
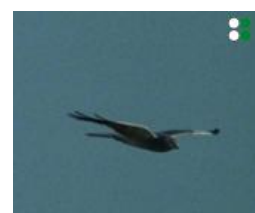
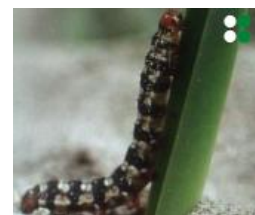


Wild side of Europe

Directed by: Various
Produced by: SD Cinematografica
Duration: 27x30'
Versions: 
Format: 16 mm

European fauna as you have never seen it before. The animals of our continent shot in their natural environment, as well as in our cities, where they have found a way to co-exist with man. From the wolf to the turtle, from the falcon to the porcupine, from the bear to the octopus. Spectacular and often moving footage of the secret lives of the species that exist around us, supported by solid scientific knowledge and stimulating narration.



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Episodes



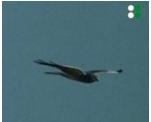
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Behind the dunes

We wonder if next summer you'll be able to bask in the sun behind a dune after watching this episode of "Wild side of Europe"! We discovered an incredible variety of insects in this strange miniature desert between the shore line and the Mediterranean scrub. Amidst the timeless dunes created by the ceaseless activity of the wind and sea carrying grains of sand landward, lives the most beautiful butterfly in Italy. The Jasio is the largest and most beautiful butterfly in Italy. It is still a mystery why it has established itself in this geographic area, since the Charaxes genus is usually found only in the tropics. Also from the tropics come the jasio's splendid colors and magnificent wing pattern. The documentary poetically illustrates the biological cycle of this butterfly. We observe the infant caterpillar hatch from the egg with its strange snout, resembling a Chinese dragon. We watch it cover the leaves of the strawberry tree with silk to keep from sliding off its only source of nourishment. Finally, after various mutations, the magic moment arrives when the fragile, velvety wings emerge from the cocoon and slowly unfold to reveal the insect's splendid beauty.



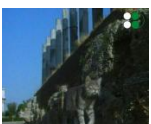
A conflict of interests

For some time the Montagu's Harrier has been forced to leave its original habitat in swampy lands as these areas are gradually reduced. Today many Harrier pairs live in the large, dense expanses of cultivated wheat. Every summer at harvest time, dramatic events occur in these fields. The reapers move steadily along devouring not only the grain but also the nests and small birds unable to fly. The only hope of salvation for the newborn is a late harvest season - or intervention by man. The documentary illustrates the WWF project to save the Montagu's Harrier nests and their precious broods from extinction. The vast fields of posidonia, up to 30 metres below the water, protect the Italian coast from erosion. A field of posidonia, the most common marine plant in the Mediterranean, waves in front of the camera. This valuable plant is now in serious danger due to man's uncontrolled use of dragnets for fishing. The film demonstrates the important ecological role played by these submerged plant fields.



Aliens of the outskirts

In a stream on the outskirts of Florence, we met a creature that looked like it came from another planet. As elegant as a medieval warrior, the river of fresh water crab has a long history behind it. It slowly moved inland from the sea thousands of years ago and, after many adventures, created a home for itself in fresh water streams. Very little is known about this animal and, unfortunately, there is a danger it might disappear from the face of the earth before we really get to know much about it. The impact of the city on the surrounding environment often threatens the survival of many animals by confining them to small areas where they are besieged on all sides. More than 3000 cormorants pass their winters in ponds around Cagliari in Sardinia. Every morning these winged vacationers leave Molentargius, where they spend the night perched on high tension pylons, and travel to Santa Gilla, an industrial zone where the pond is teeming with fish. This tiny body of water lies in a humid area containing some of the richest bird life in Europe. Unfortunately, it is a seriously polluted with toxic wastes and threatened by the approach of building construction. The pond is also suffering from neglect and indifference on the part of people incapable of comprehending its beauty and natural wealth.



