

Factsheet

Attendance is declining at circuses that use abusive and demeaning animal acts, while animal-free circuses are growing in popularity. Contact PETA for documentation.

January 12, 2004: "Cirque du Soleil is so vastly superior to something as passé as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey."—*The Miami Herald*

June 29, 2003: "The [Louisiana Shriners' first fund-raising] fair featured more than 15 rides, craft and concession booths, bands and a car show. This year, [fund-raising chair Mike Buras] said, the Shriners decided to put on a fair because of waning interest in the group's annual circus at the Pontchartrain Center in Kenner. 'The circus has been our primary fund-raiser for years, but recently there has been a decline. We thought the fair would be a great supplement to boost fund-raising efforts.'"—*Times-Picayune*

May 2, 2003: "There was the usual bunch of animal acts, but none of them was all that dazzling. ... It seems, too, that the animal rights people are starting to get to me despite reams of counter-publicity from the circus on the tender loving care all its animals receive. When I watched a tiger hop across its cage on two legs, or saw the elephants go through their paces, I couldn't help but ponder how the circus got them to do all that."—*The Providence Journal*

April 18, 2003: "And so what remains of the old [at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus], and of discomfort to some, are the animals. While only three protesters quietly stood outside the First Union Spectrum, children inside were questioning the treatment of the tigers, elephants and especially the Friesian, Arabian and Palomino horses as Sacha Houcke unsmilingly cracked his whip. ... The truth is that the human performers are now so strong and varied that, as stunning as it seems, the circus could do away with quadrupeds altogether—well, perhaps not the adorable dogs—and be just as strong."—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

February 14, 2003: "Imagine a circus with no grouchy tigers balancing on balls and no bored elephants lumbering around the ring. ... Cirque EOS features astounding balancing acts, fleet-handed jugglers, aerial artists who dance suspended from great heights, extreme bicyclists and gymnasts who make tumbling, leaping and flipping look as easy as strolling across the room."—*The Tallahassee Democrat*

January 9, 2003: "Forget the tigers, the elephants and the dancing bears. Cirque du Soleil will never travel the world with performing animals. ... 'We do not agree with the way they are trained and I'm not sure the place of an elephant or a tiger is to stand in a cage half of its life and perform all around the world,' [said Cirque artistic director Pierre Parisien.] 'We will never have animals in our shows.' ... Over the past two decades, [Cirque du Soleil] has developed into a giant entertainment empire and given circus a new lease of life. Cirque du Soleil now has 2,400 employees and 500 artists from more than 40 countries. Its shows have been seen in 130 cities by close to 33 million spectators."—*Reuters English News Service*

January 1, 2003: "There are no ... tamed lions nor dancing bears. What the world-acclaimed troupe brings to the big top is a unique artistic blend full of surprises and delights. Repackaging the circus concept in a much more modern way to create onstage magic, Cirque du Soleil offers a multisensory show unlike any seen before."—*Asahi Shimbun* (Japan)

October 15, 2002: "Forget the dancing bears, elephants, and performing monkeys. ... Cirque du Soleil began in 1984 [with] a group of street performers who wished to reinvent the circus by stripping away many of the ostentatious elements and return it to the core of human invention and imagination. Now, after 17 years, Cirque du Soleil has performed for nearly 33 million spectators worldwide. ... Judging from the roaring applause of the packed house, the showstopper was by far the hoop-diving act. ... Young and old alike will walk away with a smile on their face and a dream in their heart."—*The State Hornet*

September 14, 2002: "Cirque Eos is crammed with hold-your-breath moments. ... The concept certainly owes much to that other Québécois circus export, Cirque du Soleil—such as the elaborate costumes and the fact that there are no animals—but, considering the wild popularity of that phenomenon, who can blame [Cirque Eos founder Michel

Rousseau] for jumping on the train? ... Cirque Eos has transformed the PNE parking lot into a real circus, a fact that was confirmed by the sea of smiles leaving the big top.”—*The Globe and Mail*

August 19, 2002: “Recent editions of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus have looked a little wheezy and out of date. Worse yet, some of the acts weren’t even PC. No one wants to see elephants forced into that anxious gallop around the ring anymore. ... ‘T.M. the Gator Guy’ spent most of his time hauling what appeared to be somnolent reptiles from place to place. The coolest thing about the Gator Guy was the motorcycle he rode in on. ... Sara, the bombshell blonde, is ‘The Tiger Whisperer.’ (She whispers, but in case they don’t hear her, she still cracks a whip.) ... Nobody asked us, but what the new circus should really do is marginalize the animals and keep the spotlight on the jaw-dropping human acts.”—*The San Francisco Chronicle*

July 27, 2002: “However you describe it, though, Canada’s Cirque du Soleil is by far the classiest act around. ... You won’t find any neurotic bears riding bikes, any elephants being goaded into questionable pet tricks.”—*The Providence Journal*

