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FEATURED

Elephants, camels banned from Topsfield Fair

By Paul Leighton Staff Writer May 8, 2019



File photoCamels are among the list of animals no longer allowed in Topsfield for public entertainment purposes. Martha Sar who proposed the ban, said it's a statement against the traveling animal act industry, not the Topsfield Fair.

Mark Lorenz



TOPSFIELD — Elephants, camels and other "wild or exotic animals" will no longer be allowed at the Topsfield Fair after residents voted Tuesday night to ban their use in town for public entertainment purposes.

A majority of the approximately 600 residents who attended Town Meeting voted for the ban to "prevent the cruel and inhumane treatment" of the animals and "preserve and protect the general safety, welfare, and health of the public," as the measure read.

The ban is effective immediately and will end the popular elephant and camel rides that have been a staple of the fall fair for decades.

"In the end the town of Topsfield recognized that the treatment of these animals is inhumane," said Martha Sanders, a Topsfield resident who sponsored the Town Meeting article for the ban. "This the concept that won out, the compassionate concern for these animals."

The ban does not affect the many farm animals that are exhibited at the Topsfield Fair, which marked its 200th anniversary last year. Shows featuring goats, rabbits, horses, sheep, cattle, poultry and others will continue.

The list of banned animals includes elephants, camels, lions, tigers, ocelots, cheetahs, jaguars, cougars, lynx, bears, giraffes, zebras, kangaroos, and all "non-human primates." Out of those, the fair has featured only elephants and camels in recent years.

Topsfield Fair General Manager James O'Brien did not return messages for comment. A spokesman for the fair said O'Brien and his staff were calling the 40 schools that had signed up for the elephant and camel education programs to let them know they have to be canceled.

The spokesman, David Thomson, said all of the fair's other education programs, which serve 15,000 students, will continue, "but these two programs are the most popular so they want to give the educators as much notice as possible."

Thomson said O'Brien would have no further comment. "He is just moving forward with making the changes based on the new law," Thomson said in an email.

The vote to ban the exotic animals was taken by a show of hands during Town Meeting at the Proctor School. The measure passed by a "clear majority," according to the town clerk's office.

The use of the animals for public entertainment has sparked protests and petitions over the years at the Topsfield Fair and other locations, including the Big E in Springfield. Sanders said the animals suffer under confined conditions, particularly when transported to the fair.

The elephants and camels used by the Topsfield Fair come from the Commerford Zoo in Connecticut. One of those elephants, a six-ton Asian elephant named Beulah, has been a popular attraction at the Topsfield Fair for years. The fair held a 43rd birthday party for Beulah in 2011, with several hundred people, including school groups, singing "Happy Birthday."

A message left with the Commerford Zoo was not returned.

The ban prohibits not only rides but the use of the animals for performances, parades and photo opportunities. It covers the entire town, not just the Topsfield Fair.

Sanders said there have been no instances of animal abuse at the Topsfield Fair itself, but added, "That's beside the point because the traveling animal act industry is inherently cruel."

"It's not that the elephants are being mistreated necessarily in Topsfield," she said. "They're part of a traveling act business that's inhumane. They're transported in trailers all over the place. It's more a rejection of the industry than something that's specifically happened here."

Bill Clark, a board member of the Essex Agricultural Society, which owns and operates the Topsfield Fair, said he agrees with the ban on exotic animals. He said he has pushed for a ban for the last few years but failed to gain support on the board.

"I don't think they have any place in an agricultural fair," Clark said.

Clark said he doesn't think the loss of elephants and camels will have a major impact on the fair's popularity. He noted that some people were upset when the fair stopped dog racing 35 years ago.

"The fair has survived despite changes," he said.

