

The Problem with Orcas in Captivity

Orcas have long been a topic of controversy at Seaworld due to their inhumane treatment and the physical toll taken on their health because of it. Over recent years small changes have been made in favor of animal welfare, however, Seaworld has faced controversy with claims that these decisions are purely profit-driven, and drastic enough changes to animal welfare have not yet been made.

Image credit; *Seaworld to End Theatrical Killer Whale Show*

Orca Behavior in the Wild

Orcas are extremely social, traveling and hunting in pods of up to 40. Females carry babies for 17 months and often nurse for up to 2 years, then waiting between 3 and 10 years to breed again. Orcas are extremely intelligent and communicate using echolocation and sounds that are recognized by other members of the pod. Orcas eat a very diverse diet of different types of fish, squids, penguins and other ocean mammals. This diet is often not well mimicked in captivity, leading to health problems. In addition to a diverse diet, Orcas swim up to 40 miles a day and dive anywhere between 100 and 500 feet a day, several times a day. Orcas in captivity do not have access to enough room to mimic this natural behavior.

Orca Reproduction in Captivity

Capturing Orcas from the wild has been illegal since 1972, resulting in Seaworld breeding animals in captivity. In the

wild female orcas begin reproducing around age 15, however, in captivity females as young as 8 have been reported pregnant. Females typically breed every 3 to 10 years, however, in captivity, they are artificially inseminated to breed constantly. There have also been reported problems of inbreeding between animals.

As of 2016 Seaworld has reported that it will no longer be breeding Orcas, and the current Orcas at Seaworld will be the last ones. Although this can be seen as a large step in the right direction for animal welfare, it should not be overlooked that this decision is likely profit-based. Stocks and profits at Seaworld have plummeted in recent years due to controversy over animal welfare mainly caused by the "Blackfish" documentary. Profits would have continued to plummet if changes were not made, and Seaworld has worked to make as little change as possible while maintaining profits.

We understand some customers are upset and you may feel betrayed, but in a simple way, the data and trends showed it was either a SeaWorld without whales or a world without SeaWorld," he said. "We are an organization that needs to have cash flow to [succeed] and unfortunately, the trends were not in our favor." -Seaworld CEO Joel Manby

SeaWorld Explains Why It Stopped Breeding Orcas

Orca Health in Captivity

In captivity, Orcas are often plagued with numerous health problems. Most commonly, male Orcas develop collapsed dorsal fins, most likely as a result of not being able to mimic their natural swimming patterns while in captivity. Additionally, Orcas develop severe teeth issues due to grinding their teeth against their tanks out of stress and attempts to escape. This causes severe nerve damage and infection that is often

preemptively treated with antibiotics, leading to antibiotic resistance.



The main cause of Orca death in captivity is from Pneumonia and similar infections that cannot be cured with antibiotics due to antibiotic resistance. These health problems are rarely seen in the wild, and almost never seen to this extreme. Until recently it was widely believed that Orcas were only expected to live until age 30, however, their maximum lifespan is actually closer to 60 or 70. At Seaworld, Orcas have an average lifespan of 14.

Seventy orcas have been born in captivity around the world

since 1977 (not counting another 30 that were stillborn or died in utero), according to records in two databases maintained by cetacean experts. Thirty-seven of them, including Kayla, are now dead. Only a handful of wild-caught orcas have lived past age 30. No captive-born orca yet has."

Orcas don't do well in captivity. Here's why.

Although Seaworld has made changes there are still many animal welfare issues that go on behind close doors involving many different animals. Former Seaworld employees reported that all decisions are made by corporate, and are profit-driven. One former employee has reported that when trainers speak out against animal cruelty they are fired. This treatment of animals and lower-level employees is a result of corporate greed with one thing in mind: making as much money as possible.

Sources

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- *VICTORY: SeaWorld Will Never Breed Orcas Again*-The Dodo
- *Orcas in Captivity* –The Dolphin Project