



The show can't go on

Ending wild animal
abuse for entertainment

September 2014

We were known as **WSPA**
(World Society for the
Protection of Animals)



Wild animal entertainment is animal abuse

Each year, hundreds of thousands of wild animals worldwide are trapped, confined, mutilated and forced to live and behave unnaturally all in the name of entertainment.

Wild animal attractions – for example riding an elephant, taking a tiger selfie or swimming with a dolphin – play a part in too many holidays.

But we know that if most animal-loving people knew the suffering behind wild animal entertainment they would never take part.

Here at World Animal Protection we have more than 30 years' experience moving governments, local authorities and communities and animal owners to protect wild animals from abuse in the entertainment industry.

This report highlights five of the worst wild animal abuses in the name of entertainment that are taking place across the world today.

We are calling for animal-friendly tourists and tour operators worldwide to work with us, reduce demand, keep wild animals wild and stop cruel animal attractions once and for all.

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Image: A wild tiger chasing prey
iStock. by Getty Images



Riding elephants

Elephant owners, camps and tour operators have been offering tourists the chance to live out their Jungle Book fantasies for over 25 years. But the chance of a once-in-a-lifetime experience for tourists means a lifetime of suffering for elephants.

Few tourists are aware, however, that the majestic animals they ride are wild animals that have not actually evolved to carry weights on their backs and that brutal training has broken their spirits.

Cruelly taken from the wild or bred in captivity, these elephants are separated from their mothers and family groups at just a few months old. Elephants destined for the tourist industry experience great physical and mental trauma. Isolation, starving, hitting and beating are just some of the methods used to initially break their spirits and get them to behave and perform. The fear and suffering calves endure is intense. And just like humans who are abused, elephants can develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Lifelong abuse

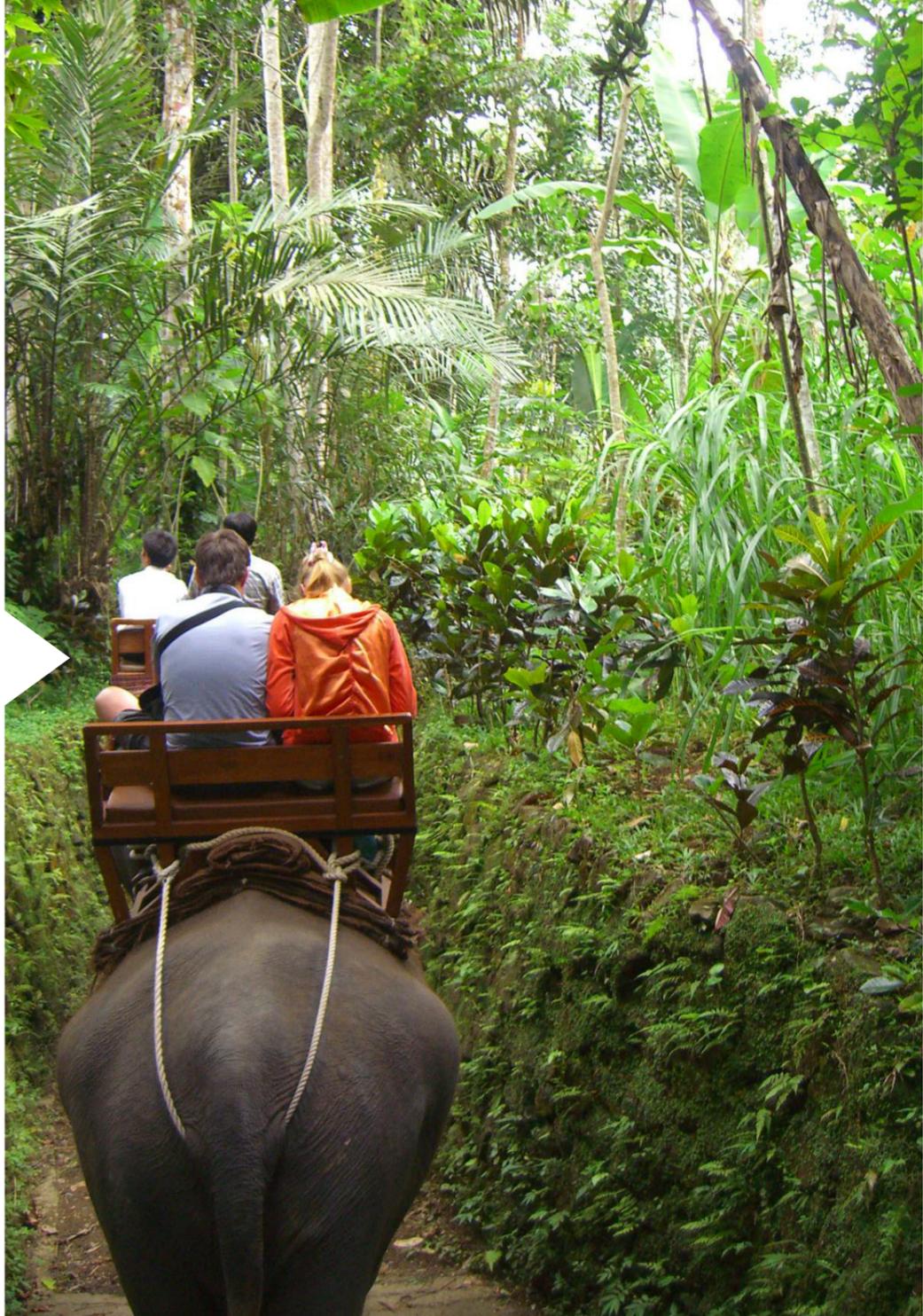
The abuse continues throughout their lives. Trainers may use pointy implements like bull hooks (nails on long sticks) to control them during tourist rides and performances.

