

NATURE



FIERY FORCES AND WILD WONDERS



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RIFT VALLEY IN THE LINE OF FIRE

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2 x 50 min., 4K, 5.1



The Story:

The Earth's powerful tectonic and volcanic forces have not only moved and shaped the continents and oceans, but also created stunning landscapes that are among the greatest natural wonders of our planet today. The African Rift Valley in East Africa is perhaps the most impressive and diverse. Here, over the course of 25 million years, a long list of iconic natural wonders have formed – like the Luangwa Valley in Zambia; Lake Tanganyika; the Serengeti in Tanzania; the soda lakes of Kenya with their millions of flamingos; the Virunga Mountains in Rwanda and the Congo, home to mountain gorillas; the Bale Mountains, where the legendary Ethiopian wolves roam, and the Red Sea, a coral paradise.

The Film:

The African Rift Valley lies at the fracture zone of two continental plates that continue to move apart. It stretches over 6,500 kilometres from Mozambique in the south to the Jordan Valley in the north. Our documentary travels along the Rift Valley's geological fault lines to tell the most beautiful, and unusual stories of nature that unfold in this wilderness.

Part 1: **Rhinos, Chimpanzees, and Flamingos**

The Luangwa River flows through wide valleys framed by rolling hills and tall cliffs. Here we are at the most southerly point of the Great Rift that extends along the Luangwa and Zambezi rivers to Mozambique. The Luangwa River is one of Africa's last great wildlife reserves. Because the flanks of the Rift Valley are impassable and steep, few visitors come to the northern section of the national park. Large herds of buffalos and hippos and a special treasure – the critically endangered black rhino – live here. The exact number is kept secret, but the population is growing thanks to extensive conservation efforts.

In the heart of the Rift Valley lies a giant crack. Without water, it would be the largest canyon on Earth. But today the gorge is flooded. It is Lake Tanganyika, one of the deepest lakes in the world at a depth of 1,500 metres. Tanganyika combines two equally magical realms – on land where chimpanzees, elephants, and antelopes roam, and in its fascinating underwater world. Here, over fifteen million years of evolution has resulted in exceptional diversity and adaptations. There are sponges, snails, crabs and more than two hundred species of cichlids found only in Lake Tanganyika.

Even the world's most famous wilderness, the Serengeti, has been shaped by volcanic processes. Twenty million years ago countless volcanoes spewed fire here. Their ash still nurtures the grass of today's legendary savanna. The millions of wildebeest, zebras, and antelopes that have followed the rain to the fresh grasses of the savanna for generations, all rely on the ancient volcanic eruptions that originated from the Earth's molten interior.

These subterranean forces can still be observed in Kenya's soda lakes, where millions of flamingos search for food in the vapours that rise from hot springs. They filter blue-green algae from the water. These tiny plants have adapted to the hot, salty soup.

Part 2: **From the Fire Mountains to the Jordan Valley**

The Rift Valley is a gigantic tear, a wound. Here, two continental plates, the African and the Somali, are breaking apart driven by powerful forces within the Earth. Nowhere are these forces more palpable than in the Virunga Mountains, located in Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Nyiragongo Volcano in the eastern Congo still spews fire. In its crater a lake of thin lava bubbles

occasionally boils over breaking through the crater rim, bringing fear, and sometimes death and destruction to the surrounding land which is densely populated by humans.

The forests at the volcanic cones of the Virunga Mountains are home to mountain gorillas. These peaceful giants were saved from extinction at the last moment. In the early 1990s, fewer than a hundred gorillas remained, today around a thousand live in the rainforests of the national parks.

The Nile, the longest river on Earth, originates in the Virunga Mountains. Its gentle sources lie in Burundi and Rwanda, but the Nile is at its most dramatic where it leaves Lake Victoria in Murchison Falls National Park. These falls are spectacular. Below them, it is said, live the largest Nile crocodiles in Africa. Herds of giraffes and elephants also bask along the banks of this section of the Nile.

North of Lake Malawi the Rift Valley splits into two fault lines. The Virunga Mountains and the upper Nile lie in the western Rift Valley, the Serengeti in the middle, and Kenya's Natron lakes in the east. The western arm is dwindling, but the eastern one runs as a trench across Ethiopia. Here, subterranean forces have created magnificent landscapes like the Simien Mountains where gelada baboons live, and the Bale Mountains, home to the Ethiopian wolf.

The Ethiopian wolf has other names – Abyssinian fox and Ethiopian jackal – but one thing is certain, it is the rarest canine in the world. This shy hunter lives in a rugged wilderness in the high alpine zone above 3,000 metres.

