

BEASTS' BURDEN - Heartbreaking images show the suffering of wild animals at popular tourist attractions

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These heartbreaking images show tigers, monkeys and elephants chained up and forced to perform at popular tourist resorts. The wild animals are just a few of millions around the world "left in distress" as they're held in captivity for human entertainment.

An orangutan looks extremely weary after it was forced to perform at a boxing show in a bikini

A mother bear and her cub stand on their hind legs within their enclosure, begging tourists for food

An elephant performs in a very small room forcing it to kneel as it plays with hula hoops while tourists take photographs

This tired tiger is used as a photo prop, but hasn't been unchained

Photojournalist Aaron Gekoski captured the images on his trip to Phuket in Thailand, after seeing reports of animal cruelty at several resorts on social media.

In one photo, an orangutan can be seen looking out from the confines of its cage while monkeys dressed in waistcoats cycle on bicycles.

Horrified campaigners believe it was bred in captivity and illegally smuggled into the country to please travellers.

Another picture shows a mother brown bear and her cub standing on their hind legs and begging tourists for food.

And a tiger was captured dragging itself through its enclosure, struggling to hold itself up as its neck was chained to heavy padlocks, to take part in a photo shoot.

The tiger had been beaten before the shoot, in order to obey its carer.

Elephants are often forced to go through a disciplinary process, known as "crush".

This is when carers beat the animals with bull-hooks in a bid to force them to obey.

Campaigners believe that some tourists feel slightly distressed and unnerved as they can sense the animal is in distress, but do not know who to report the cruelty to.

But some travellers appreciated seeing the animals in captivity, as one photo shows tourists taking picture of a caged gorilla at the top of a shopping mall.

Dr. Chris Draper, Head of Animal Welfare & Captivity at Born Free, said: "Captivity can never recreate the complex environment that animals have evolved to encounter in the wild. Many animals suffer in captivity as a result.

"Countless wild animals are kept in captive situations for human entertainment " in circuses and animals shows, as photo props for tourists, for animal encounters, for film and TV, or as pets.

"There are tens of thousands of zoos worldwide, holding millions of wild animals in captivity. All these activities can have serious animal welfare implications and pose real risks to both animal and public health and safety.

"Many people may have seen a captive wild animal in distress."

Mollie King, who works with the Born Free campaign added: "A few years ago I was fortunate enough to be able to join Born Free in rehoming captive bears from Georgia to a Greek sanctuary.

"Seeing how badly the bears had been treated before they were rescued - some of them being forced to "dance" on hot stones for tourists - appalled me, the trip also made me realise there is so much work to do to end these horrific activities."

These pictures come after another photographer captured elephants "scream" in agony after being beaten with five-foot canes by their carers, known as mahouts.

Scot photographer Norman Watson captured the horror Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh, India at the 'elephant safari', which their website claims "has gained immense popularity amongst the animal lovers".

An elephant is stabbed in the trunk with a nail at an Indonesian Safari Park

An elephant performs but tourists cannot see its food is tied to a chain, at Samutprakarn Zoo, Thailand

This hungry tiger cub, was only released from its chains to be fed by tourists

A baby tiger tries to move towards the bars of a cage, clearly in distress

An orangutan lies famished on the floor in its cage at Pata Zoo, Bangkok

A chained macaque rides a bike at a safari park in Thailand, Phuket

An orangutan is forced to pose for a photo, wearing boxing gloves

- The Sun