These implements inflict wounds that become easily infected. And when the rides are over the elephants are often restrained by chains, kept in bright sunlight and high temperatures and on concrete that hurts their feet. The fact that they are naturally highly social and tactile animals is also ignored as they are frequently isolated from other elephants.

Many of these elephants suffer as a result of the physical and psychological stress they endure under these conditions.

Around 16,000 Asian elephants are suffering in captivity worldwide – most have been stolen as calves from the wild.

Elephant rides are currently available in Asia, South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Argentina.



Wild Asian elephant facts

Heard/family group sizes:

Up to 20 – matriarch-led

Life expectancy:

Up to 70 years

Territory size:

600km²

Location:

13 states of Asia and South East Asia

IUCN Red List status:

Endangered

Number in wild:

38,500 - 52,500

Image left: Tourists participate in an elephant ride in Asia
CC BY 2.0 (via Flickr.com)

Image right: A mother and calf on the grasslands of a national park in India. iStock. by Getty Images



Walking with lions

Walking with lions across a beautiful African landscape is a holiday dream come true for many wild animal lovers. But the reality behind this and other lion-handling close encounters is a grim one.

Lions are wild animals. They retain their wild behaviours and natures despite close contact with human owners in captivity. Lion cub handling, walking with lions and photo opportunities with lions are most common in southern Africa – particularly South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, and in Mauritius. These facilities depend on the supply of a continual stream of young lions – usually captive bred and taken from their mothers shortly after birth.

Separation can be hugely stressful for both cubs and lionesses. In the wild, they would normally stay together for at least two years. Wild lionesses would usually have one litter every two to three years, but those breeding for the industry can be forced to have up to two to three litters per year.

Relentless cycle

Once cubs are taken from their mothers at just a few weeks old they are subjected to frequent handling by their owners until they are able to feed themselves and are ready to attract tourists. Their days are spent in a relentless cycle of paid-for handling and photo opportunities. This is so different from the cubs' wild existence where they are fiercely protected by their mothers and depend on them for reassurance. Handled cubs can lose their hair and become ill with diarrhoea and other illnesses because of

the chronic stress and sleep deprivation inflicted on them. Then, once an unwieldy size, lions are reportedly drugged and abused until they become compliant enough for photo opportunities or lion walks with tourists.

Sometimes they may be sent to canned hunting camps to be shot by trophy hunters in small enclosures. More than 160 canned lion camps have been established in South Africa over the past 15 years. The captive lion industry is so lucrative and powerful there that legislation banning canned hunts was successfully reversed several years ago.

Cubs and adult lions may also be sold to zoos or wealthy collectors of exotic animals.

There are dubious benefits to breeding lions in captivity. Lion cubs handled in this way can never be effectively released to the wild as their chances of survival cannot be guaranteed. It is also highly irresponsible to release a dangerous, large predator familiar with people back into wild lands where local people live. Despite stories of strong lion-human bonds, a lion will always be capable of wild behaviour and so there is always a risk to people handling them. Lion numbers throughout Africa are rapidly dwindling as a result of habitat loss, unregulated trophy hunting, and young lions being captured for commercial enterprises.



Wild lion facts

Lion pride sizes:

Average 13 lions

Life expectancy:

Females 10-14 years;

Males 10-12 years

Territory size:

Average of 200km²

Found in:

Sub-Saharan Africa; Western India (Asiatic lions)

IUCN* Red List status:

Vulnerable

Number in wild:

Fewer than 25,000

*International Union for Conservation of Nature

Image left: Tourists are able to experience walking with lions at some resorts in South Africa. iStock. by Getty Images

Image right: Lions in a national park in Tanzania with wildebeest in the background. iStock. by Getty Images



Posing with tigers

A picture-perfect selfie moment with a rare and beautiful tiger may seem like too good an opportunity to miss, but missing it is exactly what animal-friendly tourists should do.

