

Wildlife exhibitions and performances should not be sanctioned by the law

Hu Chunmei, Beijing Youth Daily, January 15, 2016

The author is a Beijing based activist against animal/wildlife performances. In this article, she highlighted one aspect of the draft that is seemingly encouraging using wildlife for performance – *“Wildlife performances are a barbarous form of entertainment that aims to please the audience through utilisation of wildlife. These practices have been gradually stopped by wildlife and parks departments. However, this draft of the Wildlife Protection Law stipulates that wildlife under special state protection can, with a permit, be bought and sold for the purposes of exhibition and performance. If this clause is added to the law, this will be a huge step backwards.”* According to her, efforts have been made to phase out animal performances *“The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has been strongest in this area, requiring that zoos safeguard the welfare of their animals and cease all animal performances. In 2013, the Ministry released the ‘National Zoos Development Plan’, in which it once again emphasised putting an end to all animal performances. Following the release of this document, more and more zoos cancelled their animal performances and laid the foundations for phasing out the animal performance industry in its entirety.”*

She said such performances are cruel because *“Although some domesticators may use ‘food rewards’ in an attempt to dress up their cruel practices, in reality the flip-side of the reward is hunger. Moreover, almost all movements within these performances are extremely unnatural behaviour, and are very difficult to train using positive reinforcement”* and *“Wild animals are perceptive and have physiological needs, but performing animals are often restricted to cages with very narrow living space and poor conditions. Some are separated from their families, and live sad, lonely lives, isolated from their communities. This has a seriously negative impact on the animals’ behaviour and welfare.”*

Worse still, it sends a wrong message, *“What audience members, and particular schoolchildren, take away from these performances is a misunderstanding of the animals, with absolutely no scientific education.”*

The author recommends that wild animal performances, which have been summarily rejected by the public, should not be included in the draft. Instead, it should clearly state the goal of stopping the practice and should introduce legislation to provide stricter controls. The aim should be to eliminate animal performances within a relatively short period of time and allow more animals to return to their natural instincts, thereby removing the negative impact of wildlife performances on wild populations and greatly furthering China’s progress towards ecological civilisation.

[Original Chinese-language article available here http://epaper.yynet.com/html/2016-01/15/content_178574.htm?div=-1]