



4K

SNOW LEOPARDS AND FRIENDS

1 x 50 min.

Produced by Xi Zhinong and Mark Fletcher

4K, 5.1 and Stereo

Photography by Zi Ding, Qu Peng, Da Jie and Xi Zhinong

Executive producers: Andrea Gastgeb, Sabine Holzer



TERRA MATER
Factual Studios

It's midwinter in the mountains of the Qinghai Tibetan Plateau, four kilometres up, and airless. This is the home of the rare snow leopard, the spirit of the Himalayas. Isolated yak herders have battled snow leopards, bears and wolves for generations; these are old animosities. In 2006, the area became a reserve, and a gun ban was strictly enforced. The herders have no way to protect their yak, and start losing 10% of their calves each year. What to do?

Three young herders try and supplement their income by scraping together some money from odd jobs, and borrow some cameras. They know the animals better than anyone, they grew up with them. Snow leopards are woven into their childhood dreams. Their names are Zi Ding, Qu Peng and Da Jie. They are joined by professional wildlife cameraman Xi Zhihong; together, they will work for over five years to capture amazing behaviour.

A pack of five Tibetan wolves moves around the area. For the first time they attack the yak herd in daylight, and the herders manage to film the spectacular hunt as the yak mothers bravely defend the calves by charging at the wolves.

One of the herders carefully follows the female snow leopard to her den. Inside, two new-born cubs, born blind, with startlingly blue eyes await. Snow Leopard cubs filmed in the den are a first! The cubs' early days are filled with calm: they suckle

and sleep, and seem tiny in comparison to their mother. Over the summer, they grow. When they are old enough to be left alone for much of the day, they have surprising babysitters: Bharal sheep, a favourite snow leopard prey! The den is near a salt lick, and the sheep keep guard for predators, inadvertently protecting the cubs.

Dangers pass near the den. A bear is grazing in the meadow below, and a big male snow leopard, maybe the father, passes right by the entrance. He's attracted by a magpie who has found the den. Magpies are scavengers, so no threat to the cubs, but the male could be dangerous, if he doesn't recognise the cubs as his. The magpie signals that there's no food in the den, and the cubs, covering at the back, are left unharmed.

One day the team arrive to find the den deserted. Were the cubs killed at night? Has the mother led them away? The chances are that the herders will never know. The majority of cubs die in their first year — but a surprise awaits.

Spectacular wildlife and a stunning backdrop are the setting for a moving true story about the power of nature, of motherhood, and the fragility of life.