Captive tigers used as photographic props at attractions and other locations in countries including Thailand, Australia, the US, Mexico and Argentina endure a shocking catalogue of cruelty.

Cubs are mostly bred in captivity and typically taken from their mothers when they are several weeks old. To make them safe for tourists to handle, they will often have their canine teeth and claws removed – a process which causes them great pain. And unwanted cubs that become too big for photographs may be killed or sold to roadside menageries.

Cruel control

'Training' methods are harsh. Facilities such as Thailand's Tiger Temple keep adult tigers on leads and punish them to train them and keep them under control. They are also reported to confine the tigers to small and barren cages when they are not being used.

The ease with which tigers breed in captivity makes it simple for existing and aspiring tiger attraction operators to meet the increased demand for tiger contact opportunities. In Thailand alone, we encountered 10 venues that housed around 614 tigers. The Tiger Temple increased its population from 20 to 70 tigers between 2007 and 2010.

This number is likely to rise with tour companies such as Skyscanner recommending the Temple as one of the top things for tourists to do in Thailand. More than 26 million tourists visit Thailand annually.

Captive in-breeding is also known to be responsible for a host of tiger health and welfare problems. These include partial blindness, club feet, cleft palates, spinal deformities and heart, lung and kidney problems.

There are around 5,000 captive tigers in the United States alone – that's far more than the 3,200 in the wild.



Wild tiger facts

Tiger group sizes:

Generally solitary

Life expectancy:

10-15 years

Territory size:

Up to 450km²

Found in:

Few Asian forests

IUCN status:

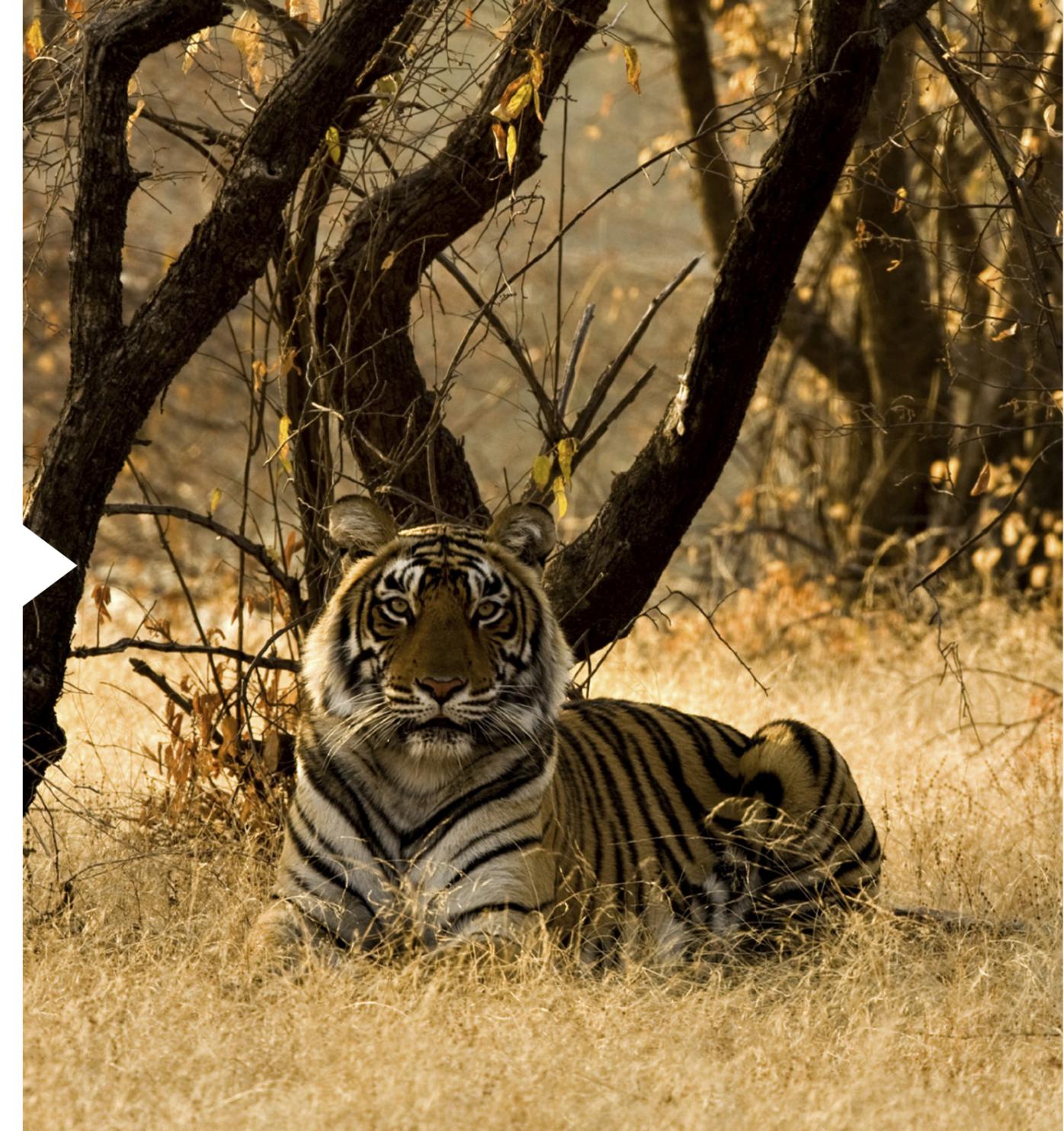
Critically endangered or endangered depending on the subspecies

