



# FILMING WITH ANIMALS

THE MANUAL





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**Animal Consultants and Trainers Association**

**[www.acta4animals.com](http://www.acta4animals.com)**

# **Filming With Animals The Manual**

ACTA - Animal Consultants and Trainers Association

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## THE MANUAL

**Animal Consultants and Trainers Association**

### Contents

Introducing ACTA	6
ACTA Mission Statement	6
ACTA Aims and Objectives	6
Foreword	9
Pre Production	10
Why you need an ACTA Vet on Set	13
Animal Welfare	14
The Filming Day	16
Animal Check List	20
Insurance and Animals in Films	21
ACTA - A Short History	23
<i>Appendices</i>	
Legislation	25
ACTA Members - contact details	27
Veterinary Members - contact details	31

# **Introducing ACTA**

ACTA is the Animal Consultants and Trainers Association, the UK trade association for professional trainers and suppliers of animals for films, television and the performing arts. This Manual is designed for all who wish to use animals in the media. It sets out the caring, humane and safe way that ACTA members advocate. This approach is the industry standard.

## **ACTA Mission Statement**

ACTA provides professional excellence and the highest standards of welfare in the preparation, training and supervision of animals throughout the media and performing arts.

## **ACTA Aims and Objectives**

ACTA Members:

- a. Will provide a professional and comprehensive service in supplying and training animals for film, television, advertising, theatre, stills photography and natural history programmes.
- b. Are committed to safeguarding at all times the welfare of the animals they provide. Respect for and the wellbeing of those animals will always be of paramount importance.
- c. Will actively promote the policy of specialised veterinary involvement in and supervision of animal welfare within the media industries.
- d. Are committed to all aspects of Health and Safety in the working environment.

The Association maintains the professional integrity of its members.





# Foreword

We live in an increasingly regulated society and yet there is a yawning gap in the regulatory protection provided to trained animals in situations where the public does not have direct access. We all derive great pleasure from the animals around us and this applies no less to the animals which entertain us in the various media. But as that pleasure increases so should our responsibility for the care of those animals.

It is especially gratifying, therefore, to see ACTA taking such positive steps to ensure the health and welfare of animals used for filming. Great thought has been given to the preparation of these guidelines which relate to the training of the animals only by those competent to do so, conditions attached to their performances, supervision by veterinary surgeons with expertise in this specialised area, and advice to clients on all aspects of the use of trained animals.

ACTA are a talented group of individuals with special skills and knowledge. They are to be congratulated for seeking to carry forward an initiative for the care of trained animals. I hope that the requirements outlined in this booklet will soon become a standard for the whole industry and for those who work within it.

It has been a privilege to be associated with the preparation of this manual and I wish ACTA every success for the future.

J S Ware BVM&S MRCVS  
President - Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, 2002/3

# Pre Production



## **Source an animal**

The reputable film directories carry details of ACTA members, who are owners and suppliers of trained animals.

Discuss your requirements and then assess the casting, availability and suitability.

## **Budgeting**

Remember to consider the following:

- Daily rate for the animals.
- Handler (s).
- A back up or stand in animal.
- Transportation of the animal (mileage).
- Travel days (if needed).
- Extra equipment and special requirements.
- Pre-training requirements.

- Overtime.
- Over nights and per-diems.
- Sourcing a Veterinary Surgeon for Animal supervision and Welfare certification.

### **Insurance**

- a. All ACTA members carry public liability insurance.
- b. On set insurance cover of animals is the responsibility of the Production Company.
- c. Insurance companies may request the availability of a back up animal.
- d. Insurance companies often request the supervision of a veterinary surgeon.

### **Licensing**

- a. ACTA members will arrange that all licensing requirements be met.
- b. For current Legislation (see Appendix 1).

### **Health and Safety**

- a. Legislation governing the use of Animals with respect to H&S is contained in Appendix 1 at the end of this manual.
- b. Advice and guidance can be obtained from your ACTA member who will ensure risk factors are fully considered and minimised.
- c. Your ACTA member is able to supply risk assessments.