Clandestine creatures of the city

Since living close to humans, the original wild cat, once a strictly solitary animal, has profoundly changed its habits. Domestic cats who have regained their freedom do not return to the isolated, retiring life of their ancestors. Instead they group themselves together in parks and courtyards throughout the city. The ancient Roman monuments, with their thousands of cubby-holes, have become the stray cats' preferred dwelling place. In addition to cheap lodging, the asphalt jungle also offers many animals free heating. Some birds who nourish themselves in the countryside and build their nests among the trees there, come to sleep in buildings in the city to escape the cold winter nights. An army of clandestine creatures has secretly crept into the city. The documentary deals with the various aspects of birds that live in the city of Rome. Amidst the baroque church domes, thousands of starling conduct an aerial duel with a peregrine falcon. A Penduline tit weaves its nest under a bridge spanning the Tiber river while a kestrel looks after her brood among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla. They have to put up with the disturbance of the notes of Puccini's opera, "Turandot". The kite snatches dead fish from the surface of the Tiber under a bridge heavy with traffic. Unknown to us, these and many other birds live lives parallel to our own. You only have to lift your eyes above the rooftops to see them.



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Relics of the past

Two animals that are among the most difficult to observe, at least in Italy, live in perfect harmony in the same den. The porcupine is the largest rodent and the badger is the largest member of the weasel family living in Italy. Spending the daylight hours in their underground shelter, they come out at night to wander around suspiciously, protected by the darkness. The ice-age forced the chamois down into Southern Europe, including the Italian peninsula. A small group found their way up the mountains of the Abruzzo region. The last 400 chamois living in the mountains of the Abruzzo National Park in Italy are descendents of an ancient community from the north who colonized the Apennine chain more than 250,000 years ago. Today, after many adversities and the risk of extinction, the chamois lives peacefully in the beechwood forests of the region. We follow the story of a young chamois, born during the month of May, illustrating the most curious aspects of the biology and behaviour of these magnificent animals. We see the young chamois at play; its struggle for survival during the long, snowy winters; and the mating exhibitions of the old males as they confront each other in late fall in order to establish their social position in the community.



Spring concert

The lagoon of Comacchio, together with the Po river delta, comprise the largest swamp area in Italy and one of the largest in Europe. Every spring the tiny islands scattered throughout these marshlands are invaded by millions of terns, gulls and other birds. They fight over tiny bits of land that could suddenly be swallowed up by a surge of water. The documentary tells the story of the territorial battles, courting behaviour and plight of the newly born, all at a frantic pace in this densely populated bird colony. Here each species has developed its particular strategy for survival in this raucous forced cohabitation. The life of millions of water birds depends on tiny organisms living in the changing world of sand and mud. The interstitial fauna, living between the grains of sand and mud, is a hidden microcosm waiting to be discovered. It's surprising to learn that life doesn't consist only of what is apparent to the naked eye. The troupe of "Wild Side of Europe" discovers a hidden world right under our eyes, one that we never thought existed. During the course of the millenniums, millions of living creatures managed to conquer the interstitial environment, evolving and adapting themselves to these particular aquatic surroundings made up of myriads of minute spaces. Of minuscule dimensions, these micro-organisms are excellent biological indicators of the quality of the environment. In fact, they are usually the first victims of marine pollution.



The kingdom of Sardinia

During that time of the year when most other birds prepare to migrate or fatten themselves up to confront the rigors of winter, one bird alone, the Eleonora's falcon, chooses this season to begin building its nest. This unusual reproduction strategy allows these birds to nourish their fledglings with exhausted migratory birds caught while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in autumn. On a sheer cliff in Sardinia, we filmed one of the few remaining colonies of this rare bird as prey. The species owes its name to Eleonora d'Arborea, an Italian noblewoman who, in 1392, passed a law protecting the bird. The survival of the Eleonora's Falcon in Sardinia depends on preservation of the environment of the rocky cliffs in the southern part of the island. The survival of the little bustard on the table-lands of the island is also in danger. Very few ornithologists have ever had the privilege of observing the nuptial dance of the male little bustard. The little bustard is one of the rarest birds in Italy, with only a few examples left in Puglia and Sardinia. The film depicts the nuptial rites of these animals against the background of the Sardinian grasslands. These regions are very similar to the desolate steppes of Central Asia and many little-known animals and plants find refuge here. Among them are several very rare plants, reptiles, amphibians and birds. The most important of these are the little bustards who put on a show every evening during which the males, in their gaudy black and white plumage, show off for the occasion. They take up positions in their tiny lek and begin jumping into the air while flapping their white wings conspicuously in the dim twilight of the plateau.