July 26, 2002: “Gone are the animals. ... With these changes Cirque has redefined the circus for the 21st century—it is the New Age Barnum and Bailey. And Cirque creates an entertainment that can be enjoyed equally by children and adults for entirely different reasons.”—*Boston Herald*

June 9, 2002: “This circus didn’t have performing animals. ... After two extensions to meet the demand, the final [Cirque du Soleil] performances will be held today. ... [O]ur guess is that this one will be remembered longer than most.”—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

March 26, 2002: “I went to see the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden. ... The Garden was half full. ... The tigers moved with the half-speed of a Municipal Building bureaucrat and were more stoned than the bums you had to step over in Penn Station on the way into the Garden. ... [M]y little guy’s favorite attraction was the giant industrial dung vacuum.”—*New York Daily News*

March 25, 2002: “[T]he three shows put on by the Moscow State Circus yesterday certainly demonstrated that if you put on an event people want, they’ll come. ... [T]he Moscow State Circus is animal free.”—*The Milford Daily News*

February 25, 2002: “Gone, seemingly for good, are the wild animals that, in their often-bedraggled form, once formed a staple of the circus experience. The Great China company has no animals among its ranks. ... The sense of community unease about exotic animals in circus-scale confinement has become stronger throughout the community.”—*The Southland Times*

February 4, 2002: “[T]he 2001 tour in New England for many [circuses] was spotty. Even those that were sponsored by nonprofit groups and fraternities often failed to bring out the crowds in 2001. ... With the folding of Roberts Bros. Circus, [and] the rumored closing of several other shows, the 2002 touring season in New England appears to [be] bleak for the buffs.”—*Circus Report*

November 7, 2001: “[Circo Fantastico] showcases a variety of acts from all over Latin America. ... ‘It’s designed as a celebration of Hispanic culture through music, dance, and traditional circus acts,’ explains Doriana Sanchez, the show’s writer, director, and choreographer. ... ‘[We have] no animals, either. I’m really glad that there isn’t a need to use them on this. I recently went to a circus and saw an animal act that upset me to tears.’”—*Los Angeles Times*

September 30, 2001: “Sure, you can expect to see jugglers, high wire aerialists, acrobats, and death-defying feats—but you won’t see a single animal throughout the two-hour performance. ... ‘We decided that with the restraints from municipal and state governments, with the concerns people have about the treatment of animals and the organizations that protest at the various circus performances—that we did not want to fight this battle,’ [said J. Sandy Swanson, director of promotions and public relations for the Moscow State Circus.]”—*The Grand Rapids Press*

September 27, 2001: “No wonder that old-line circusgoers find [Cirque du Soleil] such an exciting and refreshing change of pace from the usual three-ring bluster and bombast. You’ll find ... no ‘courageous’ lion tamer cracking his whip to scare his beasts into submission.

So it shouldn’t surprise that Cirque’s surreal, sophisticated, and highly theatrical performance events have also captured the hearts and minds of people who wouldn’t be caught dead in a conventional circus setting.”—*Philadelphia Daily News*

July 8, 2001: “The big top has been packed day after day for three months [at the Moscow Circus in Singapore]. ... But this time it brought along none of its big animal acts, concentrating instead on jugglers, acrobats, magicians, high-wire artists, and clowns. The move back to human acts is now a global theme, influenced by such spectacular international shows as Cirque du Soleil, which mixes modern technique with much older performing arts drawn from mediaeval and Renaissance traditions.”—*Reuters*

May 7, 2001: “The 2001 edition of the Detroit Shrine Circus produced by Circus Royale failed to draw Detroiters. ... There were only about 400 people in the seats.”—*Circus Report*

May 3, 2001: “The animal acts were less prominent than in some of the past Ringling Bros. shows that have come to town.”—*The Providence Journal-Bulletin*

April 20, 2001: “Mixing hokum with the perception of brutality, the traditional circus seems uncomfortably out of place in today’s entertainment market. It’s the interspecies version of a minstrel show. ... Someone had to realize that the circus was a fine idea that just needed a bit of smartening-up. ... [S]ubtract the animal acts and add a mystical theatricality. Since [Cirque du Soleil’s] 1984 appearance at the Los Angeles Olympic Games, the appearance of a new Cirque show has become a votary occasion from millions of people who wouldn’t go near a ratty, tatty old circus. ... This is the circus I dream of running off to join.”—*Time* magazine

March 25, 2001: “[G]enerally circuses are appealing to more sophisticated audiences, with shows such as Cirque du Soleil. ... Thankfully, you no longer have to be a total sadist ... bullwhips, chairs, and mangy lions are definitely out—a trend that will hopefully continue.”—*The Observer*