In the northeast of the Rift Valley lies another canyon, 2,000 metres deep and filled with saltwater – the Red



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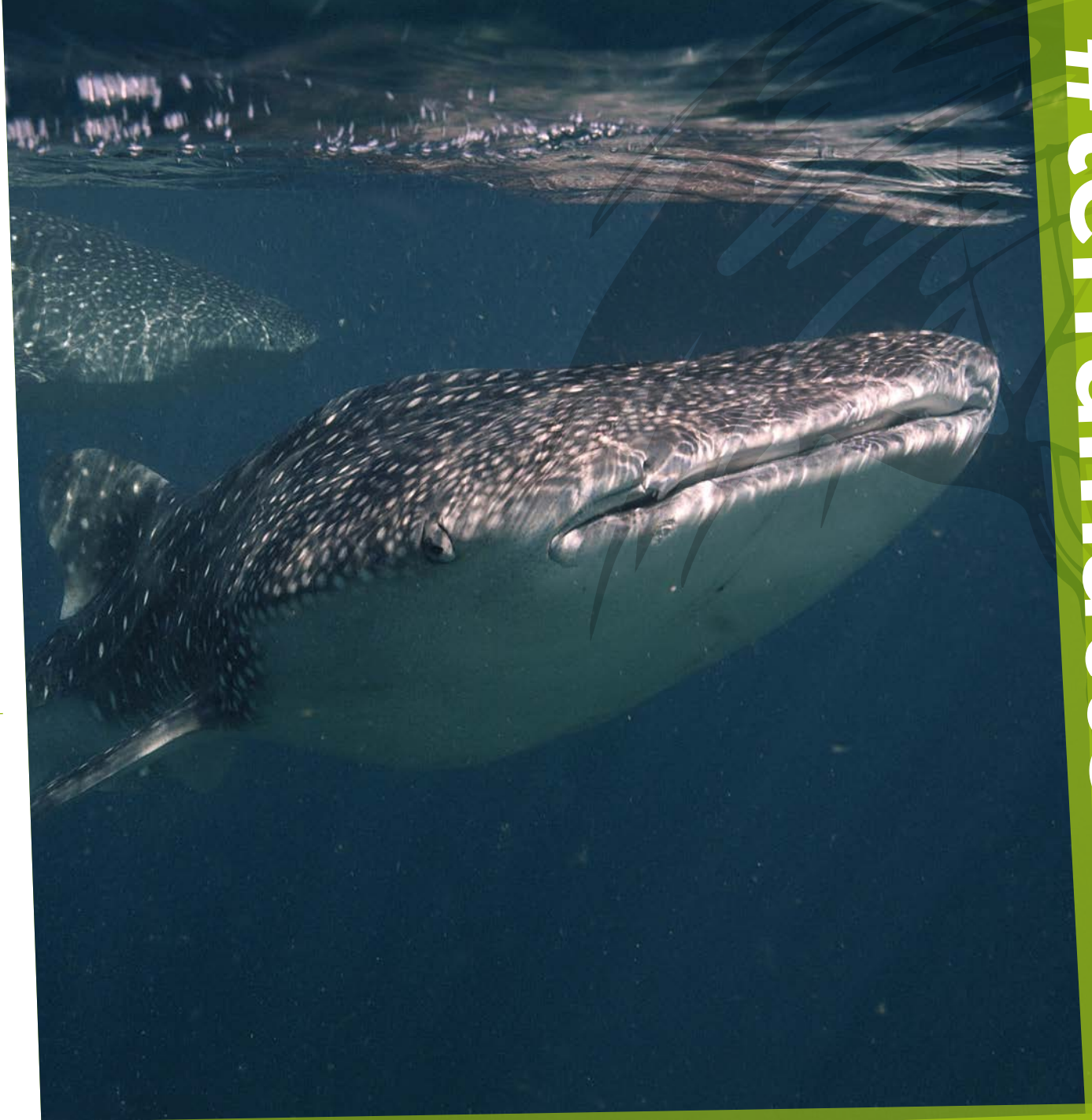
Environment matters

Sea. The Red Sea's reef ecosystem is one of the longest continuous living reefs in the world. It extends along the coastline from Djibouti past Somalia and Egypt, then ending at Saudi Arabia. Here, iconic marine creatures that also live in the Indian Ocean can be found. There are dolphins, whale sharks and manta rays along with endemic species such as the orange-red-yellow pygmy lip fish and the Picasso triggerfish.

The reefs are remarkable for their biodiversity, but also their resilience in the face of climate change. That's because the corals of the Red Sea have robust genes able to withstand rising water temperatures without bleaching.

To the northeast of the Red Sea the Rift Valley fades to become a fine crack in the Earth's crust. It is the last sigh of the volatile, continent building processes, the shifting plates and fiery volcanoes, ignited from deep inside the Earth. Here, the 6,500-kilometre trough reaches its final destination, the world-famous Jordan Valley.

A Terra Mater Studios / Cosmos Factory production



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