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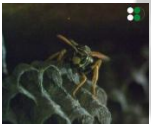
Biological indicators

In 1963 the entomologist, Frederick Hartig discovered a unique species of moth on Monte Vulture in Italy. He called it *Brahmaea europea*. It was a great surprise for all butterfly specialists. The documentary takes us to Lucania, where the discovery was made and where this rare insect still lives, although threatened by a gradual reduction of its natural habitat. Since some aspects of biology are very difficult to observe directly in nature, the film was made in the laboratory of an entomologist who succeeded in reproducing the moth in captivity. In order to save the Hartig's moth from extinction, biologists and environmentalists are asking that the entire region of the Vulture mountains be declared a nature reserve. Thanks to similar projects, new wildlife refuges have arisen where the black-winged stilt can build its nest. This bird has become almost a symbol of the Italian peninsula. Filmed in the salt marshes of Central-Southern Italy, this documentary presents the social life of the black-winged stilt: colony life, territorial conflicts, nuptial and mating ceremonies, egg laying, brooding and the birth of the chicks. The film also shows the defensive tactics the animal uses against predators and a collective assault on a group of grazing buffalo.



The Italian cowboys' friend

"The Maremma is parched land of burnt stubble and immense plains. Here and there are dry bogs exhaling a pestilential stench while the dark green underbrush relieves the aridity of the landscape. It's a land of wild animals and sullen, solitary "butteri" (Italian cowboys) twisting around on restless, hot-blooded horses". This is how an 18th century traveller described the Maremma region in Italy. The Maremma horse survives unchanged from this bygone era. This bay horse, with its wide chest and fast gallop, resembles a ram. It has a strong, proud temperament and is noted for its loyalty. "Wild side of Europe" followed the horse for a year during its various activities. We observe it in moments of complete liberty, galloping frenetically with the herd through the water of the marshes. We see it in situations of complete submission to man where it untiringly accompanies the "buttero" as he performs his tasks. We watch the amusing behaviour of an arrogant stallion displaying its leadership of the herd as it lords it over the females and claims its rights. Finally we observe a suffering mare give birth to a strong colt. It emerges head first with the Maremma traits it will carry for the rest of its life.



Living together

The social organization of the hymenopterans, including bees and ants, is incredibly complex. For almost a century, from Darwin onward, zoologists have sought to discover the intermediate stages that lead to such perfection. Studies recently conducted on wasps of the *Polistes* genus are beginning to supply the answers. "Wild side of Europe" filmed the organization of the gallicus and dominulus wasps and observed the strategy these two species employ in founding their honeycomb. The gallicus is strictly a loner, while the dominulus is very social, even during the period when it is constructing the colonies. The film illustrates, among other things, the battle the female founder engages in to decide who will play the role of queen and consequently inhibit the reproductive capacities of its sisters. A formidable predator of wasps returns each year to the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy: the rainbow-colored bee eater. Every year at the beginning of May, the bee eaters reappear among the dunes in the wild-life refuge at Orbetello. These birds with their colorful plumage arrive in Italy after a journey of almost 10,000 kilometers from the grasslands of Central Africa. A few days after their arrival they pair off and begin building their nests: tunnels several meters long, dug out with their beaks. This home protects the birds from all predators except snakes. The documentary shows an attack by a snake and the collective defense strategy devised by the bee eaters to chase away the aggressor. The birds perform nose dives and swooping assaults with their beaks wide open and succeed in giving the snake the worst of it.



