

Investigative Report

ShowMe Tigers Circus Act



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



BAN WILD ANIMAL ACTS



Tora flinches and snarls as Easley whips at her 31 times during a practice session.

During early 2017, an undercover investigator with The Humane Society of the United States spent several weeks working and traveling with Ryan Easley's ShowMe Tigers circus act. Our investigation found that the eight tigers featured in the act were trained and handled through the violent use of whips and sticks, forced to perform tricks that could lead to physical ailments, left in cramped transport cages when not performing, and fed an inappropriate diet. Easley, who uses the stage name Ryan Holder, tours with Carden Circus, often performing for Shrine Circus. Jay Pratte, an animal-behavior expert, trainer and wildlife consultant with 25 years of experience, stated in a declaration provided to The HSUS, "Ryan Easley utilizes archaic training methods which entail fear, force and punishment. In my professional opinion, the tigers at ShowMe Tigers are suffering from psychological neglect and trauma on a daily basis." The HSUS has filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for potential violations of the Animal Welfare Act, and is urging the agency to investigate ShowMe Tigers and to take swift enforcement action for violations of federal law.

Abusive Training

Our investigator documented Easley using a lunge whip and a long stick as training tools to control the six female and two male tigers. He cracked the whip, sometimes making a loud noise and sometimes making contact with the tigers, and he used the stick to prod and hit the tigers. While Easley did not always use the same degree of force in whipping and striking the tigers during the show as he did during a practice session, the tigers never knew what to expect. It was obvious that the mere presence of these tools created a great deal of anxiety for the tigers.

While in the performance ring, the tigers exhibited classic signs of fear and behavioral stress. They squinted, flinched, flattened their ears back, sat with hunched shoulders, snarled, cowered, moaned in distress, swatted at Easley or the training tools, crept reluctantly to position in the performance ring, and bolted back to their pedestals—sometimes in the middle of a trick.

During a practice session, our investigator documented Easley becoming visibly annoyed with a tiger named Tora who was not responding to commands. Easley



A tiger snarls and covers between pedestals during a performance.



A whip mark appears on the back of a tiger's head (right) as Easley whips him during an abusive practice session.



The tigers' flattened-back ears as Easley raises his whip and goad are a sign that they anticipate conflict.



Walking upright could lead to physical disorders such as arthritis.



This tiger never received veterinary care for a raw, open wound near her eye.

aggressively whipped at Tora to get her down from the pedestal, making contact with her paws, chest and face multiple times. In less than two minutes, Easley whipped at a traumatized Tora 31 times while she flinched, snarled and roared.

Some of the tigers are forced to walk backwards and hop forwards while upright on their hind legs, a physically grueling trick that could lead to physical disorders such as arthritis.

Constant Confinement

When Easley went on tour for the circus season, the tigers were kept in pairs in transport cages that measured 6½-feet long x 4-feet wide x 4-feet high. The two male tigers, each weighing more than 500 pounds, shared one transport cage. Except for the few minutes each day when the tigers performed, they were kept exclusively in transport cages where they ate, slept, paced, urinated and defecated in the approximately 13-square feet of floor space afforded to each one. Not once were they provided the chance to exercise outside the transport cages. In fact, the tigers' exercise cage was never even unloaded from the trailer.



The tigers spent 23-1/2 to 24 hours per day in transport cages.

Tigers are generally solitary animals. When multiple tigers are caged together with no opportunity to escape from an aggressive, stressed cagemate, conflicts can turn deadly.

They were never provided with any enrichment items to keep them physically and mentally active. Tigers love to swim, but Easley's tigers have no access to a pool. Confined to transport cages on the road, they were never able to walk on grass, jump onto elevated resting platforms, or even stretch upright. According to Jay Pratte in his declaration to The HSUS, "The big cats at ShowMe Tigers are [...] deprived of the minimum standards of care exercised by professional institutions that house big cats in captivity."

Neglect

Before Easley's circus act went on tour, the tigers were kept at his winter quarters in Hugo, Oklahoma. Despite temperatures that were often well below freezing, the tigers had no heat source and were only provided a mere inch of bedding during bitterly cold weather.

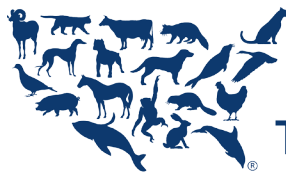
For the duration of the HSUS investigation, Easley typically fasted the tigers more than once per week, fed the tigers almost exclusively raw chicken legs, and rarely provided any dietary supplements. On fasting days, the tigers were not given bones, rawhides, or similar items to promote periodontal health and encourage natural feeding behaviors as is done at professionally-run facilities.

Tora, the tiger who our investigator documented being subjected to extensive whipping during the practice session, did not receive veterinary care for a raw open wound on the side of her face. The USDA had previously cited Easley in 2012 for not providing veterinary care to Tora when she had a 1-inch cut on her ribcage.

During our investigation, Easley disposed of a “retired” 12-year-old tiger at Tanganyika Wildlife Park in Goddard, Kansas. The facility is a poorly run roadside zoo that has been lobbying state officials to remove the state’s ban on allowing public contact with big cats.



A tiger cowers and snarls as Easley approaches her with his abusive training tools.



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