# Why you need an ACTA Vet on the Set

Changing public attitudes to animal welfare has resulted in considerable restrictions on the use of animals in film work. ACTA Vets lead the industry in providing supervision on set and advice on welfare.

*You should ask yourself:*

## **Is the animal you are using healthy?**

Examination by the ACTA Vet before filming ensures the animals are fit for the purpose. This assessment continues for the duration of the shoot.

## **Is the filming likely to cause injury or distress to the animal?**

The ACTA Vet will have a clear insight into the behaviour of the animals on set. Inappropriate tasks will be noticed before valuable time is wasted attempting the impossible or perhaps injuring the animal or crew.

## **What do you do if an animal becomes injured or sick?**

Only a Veterinary Surgeon is trained and licensed to diagnose and treat animals. Prompt medical action may well be required. All ACTA Vets carry the necessary emergency equipment and drugs to diagnose and treat likely problems on set.

## **Will the audience think the animals were cruelly treated?**

As the Broadcasting Advertising Clearance Centre points out ‘Animal lovers are likely to be concerned if they suspect rightly or wrongly that an animal has been mistreated or caused distress in the course of shooting a TV commercial’.

The ACTA Vet can, without bias and with complete authority, certify that the animal was not harmed during the making of the film. If a problem or dispute arises concerning the welfare of an animal, a Veterinary Surgeon’s opinion is unlikely to be challenged in court.

# Animal Welfare

## In Principle

This is an era when the value of animals to humanity is constantly in the public forum and passions run high. We are particularly aware of the misgivings that some quarters of society have over animals used for human gain - particularly when used in the media. It is therefore essential that the film industry is seen to maintain the highest levels of animal welfare.

To ensure this standard is maintained, appropriate criteria must be observed.

ACTA adheres to the 'Five Provisions' developed by the Secretary of State and adopted as policy by the RSPCA. These are seen to be a further improvement on the 'Five Freedoms', ensuring best welfare practice.

- Provision of food and water
- Provision of a suitable environment
- Provision of animal healthcare
- Provision of protection from fear and distress
- Provision of an opportunity to express most normal behaviours.

These pre-requisites must be continuously monitored, evaluated and maintained to ensure good welfare.

## In Practice

It is of paramount importance that only experienced and responsible handlers are employed. Healthy and fit animals should be trained using only positive reinforcement methods to accustom them to the noise, light and action both on set and on location during filming. *These trainers and handlers who have personally worked with the individual animals, are best suited to understand their needs, being quickest to identify any changes in their behaviour patterns and need to be present at all times with the animal.*



Only a veterinary surgeon is licensed to diagnose and treat an animal and therefore should be employed to ensure the fitness and health of the animal. The veterinary surgeon can objectively and independently assess that nothing is asked of the animal that is contrary to its well being and that no substance is given to affect or alter its normal state of health for the duration of the shoot. The veterinarian should be on hand - able to observe the animal- throughout filming in order to identify any physiological changes. Furthermore, if an accident should occur, the vet can then administer immediate treatment.



## The Filming Day

### Parking

It is essential to provide parking which is appropriate to the size and nature of the vehicles transporting the animal(s) to be filmed. These vehicles can range from saloon/estate cars (in the case of dogs and cats), to four-wheel drive and trailers to horse-box lorries to articulated trucks (in the case of farm livestock, horses and large exotic animals).

The parking area should be located adjacent to the filming environment (either at studio or on location), be safe and secure and under the supervision of the production. In town or city locations, it may be necessary to obtain special permission or dispensation for vehicular parking, particularly in the case of 'outsized' vehicles e.g. four-wheel drives and trailers, horse-box lorries and articulated trucks. In the case of exotic animals scheduled under The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1975, the parking area must be directly adjacent to the filming environment, be totally secure and sealed off from all public areas.

Vehicles carrying animals should have the same parking priority as essential technical production vehicles.

The reasoning for this is as follows:

- It saves precious time and allows animals easy access to rest periods
- Health & Safety, particularly in the case of wild animals.