Number in wild:

3,200

Image left: A tourist poses with a tiger at a monastery in Thailand. iStock. by Getty Images

Image right: A tiger in the dry grass of a national park in India. iStock. by Getty Images



Swimming with dolphins

Swimming with dolphins is a common 'bucket list' goal, but how much pain and suffering does it take for a tourist's dream to become reality?

Most 'dolphin encounters' take place not in their vast ocean home, but in the cruel confines of a dolphinarium. And most tourists don't realise that such small and barren environments can never replicate dolphins' natural habitats or allow them to behave naturally. They are certainly not told the full story of the animals' cruel journey to captivity.

Many dolphins kept in captivity are bottlenoses and have been taken from the wild. Their pods are chased by high speed boats and dolphins will be either wrestled and hauled on-board or caught in nets. Their complex social groups and bonds are destroyed and the fear and suffering endured during capture mean many die shortly afterwards.

Captive stress

Survivors live out their lives in chlorinated pools - tiny fractions of the vast oceans where they can travel up to 1,076 km in just 20 days. The chlorine can cause skin and eye problems. Pool-bound dolphins in the tropics may become sunburned because they can't escape to the ocean depths. They are also more susceptible to disease - including those spread by humans.

Consequently many depend on antibiotics for survival. The stress of captivity can cause heart attacks and gastric ulcers.

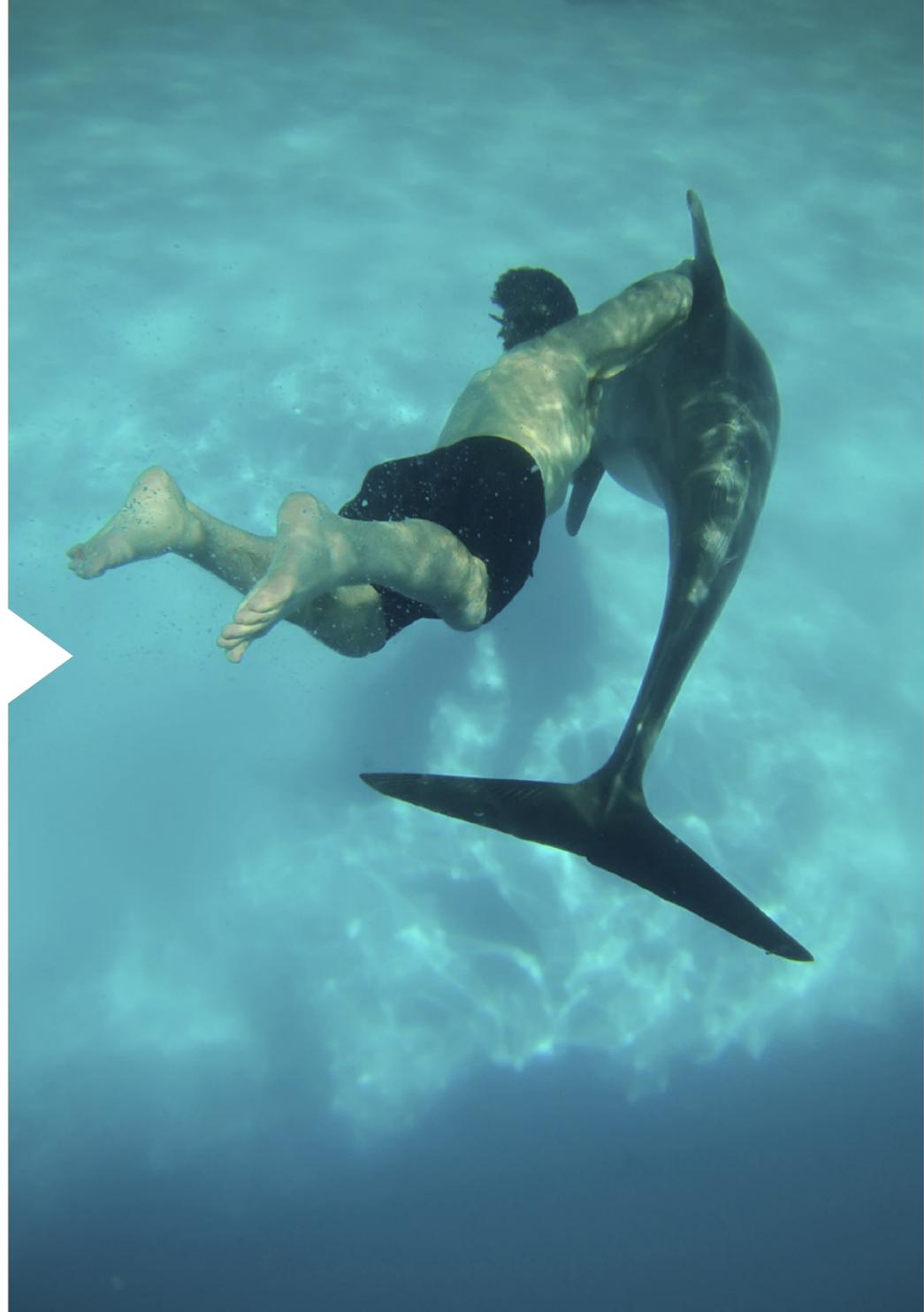
The smooth-sided pools - so different from the rocks and corals of natural ocean landmarks - also interfere with the dolphin's natural way of navigation through echolocation.

