

Letter sent by e-mail 1 November 2010 to all Fulton County Commissioners

Dear Commissioner John Eaves, Ph.D., Chairman Fulton County Board of Commissioners,

I am very glad to see that Fulton County is considering a ban of the use of bullhooks on elephants. A ban as proposed would be an important step forward in reducing serious abuse of this iconic, highly social and intelligent animal in Fulton County.

I have studied elephants for more than thirty-five years and, since 1975, have been a member of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project (AERP), the longest study of elephants in the world. I received a Bachelor of Arts with High Honors in the Biological Sciences from Smith College in 1979, and a Ph.D. in elephant behavior from the University of Cambridge in 1982. I carried out postdoctoral research at Princeton University studying the vocal and olfactory communication of elephants in Amboseli National Park in Kenya. For four years I headed the Elephant Program of the Kenya Wildlife Service where I was responsible for the conservation and management of Kenya's entire elephant population. For the last 10 years I have been working globally for the interests of wild and captive elephants for the non-profit organization, [ElephantVoices](#), of which I am co-founder and co-director.

As an expert witness in the case ASPCA vs Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, I had the opportunity to read copious amounts of written material (testimonies, depositions, internal memos and emails, USDA inspections, etc), to view many hours of video tape, and hundreds of photographs related to the treatment of elephants by Ringling Brothers Circus. I wrote a 50-page report for the court and more recently I have written a 30-page report for the USDA covering the use of bullhooks by Ringling Brothers in the training of baby elephants. I would be able to provide these documents should you require them.

Bullhook are not "guides", they are instruments that are used by people to control elephants and to force them to perform in a manner that they are not suited for. The use of bullhooks causes fear, physically harms and harasses elephants, and causes them emotional stress and trauma. The use of bullhooks on elephants is inhumane.

The use of bullhooks physically harms elephants. Ex-Ringling trainer, Samuel Haddock is quoted as saying, "The bullhook is designed for one purpose, and one purpose only, to inflict pain and punishment." The only reason why a bullhook has a steel point and hook is to inflict pain. Elephants in circuses are controlled by poking, jabbing, prodding, pulling and hooking them with the sharp metal point or hook. The point and hook are often used on sensitive areas of the elephant's body. For example, a bullhook may be used behind the ears where the skin is paper thin, around the anus, where the skin is also very thin, and on the feet, trunk and in and around the mouth which are highly enervated.

The use of bullhooks psychologically and emotionally harms elephants. People who use bullhooks often claim that these instruments are only a "guide". Circuses start by training baby elephants to perform by using the point of the bullhook to force the baby into new and difficult postures and then to hold these positions. Thereafter, bullhooks are used to keep elephants under control and to ensure that they will engage in unnatural activities that they would rather not perform (such as standing still in a line; defecating on command; standing on two legs, sitting like a dog, skipping, etc). Instruments such as bullhooks are successful

in “correcting” or “guiding” an elephant only because the animals have learned to be fearful of the consequences of not following instructions. The fearfulness is based on the experience of pain being inflicted. The fear of being jabbed, however lightly, ensures that an elephant obeys commands or follows a guide, if you will.

The use of bullhooks constitutes harassment of elephants. In the wild elephants may occasionally be tusked, poked or jabbed by another elephant, but these interactions are relatively infrequent and are carried out in contexts very different from those observed in circuses. In the wild elephants do not harass or continually pick on another elephant in the manner that can be observed in circuses. If an elephant in the wild is tusked or poked by another elephant she or he receives support from close associates. Elephants in the wild receive physical and vocal solidarity, thus softening any physical and psychological blows received from other elephants. In the circus elephants are not only repetitively prodded and jabbed - they have no recourse, no means of escape and no ability to receive support from companions.

The use of bullhooks on one individual has negative consequences for other elephants. Elephants are keen social learners. In other words, much of elephant behavior is not instinctive but learned from watching or listening to others. Such learning is seen in many aspects of an elephant’s daily life and is a vital component in an elephants development. Elephants, too, are capable of empathizing with others and have even been observed to wince when a companion reaches its trunk out toward an electric wire. Consequently, when an elephant is jabbed or poked with a bullhook this action has negative psychological consequences not only for the individual elephant receiving the prod, but also for those around it. In other words, the routine use of the bullhook causes psychological harm to the elephants whether they are being hit or not.

The use of bullhooks on elephants is inhumane. Elephants are capable of strong and complex emotions including joy, grief, compassion and empathy. Elephants are also capable of suffering from physical and emotional pain. Therefore, to treat elephants in a manner which inflicts both physical suffering and psychological suffering is inhumane.

I urge you to support the proposed ban of the use of bullhooks (ankus) on elephants.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce H. Poole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joyce" being the most prominent part.

Joyce H. Poole, Ph.D.
Co-Director, ElephantVoices

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