

Letter to ITV re: I'm a Celebrity_Oct 2021

Send to:

Jeanette Moffat
Head of Production
Lifted Entertainment
London ITV Studios UK
2 Waterhouse Square
Holborn, London
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Dear Jeanette Moffat

I am writing to you about the anticipated use of live animals in the upcoming series of 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' being filmed in Wales.

The RSPCA has written in the past, and last year had discussions with the production team, to express our strong concerns about the way in which live animals are used and portrayed in the series. Once again, I would like to urge the programme to stop using live animals during trials in recognition of the significant and ever-growing concern from the public about the welfare of animals, and in light of current discussions - including at a UK Government level - around sentience and the capacity of animals to experience feelings like pain.

In last year's series, whilst legal provisions under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 clearly played a role in how vertebrate animals were treated and campers were briefed before trials, we nevertheless saw animals being treated inappropriately and put in situations likely to cause stress. For example:

- large numbers of naturally solitary corn snakes were seen confined together in a boxes and tunnels, and in one trial they could be seen rearing up and moving back and forth along the enclosure boundary - a behaviour indicative of stress and/or attempts to escape;
- bearded dragons, that require temperatures similar to their native Australia, were exposed to conditions described by campers as "freezing cold" and appeared to get soaked in cold water;
- animals including rats, corn snakes and toads (which need careful handling due to their delicate skin) were confined in barren boxes that campers had to blindly reach into to grab plastic stars;
- pigeons were confined in dark rooms with campers groping around blindly and, in one case, a bird appeared to be grabbed briefly.

When it came to invertebrates, like previous series, these were treated as mere objects used to strike fear into campers and viewers alike. Tens of thousands of these creatures were poured, often from a height, on top of campers, or forced into camper's clothing. Many were visibly crushed under bodies and feet, or violently shaken off, with many more put into situations where they were at risk of being injured or killed, all for the sake of entertainment. Whilst invertebrates are not covered by animal welfare laws, there is growing evidence of the ability of invertebrates to feel pain and the RSPCA believes that these animals should be treated humanely and in a way that minimises the risk of harm.

There also remain questions about how animals were housed and cared for before and after trials, as well as how animals, especially the tens of thousands of invertebrates, were gathered up at the end of trials and what happened to these animals afterwards.

Steps can of course be taken to improve practices, but the context in which animals are used will inevitably lead to welfare problems, especially putting large numbers of live animals in confined spaces with frightened, panicked campers who are under time pressure to complete trials.

Aside from the experience of animals on-set, there is the matter of messaging to the public. Deliberately portraying certain species as nasty and frightening will likely reinforce peoples' fears and phobias about them and could increase the risk of cruelty towards these animals, either intentionally or accidentally. Viewers may become desensitised to the careless treatment of animals they see in the series and be left with the impression that it is acceptable to abuse animals for any reason, and may attempt to copy what they see on screen. Indeed, there have been cases of people trying to re-enact the trials, including a person who was prosecuted for swallowing a live frog and a lizard while making references to the programme. Messaging is especially a concern when it comes to young viewers whose attitudes towards animals are formed at an early age. Portrayal of animals as objects that can be used purely for entertainment, rather than sentient living creatures, is not in line with the RSPCA's values. This is true for invertebrates, as well as legally-protected vertebrates, and we believe all animals should be treated with respect and protected from any potential pain and distress.

The RSPCA will undoubtedly receive complaints when the show is broadcast, and we see that promotional footage has already drawn [criticism from the British Horse Society](#). In spite of our very stretched resources, we will investigate any complaints indicative of a breach of the law and officers may therefore be in touch with production staff on a case-by-case basis.

Indeed, last year the RSPCA saw a groundswell of public opinion in support of the RSPCA concerns, and a high number of people wishing to communicate these concerns to Ofcom - as we launched a public campaign. Ultimately, 11,800 members of the public supported the RSPCA's call by complaining directly to Ofcom to express their concerns and no doubt more people will do so this year.

I urge you to commit to withdrawing your use of live animals in any future series. I would happily discuss how the RSPCA could support such a commitment, which would be in line with the values of the RSPCA and the animal-loving UK public.

Yours sincerely