March 23, 2001: “It was the end of the first half [of Cirque Eloize], and I hadn’t written a note. My 9-year-old son was mesmeriz[ed] beside me—and so was I. But there was no big top, no sawdust, no ringmaster, no greasepaint, no clowns with funny feet, and no performing animals. ... Instead, we had ... amazing gymnastic tricks and hand balancing, contortionists, trapeze artists, clowns, jugglers, a slack rope walker, a man who climbed a ladder and did tricks on it while it was unsupported, feats of incredible strength and beauty—and bike tricks like you’ve never seen. ... The audience went mad.”—*The Evening Post* (Wellington)

March 19, 2001: “[Cirque NuAge is] a combination of circus, theatre, rock concert, opera, and visual extravaganza that leaves the viewer breathless. ... There are no animals, not one. ... For two hours ... it flows hypnotically in ever-changing patterns from one thing to the next. Cirque NuAge ... is one of those shows that are gradually taking over the world of circusdom.”—*Circus Report*

February 17, 2001: “Blending street theatre and circus arts—but without a single animal—Cirque du Soleil mounted its first production. ... No one left disappointed that there were no elephants; there was a sense they were seeing something much bigger.”—*The Toronto Star*

February 9, 2001: “If you’re waiting for the fat lady to sing, don’t hold your breath. The modern circus doesn’t have a fat lady, let alone a ringmaster or animals. Instead, international acts such as Cirque du Soleil are reinventing this ancient art form, creating magical, surreal experiences—without the need for animals in a sensitive world dedicated to protecting animals’ rights.”—*New Zealand Truth* (Auckland)

November 29, 2000: “Instead of lions, tigers and elephants, [Cirque du Soleil] substituted outrageous costumes, evocative world music, and an edgy brand of performance art that seemed plucked from outer space. ... Tickets are selling so briskly for Atlanta performances that the show has already been extended by three weeks. ... Thanks to the animal-rights movement, [Fred Dahlinger, director of collections and research at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wis.] thinks that the old-fashioned model may eventually become extinct.”—*The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*

November 3, 2000: “Founded in 1871, the ‘greatest show on earth’ has steep competition these days from artier circuses, such as Cirque du Soleil, that rely more on theatrics than on lions and tigers and bears, oh my. This may explain why the east and west wings of the venue were empty.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

September 19, 2000: “More than anything, I noticed how many seats were empty, how The Greatest Show on Earth was more of a no-show here in Seattle than anything else.”—*The Seattle Times*

August 23, 2000: “[A] Chinese Performing Arts Company representative and interpreter [for the Chinese State Circus] said: ‘The Chinese circus is quite different to any Western circuses. We don’t have any animals. ... The

audiences love it.' ... Larry Dewit, the circus's general manager, said: 'Ticket sales have been super. It's been really busy. We may well be turning people away.'"—*Plymouth Evening Herald*

August 22, 2000: "Canada-based Cirque du Soleil continues to demonstrate how wonderfully entertaining and humane animal-free circus can be as theater."—*Los Angeles Times*

August 21, 2000: "When was the last time a circus left you giddy with a sense of poetry, or brought a bittersweet tear to your eye? This is exactly what Cirque Eloize accomplishes. ... They make the kind of sensitive circus I'd want to run away and join. We know the staples of the traditional circus experience. Deromanticised, it's trained animals, possibly mangy or plain worn-out from overwork."—*The London Evening Standard*

August 13, 2000: "Meanwhile, other more traditional circuses are looking at the [Cirque du Soleil's] success and are sending in the clones. ... The show has drawn nearly unanimous raves from reviewers."—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

July 13, 2000: "[D]on't come to the Circus Royale expecting to see elephants. ... Circus Royale president Jim McConnell said he'll leave the elephants home. ... 'We've talked it through, and at this place and time, the issue [of using elephants] has to be resolved.'"—*The Associated Press*

July 8, 2000: "Controversy over the use of wild animals has already begun to shape the circus of the future. 'I do see an eventual end to animals in the circus,' said Pat Delaney, a Marquette University graduate who's executive secretary of the Showmen's League of America. 'Nobody in their right minds is getting into the animal business.'"—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

June 14, 2000: "Circus King has come under fire from MPs, councillors, and campaigners for its use of animals, including lions, horses, tigers, llamas, and Britain's last performing bear. ... [O]nly about 40 people watched the performance in a big top with a capacity for 1,000."—*Derby Evening Telegraph*

June 13, 2000: "Many seats were empty on Sunday afternoon [at the Big Apple Circus]."—*Chicago Tribune*

June 8, 2000: "There are no elephants here to do the heavy work of setting up the big top, because the Mexican International Circus has been animal-free for the last seven years. ... 'You can't use animals in a circus and not hurt them,' said [circus performer] Raymundo Campa."—*Calgary Herald*