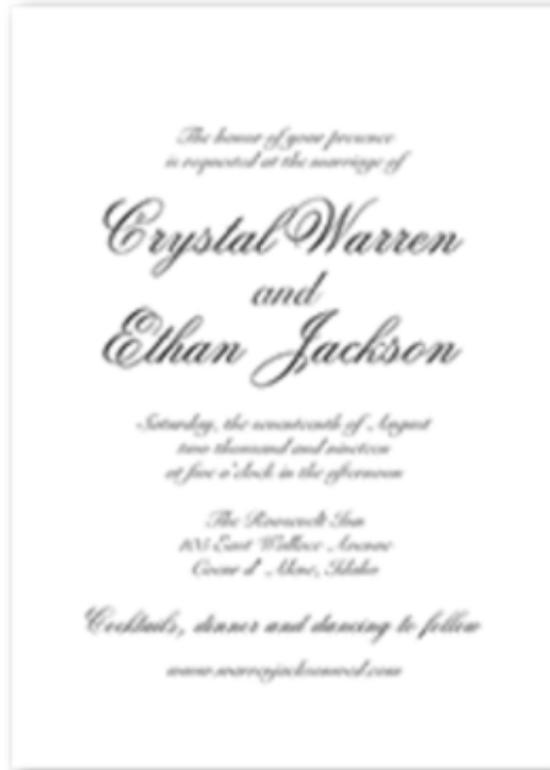
Karen Moniz, a longtime volunteer at the Topsfield Fair who won the fair's Mrs. Essex County contest in 2007, read a statement against the ban at Town Meeting. In an interview, she said she spoke out because she didn't want the fair "dragged through the mud."

"The exotic animals that come to the fair are well regulated and maintained and pose no threat to the safety and the welfare of the public, which is what part of the ban said," she said. "Topsfield does not need to ban these animals because there are already so many regulations in place to protect the animals and to protect the public."

Moniz said Beulah the elephant was a big attraction for students as part of the fair's education programs.

"She would come into the grandstand and you could hear the children scream with delight," she said. "They were able to see up close animals that are normally on TV or in storybooks. I feel that it's a loss. But the show will go on."

Staff writer Paul Leighton can be reached at 978-338-2675 or pleighton@salemnews.com.



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Chris_Hamblen

17 hours ago

The people who were exhibiting these animals were doing so in accordance with state and federal law.. this is mob rule at its best. People not knowing what they are banning. The same thought behind banning witches, blacks and Muslims.

Like Reply



Alexis_Kaiser

15 hours ago

@Chris_Hamblen good way of putting it. Over the last few years we see so much of this happening. The people who know nothing are winning. How did that happen?

1 Like Reply



Kim_Marie

19 hours ago

Thank you, residents of Topsfield! I hope this town's compassion inspires more to take a stand against cruelty to animals.

1 Like Reply



Allison_Marie

19 hours ago

Wonderful news. No animal should be imprisoned and forced to perform in a fair.

1 Like Reply



Paula_Renee

19 hours ago

Kudos to the kind citizens of Topsfield for voting to end the exploitation of exotic animals at the Topsfield Fair! This is a step in the right direction.

1 Like Reply



Lucy_Post

19 hours ago

This is good news for animals. Elephants, camels, and other animals who are forced to give rides are typically beaten into submission and kept chained when they aren't "working." It's 2019; we have better ways to entertain ourselves, without exploiting animals.

2 Like Reply



Marianne_Bessey

19 hours ago

Fantastic! The days of the animal circus are numbered, and rightfully so. Looking forward to the day when the only circuses around consist of wonderful human talent, who are willing volunteers/

3 Like Reply



Tracy_Donovan

4 days ago

ridiculous...people are ignorant of other countries and don;t realize that these animals have been domesticated for centuries..Mexico banned circus animals and thousands DIED because there was no place for them after they took away their owners livelihoods.STOP this asinine pandering to animal rights extremists and ignorant fools. There is NO abuse!!!

4 Like Reply

Linda_Macdonald1

4 days ago



@Tracy_Donovan You stop being asinine . You must have stopped reading after chapter one.
Elephants chained 20 hrs a day bull stick jabbing them , electric shock to the anus on and on it goes .

Do more research before you make such False Statements

1 Like Reply



Alexis_Kaiser 2 days ago
you have no idea who you are talking too. lol

Like Reply



Alexis_Kaiser 2 days ago
All these people know is the propaganda they see on the internet. The internet seems to have substituted for knowledge and experience. Now these same have infiltrated our government with lies. The ignorance that now prevails is disgusting. The people who follow it, more so.

2 Like Reply



Linda_Macdonald1 1 hour ago

@Alexis_Kaiser I believe you are the one with no education on the topic.

I have no idea who i am talking to nor do i care.

I do believe your lack of knowledge is evident.

