

NATURE



A STORY OF LIFE, OF BIRTH AND GROWTH



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MARA: REBIRTH

A film by **Dereck and Beverly Joubert**
Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Ivo Filatsch**
2 x 50 min., 4K, 5.1



The Mara is probably the most diverse and important savanna ecosystem on the planet. What makes it special is not just that it is the northern limit of the Serengeti, but that it is the meeting place of migrations from the south and the north-east. It is the place that the migrations stay longest and feed into the richness of this place. Great. But this is not a migration film. It is a kind of antithesis of a migration film. It answers the question about what happens when the famous wildebeest migration departs.

Part 1 of our series starts with the dust of the disappearing migration as it heads off across the river and leaves. Behind them hundreds if not thousands of other animals cannot move, or won't move because they are locked into territories, invisible barriers that say to them, 'leave your bubble at your peril'. This is their story. It is the story about what happens between September and the following July. Nine months of wildebeest-free Mara.

Wet gazelle babies lie in the grass almost impossible to see, with a special adaptation; they are born with no scent. Predators walk by most of them, and their defence is to stay still, not run. We talk about the science of the newborn. What they need to know, how long they are vulnerable, why they are born with large eyes ('cute' seems to be universal!) and the function of play, of bonding and of grooming virtually across the species range. All of this happens after the madding crowds have departed here.

One of our key characters which fits the frame well as a youngster (less so later on) is a giraffe taking its first wobbly steps into life. From the less than lofty position he looks around at his world, born in the wake of the wildebeest. We use him as our 'guide' to the other more mundane (in his opinion) creatures. Why should we care about the noisy rabble of wildebeest? Well, because when lions can't find wildebeest, they have three choices, follow the herds,

starve to death or find something else to eat. Lions, it seems, are reluctant to starve to death! They look to the young prey left behind.

Zebra foals, those wild, striped rocking horses that no one can avoid loving, have parents with strong instincts, one is to rid the plains of other babies, like Thompson Gazelles that may attract hyenas and then threaten the striped foals. One mother, a dun Eland having just given birth to a calf has her own issues with a clan of hyenas. It isn't their fault she gave birth near their own den of young, and they too need to feed their babies, nor that they are born fairly cute but grow out of that quickly! The Eland has a tactic though. She is strong, fast and flings her curled horns around like sabres, too much for the clan.

Leopard cubs, jackal pups, elephant calves who spin and dance and nobly tilt at windmills (well, small trees) all give the story a latent sense of joy and fun, a celebration of nature that is not clichéd or reliant here on a migration and the usual crocodilian frenzy.

Ours is a story of life, not death. It is about birth and growth, of the richness of a landscape that takes your breath away each dawn and gives it back again in meditation each evening.

Our film is a lyrical but factual look into what happens most of the year in the Mara and is a journey.

Part 1 ends with the respite, for everyone. The northern migration of zebras arrives. The plains are full of stripes, the rivers alive with the thundering hooves, and the predators focused on one thing now, the next best thing to wildebeest. But the storm clouds turn them away all too soon, and rains that lash the plains turn the Mara into a swampy desert for predators, one that looks green and lush but where food for big cats is lean.

Part 2 sets the scene, now, the zebras wander off, a striped echo of part 1. If the first episode is dusted in browns and yellows, this is green as the landscape changes and the rain turn again, rising rivers, making it difficult for everyone again, flooding, rushing waters in a raging torrent. Paradise it may be, but it is a harsh paradise. As the rains clear, we catch up with another character introduced in the first episode, our serval mother that had her den flooded but she reveals that she has survived. And so has her cub. A miracle under these circumstances.

The lion prides are at war, not because of territory but because of prey. They are used to rolling out of bed at dusk and picking off either a wildebeest or a zebra, but both have now gone. They have a choice, go big or go small. Some try to hunt warthogs, another species that cannot migrate. It's hard work. Others finally take on the fierce Mara buffalo herds, who, unlike other buffalo herds are very aggressive and chase lions even as they rest in the shade. They seem fearless, but when the lions finally have to risk everything, it's a battle.

The giraffe survives, the serval survives, the leopard and cub survive, all because they can adapt. The science behind savanna eco-systems is simple, change is the only and most vital constant. Day to night, hot to cold, dry to wet and most importantly here, from an army of 1.5 million wildebeest to not one.



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Our series ends with the unmistakable calls in the distance as the first of the herds spearhead their way to the Sand River and across into Kenya that unofficial distinction between the Serengeti and the Maasai Mara. It is the final scene. Today, there is a more insidious battle going on, as Tanzania tries to keep the wildebeest and Kenya tries to lure them to the Mara with massive fires, and as thousands of tourists crowd the riverbanks to view the greatest show on earth.

Both threaten the wildebeest, both create more damage than poaching, both could lead to a time when the wildebeest stop visiting the Mara and all these other animals are left without that flood of food, without the fertilization, without the change, that ebb and flow they need.

We hope you can join us.

A Wildlife Films/Terra Mater Studios production in co-production with The WNET Group in association with PBS and CPB



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