

November 5, 2020

Robert Gibbens, DVM
 Director, Animal Welfare Operations
 USDA/APHIS/Animal Care

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]; animalcare@usda.gov

Dear Dr. Gibbens:

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) promptly investigate Bhagavan Antle, dba “Myrtle Beach Safari” (license no. 56-C-0116), for apparent violations of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

On November 4, Antle [posted a video](#) to social media documenting rap artist Lil Pump in direct physical contact with a juvenile tiger at Myrtle Beach Safari. Antle also [posted a video](#) of Lil Pump climbing on Bubbles the elephant’s trunk, during which he loses his balance and falls. (*See* Video 1 and Video 2.) Lil Pump also posted stories of his fall from Bubbles’ trunk (*see* Video 3 and Video 4).

These dangerous stunts put the animals and Lil Pump at risk of serious injury, and are in apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1), which requires that “[d]uring public exhibition, any animal must be handled so there is minimal risk of harm to the animal and to the public, with sufficient distance and/or barriers between the animal and the general viewing public so as to assure the safety of animals and the public.” Lil Pump’s direct contact with the juvenile tiger also appears to violate 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(d)(3), which requires that “dangerous animals such as... tigers... or elephants must be under the direct control and supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced animal handler.”

Antle has repeatedly allowed celebrities to have direct contact with dangerous wild animals, with little to no regard for public safety. PETA has reported Antle for these types of dangerous stunts, including when Antle allowed rap artist Jin Gates to ride in a car with an adult jaguar on his lap (*see* complaint no. AC19-143).

The [USDA considers](#) juvenile (12-16 weeks or older) and adult big cats dangerous and the AWA handling regulations under 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1) prohibit direct public contact with these animals. The tiger in Video 1 is certainly much older than 12 weeks, which is the age at which the USDA generally considers big cats unsuitable for direct public contact.¹

Lil Pump’s stunt with Bubbles was also exceptionally dangerous. Not only is coming into direct physical contact with an elephant’s powerful trunk extremely risky, but Lil Pump’s fall could have spooked Bubbles and led to her stepping on Lil Pump as he landed, or she could have bolted through the crowd and injured any

¹*In Re: Jamie Michelle Palazzo, an individual, d/b/a Great Cat Adventures; and James Lee Riggs, AWA Docket No. 07-0207 Decision and Order (May 10, 2010).*

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number of bystanders. Documented [elephant incidents in North America](#) since 1987 have resulted in 20 human deaths and 140 injuries. The USDA's own [Animal Care Inspection Guide](#) advises inspectors that "elephants have the potential to be dangerous" and "[inspectors] are putting [themselves] at risk when [they] go near an elephant."

According to additional social media posts, Lil Pump and others were also allowed to engage in cub-petting with vulnerable tiger cubs. (See Photos.) In May, the USDA issued a [notice advising](#) that all hands-on encounters with nondomestic cats should be suspended until it can be assured that members of the public do not pose any risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection to big cats. [Another case of an infected tiger emerged out of Tennessee just last week](#), demonstrating that the risk to big-cat health is indeed still a serious concern. PETA has previously reported to the USDA that Antle continued to offer cub-petting despite this advisory (see complaint no. AC20-314). Animals should only be exhibited "under conditions consistent with their good health and well-being," but these encounters are exposing the tigers to potential infection, which is an apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(d)(1).

The individual big cats used for these public encounters should be identified and inspected, including a review of their veterinary records, to ensure that they are receiving adequate veterinary care pursuant to 9 C.F.R. § 2.40. It is imperative to confirm that these animals are not showing any signs of COVID-19 and that there is record of frequent veterinary evaluation for symptoms. Failure to conduct frequent evaluations of susceptible felids exposed to constant human handling would be negligent given these unprecedented circumstances, and the USDA must assess the *adequacy* of the veterinary care provided for these animals.

Please hold Bhagavan Antle and any other responsible parties fully accountable for any and all violations you discover during your investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please inform me of the complaint number that your agency assigns to this correspondence.

Very truly yours,



Debbie Metzler, M.S.

Associate Director of Captive Animal Law Enforcement

cc: Dr. Laurie Gage, Big Cat and Marine Mammal Specialist

([REDACTED])