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Y9

Cruelty to snakes

Dear listeners, do you care about animals? Many of you will say yes, so let me rephrase that question: What type of animals do you care about? When I say animal cruelty most people will think of the terrible things done to animals like mice, dogs, monkeys and other common examples. Most of the time when animal cruelty is brought up people think of fluffy mammals and ignore the horrific treatment of animals they think of as dangerous, frightening or disgusting. Why does it matter what type of animal is being tortured? Why does it matter if an animal is considered “cute” by society’s standards? They all still feel pain!

A year or two back I decided that I want my future career to be a herpetologist, a scientist who studies reptiles and amphibians, and out of curiosity was researching rattlesnakes and found out about a barbaric event that happens every year in multiple locations across the USA: rattlesnake roundups. Fourteen separate towns capture thousands of rattlesnakes each year and brutally slaughter them, calling it a “tradition”.

First people go out to capture the snakes. They do this by pouring gasoline into the burrows where rattlesnakes hibernate, the smell of which drives them out into the open where they are put into bags or pillowcases that are usually thrown around and treated carelessly. There is no limit on how many rattlesnakes a person can catch and they even make it a competition on who can capture the largest snake.

The rattlesnakes are milked for venom and then thrown into a crowded pit without food or water for days or even weeks until the day of the roundup at which point they are decapitated in front of an audience, both adults and children, locals and tourists for entertainment. The snakes are then skinned, also in front of an audience, and sold for skin and meat. Some snakes are not killed at first and instead have their mouths sewn shut so they can be passed around in the audience and are killed later.

The towns that participate in this have several defences for their actions, all of which can be disproven: They say that the roundups keep rattlesnake populations under control but rattlesnakes have natural predators and since there is no limit to how many snakes can be caught for the roundup this is actually decreasing the rattlesnake population which can have a negative effect on the whole ecosystem. Also the burrows rattlesnakes use are also used by several other species and pouring gasoline in them permanently damages the burrow and area around it.

Another excuse is that rattlesnakes are dangerous to humans and that is true but because of the invention of anti-venom most rattlesnake bites aren’t fatal and even if they were, plenty of animals are dangerous to humans and we don’t decapitate them for it. In addition the venom that is milked from roundups is often not turned into anti-venom because most medical facilities refuse venom from roundups so there isn’t even a benefit for human life.

The only reason why they continue to do this is money, the roundups attract tourists and the products made from snake skin are expensive and roundups are the biggest sources of

rattlesnake skin. Yes, it helps the economy of the towns but money should not be a reason to treat animals so horribly and some towns that used to have roundups now have educational shows where the rattlesnakes aren't harmed in any way and released back into their habitats after it that also attract tourists.

Whatever way you look at it there is nothing good about these events and if it was a cute, fluffy animal they would have been stopped by now but people just don't care about a venomous reptile. This has gone on for decades, it is cruel, it is damaging to the environment and it must be stopped. I don't care how you feel about snakes but if you say you care about animals: mean all animals, if you say you care about animals: don't ignore it, if you say you care about animals: do something!