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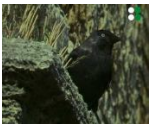
Deep love

Whenever we think of intelligent animals, monkeys or perhaps dogs immediately come to mind. We don't usually think of the octopus. In this film "Wild side of Europe" pick the humble, common octopus as an example of animal wisdom and shows how wrong we are to underestimate it. Through the collaboration of the Zoological Station in Naples, we learn that our main character is a very cunning individual. It makes up for its lack of natural weapons such as armor, stings or poison, with an extraordinary capacity to adapt to any new situation. It can change color faster than any other animal. 1000 chromatophore cells for every square millimeter of skin permit it to assume any shade of color in a fraction of a second. Its large repertoire of theatrical tricks and optical illusions make it the best magician inhabiting the seas. The octopus swims by means of a very special propulsion system. It allows the animal to maneuver precisely and even quickly move in the opposite direction. The cuttlefish's rich source of oxygen has allowed it to develop a larger brain than other molluscs. Perhaps its familiarity has prevented the cuttlefish from being the subject of intensive study. Actually, this animal still holds many mysteries. For example, we know it can change color very easily and that the various colors function as a kind of language. However, we have not yet been able to interpret the meaning of these colors. The documentary shows how the male courts the female and convinces it to mate. It also illustrates the care with which the male defend its companion from the scheming attentions of other admirers. Each phase of its behaviour is accompanied by sudden changes in the color of its stripes.



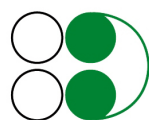
Strange friendships

The main character in this story is a jellyfish known as the *Rhizostoma pulmo*. Our cameras followed it during its apparently casual wanderings along the Mediterranean coast. We also filmed its surprising reproductive cycle, from the moment when a tiny polyp founds a new colony of thousands of individuals, until the time when, majestic and elegant, the adult sails through the water like a suspended spaceship. During our journey, the jellyfish has an unusual encounter with some crabs of the *Portunus* genus. They lie in wait for and then suddenly attack the jellyfish in nimble leaps. The quickest - and luckiest - crab install itself under the umbrella of the jellyfish and uses it as a means of transport to new territories it seeks to conquer. The sting systems developed by the various types of jellyfish are sophisticated war-machines that defend them against aggression. The sting are triggered immediately when their tentacles are brushed by an extraneous object. A strong friendship binds the hermit crab to the sea anemone. It is what zoologists call mutual symbiosis. The crab transports the sea anemone here and there, offering it its left-over food in return for the anemone's service of scaring predators away with its poisonous stings. The documentary analyses in detail the complicated behaviour that has developed around this friendship.



The new lord of the castle

In the Tuscan hills of northern Italy lies a town that has not changed for centuries: San Gimignano. Here a vast colony of jackdaws builds its nests in the famous medieval towers that characterise the town. Rather than describe the biological behaviour of this bird community, the documentary chose to dwell on the unusual story of a little jackdaw that fell from its nest and was raised by a man. The story is a homage to Konrad Lorenz and his love for these animals, of whom he wrote so well. The towers in medieval Italian towns make better homes for jackdaws than those found in their usual environment. In another instance, a bird looking for a home found a man ready to build towers especially for it. The swift, a real son of the open sky, spends its whole life in flight, even managing to make love in the air. It normally hunts at more than 60 kilometers per hour but during its courting and battle acrobatics, it reaches almost 200 kilometers per hour. Great altitudes are another of its specialties and it is most comfortable above 3,500 meters. The only time it stops flying is during the nesting period and while raising its young. At Portico Romagna, in Italy, the tall medieval watch towers situated at strategic points contain many small openings in their walls. Similar apertures are found in the buildings in other towns nearby. These openings were built in many parts of Italy to attract swifts to build nests there, making it easy to remove the young birds before they learned to fly. Times have changed but the swifts still build their nests in these wall openings. They offer an excellent opportunity to study these birds close up.