### **Dressing Rooms / Resting Areas**

Dressing rooms or resting areas accommodating animals, waiting to be filmed, should be as closely positioned to the set as is practicable. An ambient temperature suitable to the animals' needs and welfare should be maintained in these areas at all times. Fresh drinking water should be available either in or adjacent to the dressing room / resting area at all times.

The reasoning for this is as follows:

- Adequate rest and feeding periods are essential to maintain an animal's welfare and will facilitate the most effective use on set for film action. The animal trainer and/or vet - having the best insight and experience - may ask for the animal(s) to be rested.

### **Security and Safety**

- Production Health & Safety and Animal Welfare considerations are of the highest priority when animals are to be filmed either in studio or on location.
- Production personnel must be familiar with the latest regulations; details can be obtained from an ACTA member.

### **Animals Standing By / Calltime**

While it is appreciated that filming as a process (either live-action or stills) can be complex and technically challenging, it is essential that every effort be made to minimise the waiting times for animals standing by to go on set. It is advisable to have a stand-in animal or, often more effective, a dummy, to enable camera and lighting set up.

## **Crews**

Whilst many crew members have worked with animals on set previously, and understand their needs, it is always advisable that Production reiterate the necessity for due care and consideration of the particular animal(s)' needs. Sudden loud noises or blazing lights - unless anticipated - can be very distressing for an animal. Such shocks can ruin a particular shot and might even make the remainder of the shoot less productive.

Patience is an essential quality when filming with animals.

## **Lighting, Sound, Staging and Set Design**

Lighting, sound, staging and set design all impact on the behaviour and performance of an animal while filming. Every effort should be made to establish clear and constructive communication between the animal trainer and the various departments involved in the filming process.

## **Stand-Ins / Cardboard or Polystyrene Cutouts**

Cardboard or polystyrene cutouts in the shape and approximate colouring of the animal(s) are an ideal way of preparing a lighting setup or blocking out a scene in preparation for filming, without requiring the animal(s) to stand in, unless there is a particular and important reason for them to do so. Such a practice allows the animal to come fresh and enthusiastic to a scene.

## **Liaison Between Animal Trainer/Coordinator and Assistant Director**

It is essential that a clear, satisfactory and constructive system of communication is established between the Animal Trainer/Coordinator and the relevant Assistant Director(s) so as to ensure that the 1st Assistant Director and therefore the Director are fully aware of the safe and secure parameters under which the animal must be filmed.

## **Liaison Between Animal Trainer/Coordinator and Production Nurse**

It is important that the Production Nurse in attendance be made aware of the animals which may be interacting with the cast and crew during filming.

## **LMGIs (Last Minute Good Ideas)**

It has been identified within film production that the single most dangerous practice, leading to many serious accidents, is that of proceeding with unrehearsed and untested action by way of a 'last minute good idea'. In the interests of Health and Safety, the LMGI should be avoided at all costs.



# Animal Check List

- Source .....
- Animal .....
- Back up animal .....
- Budget .....
- Pre-Production .....
- Casting .....
- Travel/Mileage .....
- Shoot .....
- Overtime .....
- Additional expenses .....
- Licences .....
- Insurance .....
- Handler's details .....
- Transportation .....
- Licensing .....
- Health & Safety .....
- Risk Assessment .....
- Veterinary Surgeon .....
- Health Certificate .....



## **Insurance and Animals in Films**

Animals have always had a key role in film production from documentaries through to television commercials and feature films and many become stars in their own right.

From an insurance point of view there are three main areas that are crucial and these are detailed below. Although they are numbered 1-3, each point is as important as the other.

### **1) Insurance of the Animal for All Risks of Mortality (Death) and Veterinary Fees.**

For this cover insurers need to know

- a. the breed, age and value of the animal.
- b. how long the animal will be used for.
- c. how it is getting to the location.
- d. how it is being used on location. A copy of the script is essential together with any subsequent changes that are made to it.

### **2) Non Appearance of the Animal**

If the animal doesn't appear on location or becomes ill or injured during the production the cost to the production can be enormous.