The life expectancy of a captive dolphin is much less than that of a wild one which could live up to around 50 years old.

Increasing numbers

There are around 80 registered facilities worldwide offering swimming with dolphins experiences. An estimated 1,600 captive bottlenose dolphins are used for dolphin entertainment worldwide. But not all facilities are registered or keep up-to-date records. The number could be much higher.

These facilities are found across North America, Asia, South America, Europe, Australia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Some are as big as SeaWorld San Diego which attracted more than 4 million visitors in 2012.



Wild bottlenose dolphin facts

Dolphin pod sizes:
Around 12

Life expectancy:
Up to 50 years old

Territory size:
Up to 300km²

Location:
Tropical and temperate waters

Number in wild:
Estimated at 600,000

Image left: A man swimming with a dolphin in an aquarium
iStock. by Getty Images

Imageright: A wild dolphin jumps in the wake of a boat.
iStock. by Getty Images



Dancing macaques

If the macaques that dance and perform on the streets, in animal shows and in zoos throughout Asia could talk, their stories would not make easy listening.

In Indonesia alone, it's estimated that around 3,000 baby macaques annually are wrenched from their shot mothers' arms. Deeply traumatised, as they would not normally stray from their mothers' sides until 11 months old, some are then sold into the entertainment industry. Once in the hands of their new owners their horrific training begins.

