

HOW BRITISH CHARITY GAVE NEW LIFE TO PORTUGAL'S LAST CIRCUS ELEPHANT

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Read online here:

<https://www.dailymail.com/news/article-15965057/Portugals-circus-elephant-finds-forever-home-sanctuary.html>

A British charity has helped provide a peaceful retirement for Portugal's last circus elephant.

Julie was taken from her mother, who was killed for her ivory tusks, when she was just a calf in the 1980s. She was shipped out of southern Africa and sold in to the circus trade, where she spent 40 years performing for crowds. Julie lived in a barn while working at the family-run Victor Hugo Cardinali Circus – the largest in Portugal.

But now she has been transferred to the 1,000-acre Pangea Elephant Sanctuary – made up of rolling hills, grassland, forest and lakes – two hours east of Lisbon. The reserve is the first of its kind in Europe and was established by British charity Pangea Trust, based in Suffolk.

Portugal banned wild animals in circuses in 2024 and for her final years at Cardinali, Julie was not working but being cared for by the staff. Julie has spent the last fortnight since her arrival at Pangea making the most of her freedom, enjoying mud baths and grazing in her new habitat. And her old family from the zoo has been wishing her well, bringing her baskets of fruit after dropping her off in an animal transport vehicle.

Pangea's Managing Director, Kate Moore, believes Julie's new surroundings could help her to remember her life back in Africa with her family 40 years ago. She said: 'The landscape and climate in the Alentejo region of Portugal is very similar to Africa, and we can't help but wonder what she remembers from her early years before she joined the circus.'

'Elephants are incredibly intelligent, sociable creatures with complex needs and the most extraordinary memories, and within days she was behaving just like a wild elephant – grazing, playing with the trees, wallowing in the mud, and giving herself a dust bath. Hearing her rumble is incredible, but what she needs now is a companion to answer her.'

For many of her circus years Julie lived alongside fellow elephants but was left alone after losing her last companion Samba in 2024. But now she is set to have new ones as she will soon be joined by Kariba, another female African elephant of a similar age. Kariba is also wild-caught and currently lives alone at a zoo in Belgium but will soon make the journey to Pangea, with even more elephants set to follow.



Pangea also helped to rehome Portugal's last circus tiger this March – but there was nowhere in Europe for Julie to go to until the charity's sanctuary, which has capacity for 30 elephants in total, opened this month.

More than 600 elephants live in captivity across Europe, roughly 40 of which still perform in circus-type settings. At circuses and zoos in Germany, Hungary or Dubai, elephants that perform tricks are still in high demand.

The story echoes a Daily Mail campaign from 2011 to rehome Anne, the last circus elephant in Britain, who was rescued from a life of abuse in a Northamptonshire barn. She was moved to Longleat Safari Park in Wiltshire thanks largely to the generosity of Daily Mail readers, who raised more than £400,000 in donations. Donations to Pangea can be made at <https://www.pangeatrust.org/donate/>.