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THE WELFARE AND MANAGEMENT OF ELEPHANTS BETTY AND JANICE AT CARDEN CIRCUS

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A report commissioned by PETA

Executive Summary

This report details observations made on May 26, 2025, at Carden Circus in Rolla, Missouri, with a specific focus on the welfare of two elephants, Betty and Janice.

The elephants were housed in a small, electrified pen with a concrete substrate and were subjected to public performances and rides. During the three-hour observation, several indicators of compromised welfare were noted, alongside serious concerns for public safety and a lack of appropriate veterinary oversight.

Key Findings

- **Betty showed signs of significant physical compromise**, including impaired mobility in her right front leg, consistent with joint pain or injury. Her gait was abnormal and stiff, and she appeared unable to bend the leg at the knee or wrist joints. This condition was especially concerning given that she is required to perform physically demanding tasks such as climbing, carrying riders, and enduring road transport. Furthermore, there were indications of cracked nails on her rear foot, which could be associated with infection.
- **Betty's trunk function also appeared compromised**, with visible atrophy in the central section. Her trunk dragged while walking and was rarely lifted, suggesting serious muscular or neurological impairment. Further veterinary evaluation is urgently needed to assess her ability to feed and interact normally.
- **Behaviorally, Betty appeared withdrawn, unresponsive, and physically subdued**, frequently standing still with eyes closed and trunk on the ground—behavior inconsistent with good welfare in elephants.
- **Janice showed signs of ocular discomfort**, with red, possibly sore eyes requiring veterinary investigation. Her nails were overgrown and she lacked muscle tone.
- **Housing and transport conditions were minimal and inappropriate**, with elephants confined to a small pen and transported regularly by road, despite known physical impairments.
- **Public safety risks were high**. Both elephants were moved through crowds and kept within arm's reach of visitors, separated only by lightweight metal barriers. The howdah straps used during rides appeared poorly secured, increasing the risk of slippage or collapse.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The cumulative stress of performance, transportation, inadequate housing, and lack of medical care places these elephants—particularly Betty—at significant and immediate risk of catastrophic health failure. Betty's current condition, combined with her age, obesity, and the physical demands of circus life, is likely to result in collapse or death if her circumstances do not change.

This report strongly recommends:

- **Immediate, independent and expert veterinary assessment** of both elephants, with a focus on limb, trunk, foot, and ocular health;
- **An end to the use of both elephants for rides, performances, and travel**, based on overwhelming evidence that these practices are incompatible with basic welfare standards;
- **Urgent review by regulatory authorities** of public safety protocols at Carden Circus and other venues using wild animals in close proximity to the public.

The findings in this report underscore the critical need for legislative and regulatory action to prohibit the use of elephants and other wild animals in traveling circuses.

About the Author

I hold a PhD in Animal Welfare Science from the School of Biological Sciences, University of Bristol, where my thesis examined the practices and legislation of zoos. I received a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in Zoology from University College London in 1998. I received a Master of Science degree in Primatology from University College London in 1999.

I was employed by the Born Free Foundation, UK, from May 2004 through December 2020, becoming Head of Animal Welfare and Captivity in 2017. In that role, I was responsible for the operation of Born Free's wild animal sanctuaries in Ethiopia, South Africa, and India; as well as overseeing the organization's research, policy, and advocacy on animal welfare and wild animals in captivity.

I then worked at the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), USA from December 2020 through February 2025, where I was Chief Operations Officer (2020-2024) and then Chief Executive Officer (Feb 2024-Feb 2025). While there, I led the organization's sanctuary and global animal welfare programs and was responsible for the operations of the Ark 2000 wild animal sanctuary in California, the first elephant sanctuary in the USA.

I am a member of the Accreditation Committee of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS), a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology, a Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, an Advisor to the Whale Sanctuary Project, a Former Member of the Zoos Expert Committee for the Governments in the United Kingdom, a Former Member of the Wild Animal Welfare Committee in the United Kingdom, and a Former Member of the Editorial Board for the UK Journal of Animal Law.

I have authored multiple scholarly publications in my field, and given multiple invited presentations across the globe on animal welfare science, conservation biology, zoos, and exotic animals in captivity; I have provided Parliamentary Presentations and Testimony on topics including wild animals in circuses, and licensing and inspection in zoos, among other topics.

I have previously been retained to observe and provide recommendations on elephants in captivity in countries including, but not limited to, Sri Lanka, India, USA, Mexico, UK, Ireland, South Africa, France, Spain, and Italy. I was involved in the retirement and movement of the last circus elephant in England, and have been central to the rescue and retirement of numerous wild animals rescued from zoos and circuses to lifetime sanctuaries.

Observations

Introduction

PETA asked me to report on the welfare and management of elephants at Carden Circus, with a particular focus on the welfare and health of Betty.