### **3) Public Liability Insurance**

This covers injury to third parties e.g. production crew, artistes, or members or the public caused by the animal(s). Insurers more and more insist that the supplier of the animals have Public Liability Insurance in their own right and do not rely on piggy backing (no pun intended) the Production Company's Insurance. It is unsafe to rely on the Production Company's Insurance as the animal supplier may not necessarily have been added to Insurance as an Additional Insured and may leave themselves open to bankruptcy if sued.

I welcome your focus of attention in this sector as the forgoing highlights, from a Production and Insurance point of view, how important it is that the animals are sourced from professionally run companies. They have years of experience in dealing with their precious charges. Very importantly, they are aware of the specialised and exceptional conditions that apply on a film set and so ensure, with their experience and foresight, the safety and well being of their animals and a successful completion of the film production.

Tony O'Neill  
O'Neill & Bramwell Plc





## **ACTA - A Short History**

*'Clearly no group can, as an entity, create ideas. Only individuals can do this. A group of individuals may, however, stimulate one another in the creation of ideas.'*

Estill I. Green

The Animal Consultants and Trainers Association was the eventual result of a meeting of a group of dedicated businesses, which supplied animals to the film, TV, commercial and still photography industries. Their aim was to standardise minimum fees and to ensure professionalism as the industry had suffered from many 'cowboy' businesses under-cutting the competition and producing an unacceptable standard of work. Therefore a trade association such as this would set standards to promote a more proficient approach to work, better animal welfare and better communication between animal suppliers.

The initial meeting held for this association took place in the BAFTA meeting rooms in London's West End in 1989. A member from virtually every legitimate film animal company was present. It was originally suggested that those present should join one of the many film-associated unions. However, this was soon dismissed in favour of a specialist independent body, when it was pointed out that everyone present were already

directors of their own individual companies and none of these unions were really applicable to the film-animal business. The meeting progressed, ideas were put forward and the organisation was given a title: the Animal Consultants and Trainers Association or, as it is virtually always referred to, ACTA.

The group continually met every fortnight, and sometimes every week, in order to get it up and running. This went on for almost two years and, had it had not been for the hard work and persistence of a determined few, the association might have never blossomed into the respectable alliance it is today. Over this period a criteria was laid out. The association established rules, a code of conduct and regulations for its members to adhere to, and an official ACTA contract was agreed upon. Eventually a committee was elected and the first official chairman took the seat.

Over the years the association has matured and developed into a more efficient and better-recognised body. The original committee format was eventually replaced with one involving all members actively participating in all meetings. This proved to be a popular decision and increased attendance levels. Membership increases on an annual basis, although standards for joining are always stringently stuck by.

Another important aspect of ACTA was Animal Welfare. This had always been a big issue with ACTA and from its earliest days formed a major part of its agenda. Members of the association had worked with a growing number of veterinary surgeons interested in the use of animals in the film media. The group voted on those they deemed best suited for the work to be associate members. As these vets became more actively involved, helping to progress ACTA in many ways, they became accepted as full members. Having them present at meetings has helped bring qualified advice, new ideas and perspectives to the association.

ACTA are now the proverbial 'rubber stamp' on guaranteed professionalism when working with animals in the world of media. Their membership represents this industry's elite and now many TV companies will only accept ACTA members.

# Appendices

## Legislation

Performing Animals (Regulation) Act, 1925

Dangerous wild animal act 1976 (DWA)

Dangerous dogs act 1991

Countryside and wild life act

Protection of animals act 1911

Veterinary surgeons act 1966

Health and safety at work act 1994

Information on these legislations can be obtained from

The Stationery Office

[www.hmso.gov.uk](http://www.hmso.gov.uk)





## **ACTA Members contact details**

1st Choice Animals

Contact = Jill Clark

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A-Z Animals Limited

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## **Veterinary Members Details**

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# *“Delivering the art of animal training to camera”*

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**Contents** include: ACTA Mission Statement; ACTA Aims and Objectives; Foreword by Stephen Ware, President RCVS; Pre Production; Why you need an ACTA Vet on set; Animal Welfare; The Filming Day; Animal Check List; Insurance and Animals in Films; ACTA - A Short History; *Appendices* Legislation; ACTA Members - contact details; Veterinary Members - contact details.

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