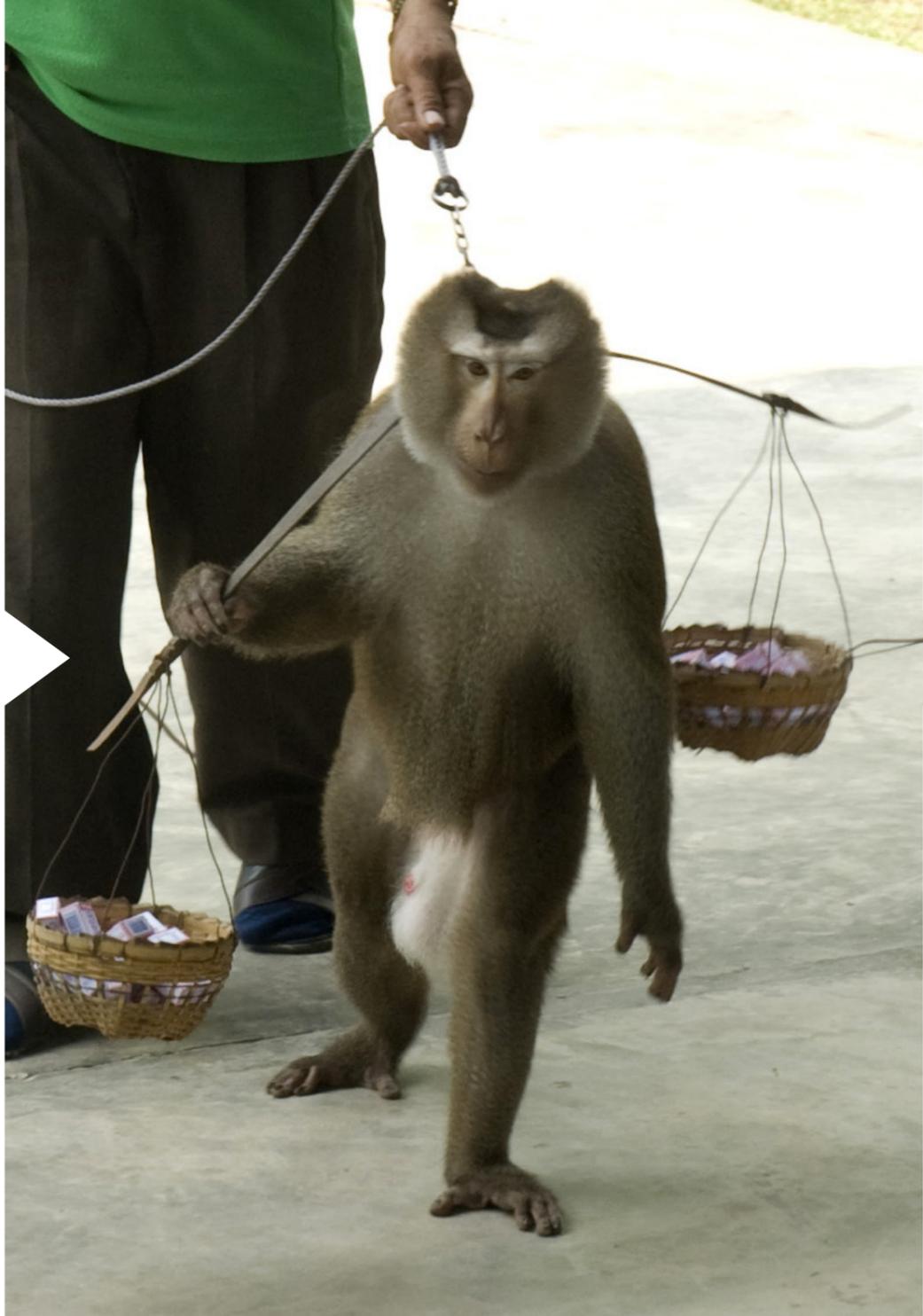
The methods used to 'train' the macaque to perform, whether it's to dance, 'play' a guitar, ride a bike or get coconuts from trees for tourists are brutal. They all involve inflicting long-term physical and mental harm.

Tight controls

Firstly chain collars are typically put around a young macaque's neck as a means of control. Collars can become so tight as the animals grow that the metal becomes embedded in their skin causing painful infections and diseases. When the young macaques are not being trained or performing, the chains are used to confine them in small barren cages, or to tether them outside.

Training sessions can last four to six hours a day over a four to six-month period and may be done on a one-to-one basis or in centres where several macaques are trained by several trainers together. To force a macaque to stand up on two legs, trainers tie its arms around its back and use the chain fixed around its neck to pull the animal upright, until it's left with just enough chain to be able to keep its feet on the ground. The terrified and suffering animal can be left to hang like this for hours. Often Macaques are also beaten and hit if they fail to do what is required – such as holding a prop or wearing clothes.

Many young macaques do not survive the intense training. Those that do are forced to perform almost daily for 5-10 years before they become too big and aggressive to handle. Some are then sold to be killed as food to people and restaurants that consider macaques a delicacy.



Wild macaque facts

Life expectancy:

Around 31 years

Territory size:

300km²

Location:

Countries in Asia such as India and Indonesia

IUCN Red List status:

