

Begin the Process of Retiring Elephants in Jaipur, says World Animal Protection on the Occasion of World Elephant Day

Category: Business

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On the occasion of World Elephant Day, World Animal Protection is renewing calls for the retirement of the eighty odd elephants that are still kept in captivity in Amer Fort and Haathi Gaon in Jaipur and Rajasthan. For more than two decades, activists have been campaigning for the retirement of these elephants that are kept in captivity for human entertainment.



Elephant in Haathi Gaon Credit: Shubhobroto Ghosh

The elephants of Amer Fort endure a harsh existence to cater to the needs of both domestic and foreign tourists who consider riding them an act of status and curiosity. This activity fuels the traditional stereotype of India as a land of elephants and snake charmers and exotic wild animals, and adds immensely to animal cruelty and the perpetuation of suffering for the National Heritage Animal of India.

More than a decade ago, there were indications that captive elephant management in India would be appositely dealt with and proper measures would be taken to improve elephant wellbeing in captivity and to curb the illegal trade in live elephants in the region.

Unfortunately, even today, we realize that captive elephants like the ones in Jaipur, are subjected to cruelty and abuse and the whole process is being perpetuated with infusion of new animals that appear to be of wild origin. World Animal Protection has a set of standards for the maintenance of captive elephants in well maintained sanctuaries. Apart from animal husbandry and animal welfare, there are major issues

surrounding the procurement of elephants and their transport within the country.

*"We recognize that continuing the status quo of the captive elephants in Jaipur indefinitely is inimical to animal welfare and conservation," says **Gajender Kumar Sharma, Country Director of World Animal Protection in India.** "If there is an understanding that this flagrant abuse and exploitation of social and sentient animals that are essentially adapted to pristine wild conditions, then there cannot be any delay in initiating the conversation to retire the captive elephants used for riding and entertainment purposes in Amer Fort and Haathi Gaon in Jaipur."*

Several research documents including one by the Animal Welfare Board of India and another by Project Elephant of the Ministry of Environment and Forests show that it is in the best interests of the elephants to have the ride spectacle at Amer Fort in Jaipur phased out in favour of more animal friendly options. With rising awareness among tourists, including overseas tourists to avoid captive wildlife in entertainment venues, it is also a logical conclusion that the phasing out of elephant rides in Jaipur can enhance the international status of Jaipur as a UNESCO World Heritage City.

With animal welfare and wildlife conservation becoming part of standard conversation on environmental issues and beyond, it is well past time that the plight of captive elephants in Jaipur is addressed to take into account the holistic needs of the animals, mahouts as well as the elephant owners. Elephants belong in the wild, where they roam free with their kin. Keep elephants free where they belong, in the wild, this World Elephant Day message ought to resonate in our hearts and minds.

For more information, please contact: Gajender Kumar Sharma, Country Director, World Animal Protection In India

Email: gajenderksharma@worldanimalprotection.org.in

Mobile phone: 9313333283