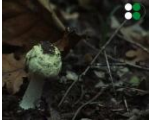
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As in a mirror

Face to face and looking very much alike, the male and the female grebe imitate each other's movements in an elegant "mirror" dance. After many years absence, the great crested grebe has returned to live among the reed thickets of Lake Annone, a small body of water lost in the hill of Brianza in Italy. As soon as the pollution in the water and hunting diminished, the first pairs began colonizing the area once again. The documentary tells the story of their return. Grebes are classified by ornithologists as "short-distance migrants" because of the brief journey they make to reach their winter quarters. The "long-distance migrants" are much more tenacious flyers and among these is the white stork that flies over 6,000 miles. According to a famous story, the stork places infants in the cabbage patch at night. In an effort to document this unusual behavior, we lay in wait for many long nights but, to tell the truth, we had no success. Maybe storks do not place infants there anymore out of revenge for the countless bullets shot at them once they crossed the Italian border. Times have changed now and many people are working to persuade the storks to return.



Reproduction devices

There are thousands of mushrooms, both large and microscopic, growing everywhere: in the dark, in the light, in the warmth and in the cold. They assume many bizarre forms including that of goblets, hats, stars and lanterns. "Wild side of Europe" conducted a journey through the world of these mysterious plants whose origin is still uncertain. Mushrooms have adapted themselves to living entirely underground and this has created problems not easily solved. On the other hand, sowing seeds to endure their future is a common problem for all plants and each species has had to evolve its own particular strategy. This documentary is a fascinating description of the strategy that plants have elaborated to sow their seeds and assure their future. "Wild side of Europe" used sophisticated techniques to discover the secrets of a mysterious, fundamental chapter in the adventure of life on our planet.



Away from this mad earth

The only time sea turtles remember their remote past as land creatures is when they lay their eggs. But that link is their Achilles' heel since it makes them easy to catch in many parts of the world; so much so that today they are one of the endangered species. Their situation in the Mediterranean is even more serious than in other places because the few beaches where they lay their eggs are continually disturbed. The documentary recounts the story of two species of sea turtles, the Caretta and Chelonia mydas, the only ones that still reproduce in the Mediterranean. We follow them from the moment of birth on the beaches of Cyprus until they lay their eggs. Figures representing the number and distribution of sea turtles in the Mediterranean are still incomplete. Though they no longer deposit their eggs on the western Mediterranean beaches, they still inhabit the waters along the coast.



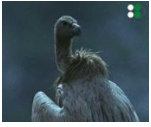
The return of the deer

The project to reintroduce deer on the Majella mountains in Italy, begun four years ago, represents a typical example of wild-life management. Behind this initiative by forest rangers is the project of zoologist, Luigi Boitani, to help wolf survive. Italy's largest carnivorous animal is now reduced to only a few examples dispersed throughout the Apennine mountains. Its survival depends on reconstruction of a suitable environment for its survival, including the presence of deer which are its chief source of food. "Wild Side Of Europe" 's cameras followed the various phases of the operation, from breeding the deer in enclosures, to their liberation on the peaks of Majella. Finally masters of their new environment, the male deer gather their harem of females around them and the mating season begins. The "Wild Side Of Europe" troupe's greatest achievement was in photographing the real protagonist of our story, the wolf, which has never been filmed in the wild in Europe. In these primitive, inaccessible mountains, the wolf has found its ideal refuge. The encounter was very exciting. At the end of World War II, deer were almost extinct in Italy. The last specimens lived in the remote Alps near Switzerland and Austria. They are now returning after intelligent planning.



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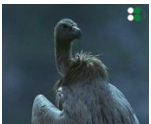
The land of the vultures

Spain with its rock formations, steep canyons and vast pasture lands, represents an ideal habitat for vultures. It was here that "Wild Side Of Europe" filmed these griffon vultures during their reconnaissance flights and as they attacked a carcass and began their tumultuous ceremony to establish the order of precedence for dinner. The ritual decides who is the hungriest and therefore has the right to eat first. In its wanderings, "Wild Side Of Europe" met the rare Cinereous vulture and observed it feeding its young and exchanging tender gestures with its mate. The documentary closes with an experiment: a large ostrich egg made of plaster of Paris and filled with giblets is used as bait for the Egyptian vulture. The bird arrives on the scene and immediately looks for a large stone. The vulture throws it repeatedly against the egg until the shell breaks open. This type of behaviour has caused this species to be called the "intelligent vulture". The nest hidden in an impenetrable part of a rocky cliff belongs to the peregrine falcon, a fearsome predator that streaks across the endless skies like a prince looking down on his immense dominion. Unfortunately, the peregrine falcon's life is now threatened by dangerous pesticides that poison the bird's habitual prey. Consequently the calcium in its egg, necessary for the young to grow up healthy and strong, is reduced and reproduction is hindered. As a result, this noble falcon is slowly disappearing from Europe, though the situation is slightly better in the Mediterranean countries, especially Spain and Italy. We're again faced with the burning problem of the use of chemical products that poison nature and the creatures living in it.



