



## VETERAN NATURE FILM PRODUCER EXPOSES DARK SIDE OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING

*New book is first insider account, calls for changes to questionable practices*

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 5, 2010)—Discovery programs *River Monsters*, *Deadliest Catch*, and the new series *Life*. The BBC's blockbuster *Planet Earth*. Box office hits *Winged Migration* and *March of the Penguins*. The nature film genre has become an entertainment juggernaut, bringing astounding high-tech action sequences and intimate glimpses of animals' lives to viewers hungry for a secondhand experience of the wild.

But this success has dark side, says Chris Palmer, veteran wildlife filmmaker and director of American University's Center for Environmental Filmmaking. A dark side driven by money, sensationalism, extreme-risk taking, misrepresentation, and even the abuse and harassment of animal subjects.

Now Palmer draws back the curtain on what wildlife filmmakers have kept from audiences for decades in his new book ***Shooting in the Wild: An Insider's Account of Making Movies in the Animal Kingdom***.

Renowned primatologist Jane Goodall, who contributes a foreword based on her own experience with such films, calls it “a very important and much-needed book . . . Palmer is to be highly commended for tackling such a difficult subject and sharing his findings in such an honest and engaging way.”

Published by Sierra Club Books on May 15, the book is the first by an industry insider to blow the whistle on what often goes on behind the scenes in wildlife filmmaking and television—illustrating why conservation is all too often not the first priority and how these productions distort our views and treatment of wild animals.

“These films excite audiences and allow them a connection to nature—something increasingly missing in modern life—from the safety and comfort of their living rooms,” notes Palmer, who regrets that in the past, he employed some of the practices exposed in the book. “It’s no wonder these productions net high ratings and impressive network profits.”

### Pressure to Get “The Money Shot”

In the rush for ratings, some filmmakers will do almost anything to get the “money shot”—staging or digitally altering scenes to deceive viewers, sensationalizing animal behavior to produce “nature porn” or “fang TV”; and frequently getting too close to dangerous creatures, sometimes resulting

in death as with “Crocodile Hunter” Steve Irwin (killed by a stingray) and Timothy Treadwell, who fell prey to the Alaskan grizzlies he lived among and filmed.

“Audiences see personalities on shows interacting with wild animals as if they were not dangerous or, at the other extreme, provoking them to give viewers an adrenaline rush,” Palmer says. “Mostly, the animals just want to be left alone, so it’s not surprising that these entertainers are seriously hurt or even killed on rare occasions. On one level, it’s that very possibility the shows are selling.”

Palmer contends that a misdirected urge to bond with wild creatures is behind the lucrative trade in captive dolphins and orcas used in shows and resorts, setting up tragedies like the February 24 death of SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau. Following the incident, Palmer appealed for an end to marine mammal shows, voicing his concerns on CNN.com and in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

“People forget that these animals are not tame, even though they interact closely with humans on a daily basis at parks like SeaWorld or the zoo,” Palmer says.

### **Eight Steps to Reform**

At their best, Palmer says, wildlife films can still be a powerful tool for conservation, as they can enlighten audiences while entertaining them. He outlines eight steps to reform the craft he loves and profiles the people behind the camera who are “doing it right.” Palmer shares their enthralling stories—everything from being overrun by a caribou migration to dangling from cliffs to film condors to a near miss with a lightning strike deep in the Everglades.

He also shares his experiences working with celebrities brought in to host or narrate films, recounting a stirring episode in Africa where a film crew including presenter Alicia Silverstone revived a tranquilized elephant, and a thrill-packed visit to Ted Turner’s buffalo ranch. The book’s 16 pages of color photos show filmmakers in action.

### **Praise from Wildlife Advocates, Experts**

*Shooting in the Wild* has garnered advance praise from a wide array of wildlife experts, advocates, and film authorities.

“His book is a major contribution to our understanding of the role mass media plays in protecting our planet,” says actor and conservation advocate Ted Danson.

Jean-Michel Cousteau says, “It is a must-read for anyone in the audience.” Wildlife television host Jack Hanna states, “Readers will experience the myriad trials and tribulations faced by wildlife filmmakers,” and famed paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey declares, “This book will change the way we look at nature films.”

Palmer is a veteran leader in nature and wildlife films, having developed film programs at Audubon and National Wildlife Federation. He founded and oversees the Center for Environmental Filmmaking at American University’s School of Communication and is a top executive with MacGillivray Freeman Films, the world’s largest producer of giant-screen IMAX films.

During his filmmaking career, Palmer has swum with whales and dolphins, confronted sharks, come face to face with Kodiak bears, camped with wolf packs, and waded hip-deep through an Everglades swamp. His films have been broadcast on the Disney Channel, PBS, TBS Superstation, Animal Planet, Home and Garden Television, the Travel Channel, the Outdoor Life Network, and

in IMAX theatres. His IMAX films include *Whales, Wolves, Dolphins, Bears, India: Kingdom of the Tiger*, and *Coral Reef Adventure*.

Last year, Palmer was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Media at the International Wildlife Film Festival. He recently received the Environmental Film Educator of the Decade Award at the Green Globe Film Awards in Los Angeles.

A stand-up performer in his spare time, Palmer will appear this spring at the Smithsonian, the International Wildlife Film Festival, and other venues in connection with the book's publication and the issues it explores.

For more information, see the *Shooting in the Wild* Amazon.com site:

[http://www.amazon.com/Shooting-Wild-Insiders-Account-Kingdom/dp/1578051487/ref=ntt\\_at\\_ep\\_dpi\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Shooting-Wild-Insiders-Account-Kingdom/dp/1578051487/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpi_1)

The *Shooting in the Wild* Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Shooting-in-the-Wild-by-Chris-Palmer/209826136795?ref=ts>

And the *Shooting in the Wild* page on the Center for Environmental Filmmaking Web site:

(<http://www.american.edu/soc/cef/palmer-book.cfm>).

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