I visited Carden Circus on Saturday May 26 2025 in Rolla, MO. The circus was staged outdoors at the Rolla Fairground in what appeared to be a disused speedway track. The two elephants were housed outside the circuit area, while the other animals (bison, zebra, camels) were housed near their trailers in the centre of the circuit without public access. I was present at the site from 5:45 to 8:00pm. The weather during my visit was overcast but warm, with occasional very light rain.

I observed both elephants from visitor viewing areas, and did not attempt to enter areas marked as inaccessible to the public.

Summary of observations of Betty and Janice, Carden Circus, May 26, 2025

	Betty	Janice
Eyes	Appeared to close them a lot of the time	Red and appeared sore - see comment below
Ears	Nothing significant noted	Nothing significant noted
Skin	Generally acceptable; callouses on bony ridge above eyes	Generally acceptable; callouses on bony ridge above eyes
Trunk	Appeared to be compromised - see comment below	Appeared normal
Mucous membranes	Not seen	Briefly seen; appeared normal

	Betty	Janice
Body condition and weight	Overweight	Lacked muscle tone
Feet and nails	Nail fracture(s) observed on rear foot; basic maintenance seemed to have been attempted - see comment below	Nails overgrown - see comment below
Tail	No significant issues noted	No significant issues noted
Feeding	Not seen; provided with cotton candy in the ring and hay from trailer after performance	Not seen; provided with cotton candy in the ring and hay from trailer after performance
Water	Not seen	Not seen
Behavior and demeanor	Appeared withdrawn and slow - see comment below	Appeared alert
Mobility and gait	Front legs, especially RF appeared to have problems in wrist and/or knee joints. Leg generally held straight and wrist not bent while walking - see comment below	Able to walk at a reasonable pace when asked. Slow shuffling gait during rides.

	Betty	Janice
Public safety	<p>Both elephants were in very close proximity to the visiting public, and separated from them by lightweight metal barriers.</p> <p>When walking to the performance area, the elephants were required to walk through groups of people waiting for the show.</p> <p>Betty's howdah straps did not appear to be properly fastened.</p>	<p>Both elephants were in very close proximity to the visiting public, and separated from them by lightweight metal barriers.</p> <p>When walking to the performance area, the elephants were required to walk through groups of people waiting for the show.</p>
Disease	No obvious signs of infectious disease were observed	No obvious signs of infectious disease were observed, although Janice's eyes require investigation
Housing	Small roofed pen with electric fence. Concrete substrate.	Small roofed pen with electric fence. Concrete substrate.
Performance and public interaction	Climbed onto tub in the circus ring. Carried human performer during show. Carried up to 5 people in howdah during interval rides. Howdah straps appeared to be unfastened, yet very tight around her neck.	Climbed onto tub in the circus ring. Carried human performer during show. Carried up to 5 people in howdah during interval rides.

Eyes

Janice's eyes appeared to be very red and possibly sore. Whether this is the result of allergies, infection, or other cause requires veterinary investigation.

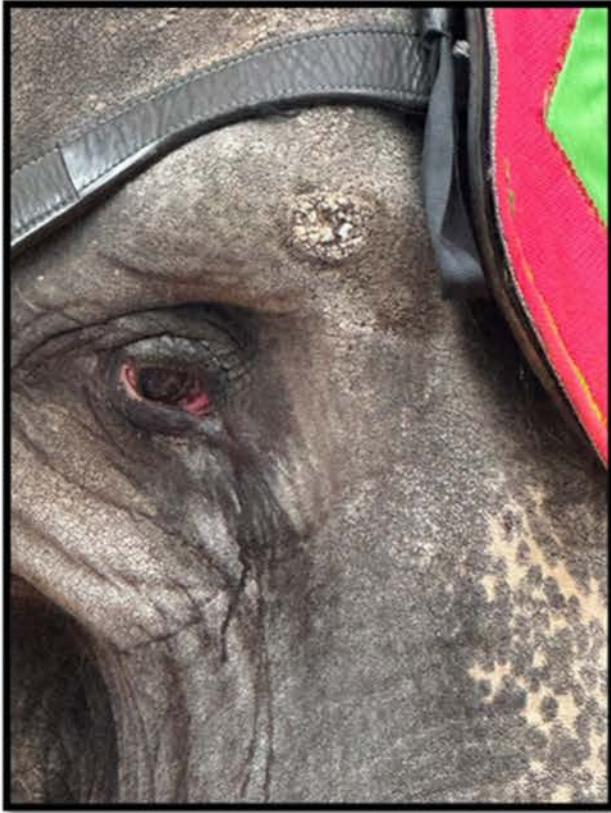


Figure 1: Janice's eye appeared red and weeping



Figure 2: Betty's trunk, showing varying thickness and standard position with trunk tip on the ground

Trunk

Betty appears to have a significant issue with her trunk. It appears that while she can move both the top, proximal portion and the distal portion near the tip, she is unable or unwilling to use the central section between. In fact, the central section of trunk appeared narrower and atrophied compared to the rest of her trunk (see photo). At no point during the performance or rides did I observe Betty lift her trunk from a hanging position, with the sole exception of holding Janice's tail when forced to walk to and from the ring. While standing, her trunk rests on the ground, and it drags while she walks. Unfortunately, I was not able to observe Betty eating hay and therefore I cannot comment on whether she can successfully feed herself in a normal manner. This matter requires more investigation.