June 2, 2000: "One of the changes in this year's [Vidbel Circus] tour is the elimination of exotic and endangered animal acts."—*Asbury Park Press*

May/June 2000: "[T]here were a noticeable number of cities and towns not wanting to sponsor circuses as fundraisers."—*White Tops*

May 29, 2000: "'In the interest of safety, [the] American Zoo and Aquarium Association strongly encourages members to discontinue public elephant rides,' read the March 21 statement from the organization's board of directors."—*The Indianapolis Star*

May 21, 2000: "But the most amazing thing of all wasn't even what was going on in the three rings [at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus]. It was to be seen elsewhere in the arena, up in the seats. In all the empty seats. ... [T]he show we attended was nowhere close to sold out. In fact, the place was nearly empty."—*Dayton Daily News*

May 1, 2000: "The first question Sandy Dobritch asks callers seeking circuses through his Las Vegas-based talent booking agency is: 'Are you looking for a traditional three-ring circus or Cirque du Soleil?' The majority say Cirque."—*Amusement Business*

March/April 2000: "Circus Flora Ringmaster Ivor David Balding says the one-ring show's elephant will make her final bow May 21. ... As for Circus Flora without Flora [the elephant], a spokesman ... said, 'The circus is very able to continue providing the theatrical presentation using the circus arts as its foundation.'"—*White Tops*

December 2, 1999: "Attendance at the 66th annual Hadi Shrine Circus was down from last year. ... [The executive manager] estimated attendance to be 3,200 less than last year's."—*Evansville Courier & Press*

November 19, 1999: “Last Thursday’s performance of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at the 16,000-seat Allstate Arena was so small that two of the three rings were playing to rafts of empty seats. Attendees at several other first-week performances reported similarly small houses.”—*Chicago Tribune*

November 8, 1999: “As master of ceremonies, baby-faced Johnathan Lee Iverson was a congenial [Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus] ringmaster who didn’t let on if the half-empty venue affected him.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

October 9, 1999: “There were the 10 tigers [at the Ringling Bros. performance], rolling over on command of a whip-cracking trainer, then—against all laws of nature—walking backward on their hind legs. ... [T]he pachyderms jumped on and off a portable stand, a trainer sinking a bullhook into one who moved too slowly. ... [I]t wasn’t what I’d call the greatest show on earth. ... You’d think that wild animal acts would have gone the way of jockey lawn ornaments, two-martini lunches, and other remnants of less-enlightened days.”—*The Buffalo News*

September 17, 1999: “Attendance continues to dwindle when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus comes to town.”—*The Indianapolis News*

June 7, 1999: “But now no fewer than a dozen animal-free [circus] shows are operating from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco; a third of them have started in the last two years.”—*Los Angeles Times*

May 1, 1999: “[T]he animal acts that once thrilled audiences now often turn them off. Television programs about animals in the wild and animal rights activists have opened people’s eyes to the fate of animals in circuses. No matter how well circus animals are fed and cared for, most of us now believe that working for peanuts and living in cages is neither natural nor healthy for wildlife.”—*Sarasota Magazine*

January 28, 1999: “‘You would have to be a blind man not to see how attitudes were changing,’ said [Chipperfield Circus spokesman Dan Owen]. ‘Circus owners have to adapt or walk away and find another way of making their living.’”—*The Northern Echo*

January 15, 1999: “[T]here’s no question Thursday’s audience [at the Moscow Circus], looking like a skimpy 2,000 or so in total, often seemed ill at ease, responding with weak applause to some of the bear antics. ... Perhaps it’s time the circus folk reassessed that part of the show ... there’s plenty of good entertainment without the muzzled beasts.”—*Calgary Herald*

September 22, 1997: “Times are changing, and people are changing, and maybe we need to change also; maybe animals aren’t going to be in circuses because people don’t want them to be. The majority will rule someday, and maybe that time is here.”—*Circus Report*

July 26, 1995: “[Ringling] also has a good idea on how to handle its image. A photo request to show the elephants with chains around their ankles was politely declined.”—*Los Angeles Times*

March 16, 1995: “Ringling Bros. finds just coming to town isn’t enough anymore. ... The company will spend more on advertising—\$25 million—than ever. And ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ is introducing the first national advertising campaign in its history.”—*The New York Times*

February 19, 1995: “These days, the circus animals sneak into town.”—*The New York Times*

February 5, 1993: “The Garden Bros. circus came to town yesterday, but it was a new, politically correct edition, with lasers instead of lions, electronics instead of elephants. Because of a city of Toronto by-law introduced last year and under appeal, no exotic animals perform in this circus. ... But did the circus suffer without a parade of pachyderms or, as advertised in the program, a poor little pussycat jumping through a ring of fire? Not at all. The death-defying feats by the human species, the dramatic laser show, the pageantry, and the live orchestra were entertainment enough.”—*The Toronto Star*