

Biker Gangs Turned Whale Activists Ride to Save Orcas

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Environment

Orca shows remain popular attractions at aquariums across the world, and it's not uncommon for activist organizations to voice their objections to the violent capture and poor treatment of these animals. Captive killer whales may have been forcibly removed from their natural habitats and are then confined to relatively small tanks and forced to perform tricks to the possible detriment of their health. Recently, a surprising group has organized to raise awareness about the conditions and circumstances under which these orcas have come to entertain people. They call themselves "Bikers 4 Orcas."

The bikers in question aren't the typical liberal-leaning cyclists, but motorcycle enthusiasts, who cruise highways in packs for the joy of riding and the experience of freedom. Bikers 4 Orcas founding member Vincent Lensen found the same spirit in Morgan, a captive orca he saw on an aquarium trip with his kids. He said, "Something in her look broke my heart," and added, "She looked sad, and I felt really bad for her."

His encounter with Morgan motivated Lensen to do some reading about killer whales, which led him to "many stories about them being in poor conditions, and used for entertainment in marine parks." He explains his inspiration to start Bikers 4 Orcas like this: "I wanted to do something, something new, something that may help to get these animals out of those parks. For a long time I kept wondering and asking myself, 'What can I do?' Well, I could ride a motorbike! That is basically how it all started."

Lensen wanted to leverage the attention that bikers naturally attract to raise awareness about these captive killer whales, and feels that the rumbling of engines before a ride is a great springboard to grab people's notice and talk about the subject of captivity. Now 36, Lensen was once mesmerized as a child by an orca named Gudrun in his native Holland, and now cites this experience as the beginning of his whale activism. Bikers 4 Orcas have quickly garnered over 2,900 "likes" on their Facebook page and have planned their first meeting for September 21 in Switzerland. They're focused not only on freeing Morgan but also others like Lolita, a killer whale taken from the wild who has been living in a Miami aquarium for

the last 42 years.