Feet and nails

Janice's nails appeared overgrown.

While not substantially overgrown, Betty's feet had at least one, possibly two, nails on the RR (right rear) foot with a substantial crack. While it was not possible to observe the crack up close, this is a cause for concern depending on the crack's depth and the presence of infection in the foot. Cracked nails are often the result of a variety of problems in the elephant's living environment, and cracks can provide a route for acute or chronic infection. Such infections can cause serious and life-threatening problems in captive elephants such as abscesses or osteomyelitis.

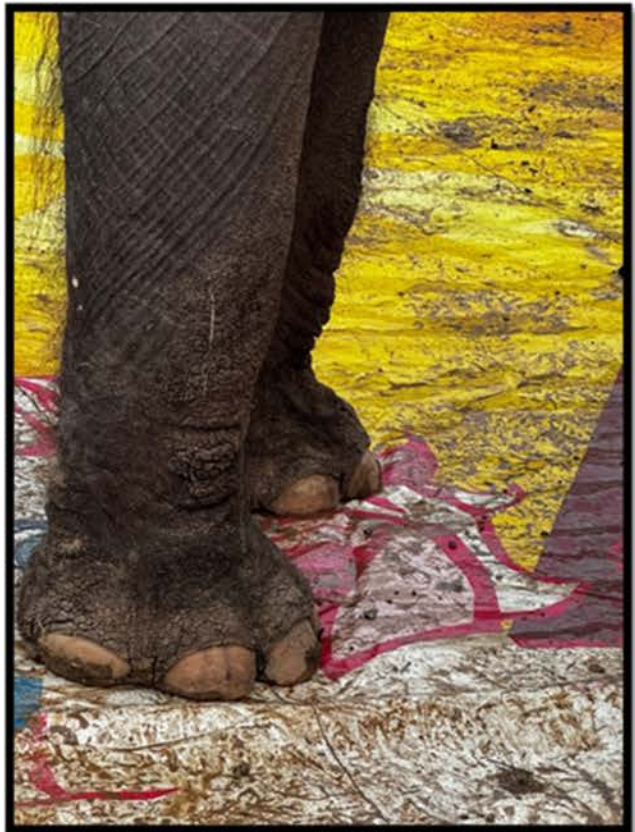


Figure 3: Janice's overgrown nails



Figure 4: Betty's rear foot showing crack in nail (marked by arrow)

Behavior

Betty appeared markedly withdrawn and slow to respond to external stimuli, including the handlers. She is disinterested in her surroundings. Her baseline behavioral state seems to be stationary, trunk on the ground, eyes frequently closed. In my opinion, this is not normal behavior for an elephant with adequate welfare, and I urge further investigation into her physical and psychological state.



Mobility and gait

Betty's front legs were concerning. It was clear to me that she is unwilling or unable to bend her RF wrist, and there may also be involvement of the R elbow joint. In general, the RF leg was held straight and not flexed at the joints when she walked. This was more difficult to observe when she was ordered to walk at speed by the handlers. I would strongly suggest that any subsequent observation by veterinarians or other authorities focus on Betty's gait *ad libitum*, rather than when ordered to move by the handlers.

It is significant that Betty is still required to climb into and down from a traveling trailer, stand in the trailer during long-distance road transport. She also is required to climb onto a tub and lift her limbs during the performance, and use her leg to lift a human performer onto her back. When not performing, she is used to carry several people in a howdah on her back, while walking repeatedly in a small circle; or she is confined to a small electrified pen which was on concrete when I observed her. All of these factors are likely put additional physical stress on already compromised and unhealthy limbs.

Overall Impressions

Betty is overweight, relatively old (at least for a captive elephant) at 55yo, and appears to have problems with at least one leg and her trunk. Considering the forces and stresses involved in road transport, combined with her weight, and coupled with continued demands to perform in the circus ring and to provide rides, I would not be at all surprised if Betty's joints deteriorate further or if she collapses while on the road or during a show.

It is my firm recommendation that both elephants receive prompt expert and independent veterinary assessment and treatment.

Moreover, I am convinced that life on the road, being used for rides and in performances is entirely incompatible with even basic welfare standards for these and other elephants. In this case, I am extremely concerned that both elephants – and especially Betty – face a catastrophic and likely fatal collapse in the near future, should they continue to tour and be used for performance and riding.

Finally, I am convinced that the public safety aspects of continuing to use elephants like Betty and Janice in travelling circuses have been ignored for too long. These are exceptionally dangerous wild animals being used for tricks and rides mere inches from visitors and without adequate barriers. There is a very high risk of escape, human injury and/or death under these conditions; the only question is when.

