



Laws to stop tigers, camels, zebras and snakes being used as performing animals in circuses in England have been announced by the British government.

Environment Minister Jim Paice told MPs he hoped the laws would be brought in before the end of the parliament in 2015.

Currently between 35 and 50 wild animals are thought to be used by circuses in England, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs offered to help find new homes for the retired performers.

"There is no place in today's society for wild animals being used for our entertainment in travelling circuses," said Animal Welfare Minister Lord Taylor.

The announcement follows a campaign by animal charities for the ban, which came to a head when video evidence emerged last year of a circus elephant being beaten by her trainers. Campaigners were angry when Mr Paice previously announced a tougher licensing scheme instead, arguing that the government could not ban the practice because of European regulations and an outstanding legal challenge to a similar law in Austria.

Circus Mondao, whose website shows zebra and camels, said it would probably challenge the proposed ban. The circus is a member of the European Circus Association, which previously challenged Austria's ban, saying there was no scientific evidence the animals were harmed or distressed by the travelling or conditions.

On its website, Mondao says that when it travels, animals are the last to be loaded and the first to be unloaded. The circus says it employs seven government-registered animal handlers.

Animal charities welcomed the move, but called for ministers to speed up the laws.