No person who was educated on the abuse of animals being on display for man's perverse pleasure would take your stand on animals entertaining man.

SO my suggestion to you is to get some READING materials on the topic and browse through it. I know you will not read the too much but a little will do you good.

Like Reply



Mikhael 4 days ago

Excellent news! Animals were not created to be entertainment for humans.

4 Like Reply



LibertyBelle 4 days ago

Where in the Constitution does it say law makers can ban legal businesses?

5 Like Reply



Abso_LutelyNobody 5 days ago

Why does anyone even frequent the Topsfield Fair any longer. It is by far the biggest scam since the circus. I guess it strengthens the axiom that a sucker is born every minute.

1 Like Reply



Linda_Macdonald1 5 days ago

This is what I have been waiting to hear for years.

Thank you to all that voted for this ban.

The use of the poor animals for man's entertainment are over.

There is absolutely nothing educational to have a animal walking in circles with a human on his back, disgusting and sad.

Ms Karen Moniz your comments are ludicrous and ignorant.

5  Like Reply



Abso_LutelyNobody

5 days ago

@Linda_Macdonald1 Only exotic animals are banned. Which means they will still have the oxen, sheep, rabbits and chickens and other animals that are clearly enjoying themselves.

The exotic live animals provide a learning experience for the children who pay \$25 a head to attend the fair. I am sure seeing them has inspired many to pursue fields associated with conservation. But, maybe the fine people of Topsfield would rather have everyone board a plane and exhaust thousands of gallons of fuel so one can see them being poached in their natural habitat.

5  Like Reply



Linda_Macdonald1

4 days ago

We are not talking about agriculture

Elephants and camels absolutely do not belong in this type environment not in Topsfeild not in any other environment that exploits these beautiful animals

It is shameful on every level.

This is abuse and should not be permitted.

2  Like Reply



Kathryn_Weaver_Rolke1

21 hours ago

It most certainly is not abuse; These animals have been living with this traveling zoo for many years, if not most of their lives. It is all they know. You can't change the fact that they are living in captivity and they can never again live like wild animals—it would not be possible at this point. Sending these animals to a sanctuary wouldn't be any better for them, and it would probably make them miserable. These animals are used to almost constant human contact and training scenarios. If you know anything about elephants in captivity, you would know that Beulah, at 50 years old, is obviously doing very well at her advanced age. An elder elephant requires more close supervision and medical care, and that most likely would not be provided in a sanctuary to the degree her current owners provide it. Also, depriving her owners, the Commerford Zoo, of the income they derive from performing at venues like the Topsfield Fair will be detrimental to Beulah and the other animals because of loss of revenue. These are facts.

1  Like Reply



Abso_LutelyNobody

4 days ago

@Linda_Macdonald1 Nice try! It is convenient to say that the fairs display for our amusement of sheep, oxen and caged oversized rabbits and chickens play in agriculture. It's all the same. It's exploitation for a quick \$25 bucks.

2  Like Reply

Maureen_Damato_Gallant

4 days ago



What about the education aspect. Many patrons learn about how to raise and care for animals. Plus the school program affords many children a chance to witness this up close and personal and they might not get any other exposure to the agricultural part of it.

The elephant and camel in no way have been mistreated at the fair.

3 Like Reply



Linda_Macdonald1

4 days ago

@Maureen_Damato_Gallant really riding people on their backs in circles chained for 20 hrs a day bull hooks jabbed at their bodies frightened to death, in pain staying in cramped quarters.

It is abuse they so called trainers inflict pain upon these defenseless animals

You may want to do some research on the topic

1 Like Reply



Maureen_Damato_Gallant

4 days ago

Maybe you should take a ride to CT and witness the home where they live as one person I know did. I'll bet they are treated better than some horses in this area.

4 Like Reply



Kathryn_Weaver_Rolke1

1 day ago

Just because an animal, exotic or not, is in captivity, doesn't mean it is either being mistreated or is unhappy.

1 Like Reply



Linda_Macdonald1

1 hour ago

@Kathryn_Weaver_Rolke1 Really ? Being Chained up for for about 20 hrs a day is not abuse . Sticking and hitting an animal not abuse .

Your statement is beyond comprehension

Lets chain and hit a living being for its entire life .. Not abuse?

Like Reply

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