

To the Editor of the Berkshire Eagle:

Sarah Conley of Circus Fans Association of America and Catherine Crawmer from NY write in defense of circuses (*Circuses instrumental in saving elephants*, 4/12/15 and *Circuses offer animals fulfillment, protection*, 4/13/2015, respectively) but their message blatantly misstates facts, painting a wholly inaccurate picture of circuses using wild animals.

The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), one of the nation's oldest humane organizations, has for decades advocated against the use of wild animals in circuses because of the immense suffering sustained by these animals for their entire lives. The very nature of circuses demands that performing wild animals endure lives of intensive confinement and inhumane training methods, all while suffering from deprivation of their natural environments and from an inability to fulfill their basic behavioral and social needs.

Ms. Conley attempts to convince readers that the RSPCA believes circus animals “enjoy” their extensive travel schedules, when in fact the opposite is true. Like the MSPCA, the RSPCA opposes continued use of exotic animals in circuses: [“because the requirements of circus life are not compatible with the physiological, social and behavioural \[sic\] needs of these animals.”](#) Ms. Crawmer's claim that elephants find performances “rewarding” and “stimulating” also rings hollow: a 2009 review of peer-reviewed scientific literature on circus animal welfare (including Dr. Friend's) found that the captive environment and physical restrictions imposed upon circus animals result in adverse physical impacts and psychological stress.

Sadly, these performances generate another harm: creating patently false impressions of wild animals' nature and their relationship with people. In the wild, elephants can spend 18 hours daily foraging and travelling for as many as 30 miles. In circuses, they are chained virtually their entire performing lives. These intelligent, highly social animals that form strong familial bonds are unable to engage in natural social behavior with other elephants, have contracted infections from standing in their own excrement, and have developed painful, debilitating arthritis from continuous immobility. Standard circus industry practice employs “tools” to poke, prod, strike, and shock captive wild animals, forcing them perform tricks wholly inconsistent with their natural behaviors and physical capabilities. This is exploitation – not conservation.

Ms. Crawmer asserts that without human interference, many animal species would already be extinct. She fails to consider that the reason we need to step up to protect animals is because we are the ones taking over their land and forcing them into unnatural situations. Ringling's recent decision to stop the enslavement of elephants is only one more reason why a ban on performing animals is justified. Even the largest of these companies recognizes public sentiment and understands that business models need to change with a changing audience. The Ringling decision is not “unfortunate” and a ban for all performing animals is far from “treacherous”; it's necessary.

Both letters ignore the most basic of facts: circuses exist not for conservation, but to turn a profit, and – through the wallets of spectators unwitting or unwilling to acknowledge what really happens on the road and behind the scenes to make wild animals perform night after night – enhance the circus' bottom line at the animals' expense.

Laura Hagen
Deputy Director, Advocacy
MSPCA