Soulsbury and D. Harris 2009. Are wild animals suited to a travelling circus life? *Animal Welfare* 18, pp. 129-140.