

SeaWorld, activists clash on social media over orcas' lot

March 31 2015



Killer whale "Tilikum" performs during the "Believe" show at Sea World in Orlando, Florida on March 30, 2011

SeaWorld and animal rights groups clashed on social media Tuesday over the company's treatment of orcas, which star as the main attraction at several marine parks.

The Florida-based company recently put its trainers and veterinarians on social media to respond to questions from the public amid a controversy over the [orcas](#)' lot in captivity.

Instead, it met a storm of hostile questions, such as why "animals starve unless they perform" and why "you intentionally hire trainers with no marine biology experience."

SeaWorld on Tuesday charged that PETA and other animal rights groups had "inundated" Twitter to try to disrupt its "#AskSeaWorld" initiative.

"It's unfortunate that these people would try to drown out thoughtful and honest answers by flooding [social media](#) with repeated questions and troll accounts," SeaWorld said.

PETA insisted that the response had been "spontaneous and massive."

"#AskSeaWorld backfired because people everywhere saw an opportunity to let SeaWorld know exactly what they think of the cruelty of breaking up orca families, forcing orcas to swim in circles in small concrete tanks for years, and drugging them to mask the stress and rage caused by captivity and being kept in unnatural groups or in solitary confinement, among other things," Collen O'Brien, Peta's senior director said.

SeaWorld admitted last year that its income had fallen in part because of campaigns by activists against the use of the killer whales in its shows.

An acclaimed 2013 documentary "Blackfish" also spotlighted the impact of captivity on orcas in examining an attack in which an orca killed a trainer.

The company is building much larger tanks to hold its orcas, to be completed by 2018.

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Citation: SeaWorld, activists clash on social media over orcas' lot (2015, March 31) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-seaworld-activists-clash-social-media.html>

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