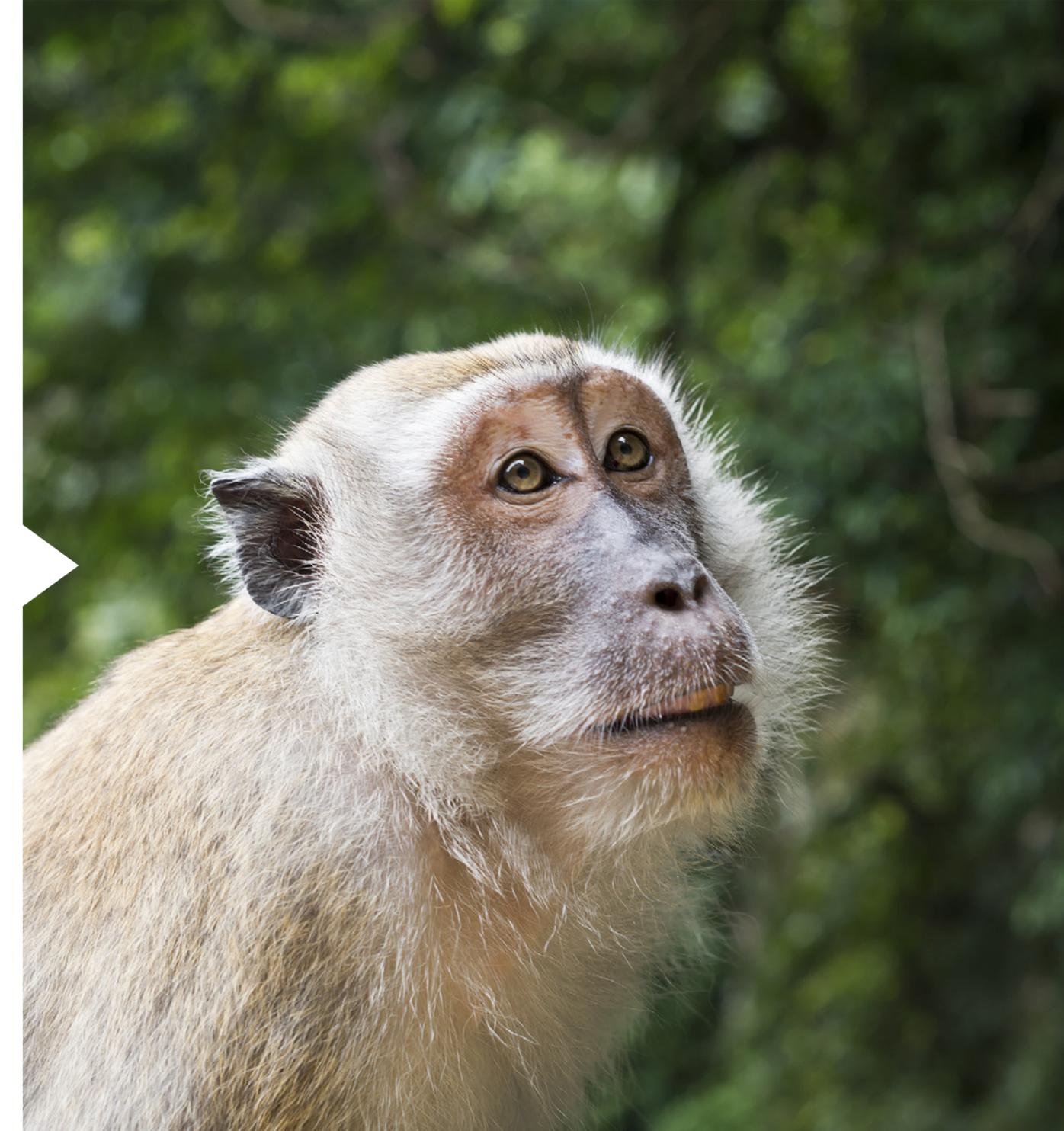
Long tailed and Rhesus macaque – least concern; pigtailed macaque – vulnerable

Number in wild:

Unknown

Image left: Macaque being trained to perform for tourists in Thailand.

Image right: A male long-tailed macaque in the wild in Malaysia. iStock. by Getty Images



Making unnatural acts history

How we broke the chains of cruelty

Until we stepped in to stop the cruelty, bear dancing was once a normal entertainment for tourists and local people in Greece, Turkey and India.

Typically most spectators were unaware of the chain of suffering and exploitation the animals endured and the appalling, unnatural conditions in which they were kept.

To fuel this cruel industry, mother bears were often shot in the wild and their cubs taken from them by hunters. Once sold to their new owners, the cubs' noses were pierced with a metal ring, a chain was attached and the animals would be trained to 'dance' in time to music. Training methods included owners tugging on the chain, beating the bears' legs and sometimes making them stand on hot metal plates to make them stand upright.

Before the end of bear dancing, more than a hundred bear cubs were poached from the wild every year to meet demand. And at the start of our project in 1998 more than 1,000 bears were being used for this unacceptable entertainment both on the tourist trails and in rural areas.

Ending the last dance – what we did

Empowering the Kalandars – traditional bear dancing owners – to hand over their bears in exchange for new and stable careers was central to our campaign's success which ended in 2012.

This unique 'alternative livelihood' five-year project with our partner the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) had a 100% success rate with more than 50 Kalandars who were most resistant to giving up their bears and changing their livelihoods. Alternative livelihoods include running bakeries, shops and taxi businesses.

Other keys to our success involved working with WTI and local people to stop the bears being taken from the wild.

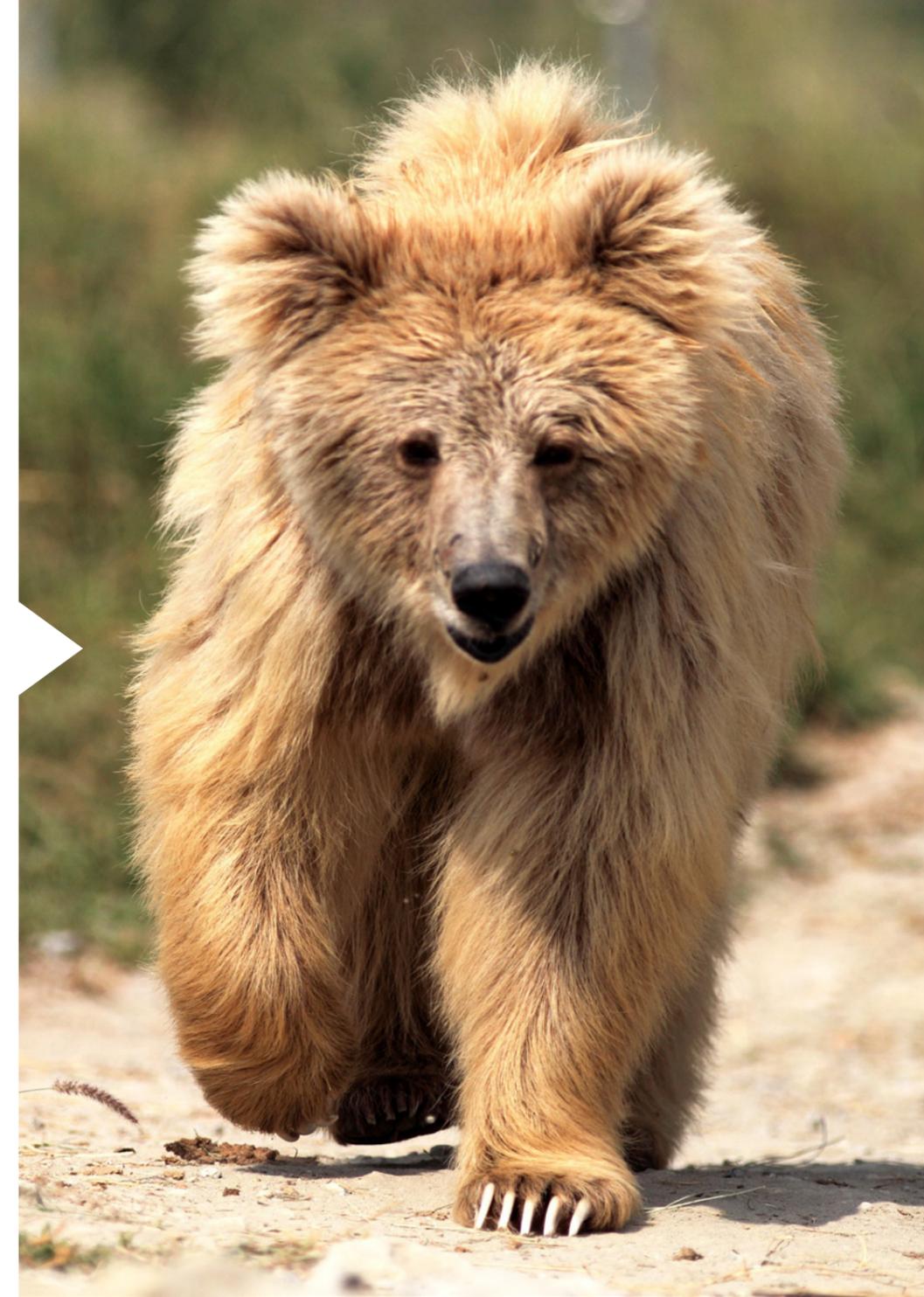
We developed and delivered anti-poaching surveillance training to more than 400 government forestry staff and volunteers who now oversee remote anti-poaching hubs.

It was also vital that confiscated bears be given a safe haven where they could be looked after for the rest of their lives. Their captive lives and cruel treatment meant they could never fend for themselves in the wild. The first confiscated bears were housed in a sanctuary that we funded and then donated to local organisation Wildlife SOS. Wildlife SOS has since set up other sanctuaries in India dedicated to the care of rescued bears.

Taking action to keep wildlife wild

Become an animal-friendly tourist by downloading our helpful travel guide and joining our community to move the world to protect animals.

► beforetheybook.org



We are World Animal Protection.

We end the needless suffering of animals.

We influence decision makers to put animals on the global agenda.

We help the world see how important animals are to all of us.

We inspire people to change animals' lives for the better.

We move the world to protect animals.