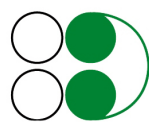
The heron tree

What does the trees represent in human culture? Besides practical aspect such as supplying wood, fruit, leaves and shade, the tree has served man as the subject of every sort of fantasy. Walnut trees housed witches and the door to the other life opened through the hollow trunk of an olive tree. Understanding how the tree has stirred our imaginations, can perhaps help us to understand ourselves better. It can certainly help us develop a more direct relationship with the plant kingdom. About a thousand herons return to the most industrialized area of Italy every year. They live together in colonies and inform each other when danger approaches. However, unlike other species, each couple must provide for the defense of its own brood. In the most industrialized area of Italy, Which includes Milan, Genoa and Bologna, live some of the largest colonies of herons in Europe. A few tall poplar trees among the smoke-stacks and factories is all a heron needs to found a community. The colony's proper name is a "heronry". Sometimes even one large tree is enough. The documentary tells the story of a heronry situated in an isolated tree and the life revolving around it. "Wild Side Of Europe" observed the colony through all four seasons, revealing a fascinating fresco of nature. The activity of the heronry is mingled with that of people working in the fields in this forgotten angle of the Padana plain.



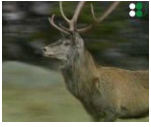
The king of the sweeper

On the verge of extinction, the last griffon vultures in Sardinia are fighting a desperate daily battle for survival. The film depicts this huge glider with almost three meters of wingspread flying over the mountains of Barbagia, one of the wildest and most enchanting spots in Sardinia. The camera carefully follows the parent birds as they take turn defending their one large, hairless offspring. They alternate their long period at the nest with exhausting flights in search of the food that becomes more and more scarce. The griffon vultures of Sardinia are now being aided in their struggle by members of the Italian League for the Protection of Birds. Through supplies of meat and attentive surveillance they have made the future of these birds a little less uncertain. Though modern society denies the Sardinian vultures their traditional carcasses, every large city accumulates huge amounts of food refuse on its outskirts. This enormous mass provides nourishment for numerous animals. The herring gull is certainly one of the animals that knows how to best exploit co-habitation with man. Open-air refuse dumps with their limitless food supply have allowed these birds to greatly increase their numbers. But there is a time of the year when the gulls abandon all this to move to wilder, less spoiled area of the Italian peninsula. During the mating season, they meet in noisy, crowded colonies and compete for tiny spaces on cliffs descending into the sea. Our cameraman, Giancarlo Pancaldi, followed them to the island of Capraia and filmed every phase of their reproductive cycle against an extraordinary beautiful background.



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The most beautiful horns

Ever since man became a shepherd, he has been moving animals from one continent to another, thus favoring crossbreeding and adaptation to new environments. This is what seems to have happened to a species of goat that was introduced into the Mediterranean from Asia Minor and found ideal living conditions on the islands of Creta and Monte Cristo. The film illustrates the differences and similarities of the various types of goats found among the steep, dangerous coasts of these marvelous islands. There also exist some species that seem to be absolutely indigenous in several regions. The "Wild Side Of Europe" troupe filmed the Corsican deer which, unfortunately, owes its fame to the fact that it is in danger of extinction. Studies of these animals serves as a pretext for a wider panorama of ungulates in general.



Man's friend

This is the little known story of the double personality that often exists in domestic dogs. Just as Dr. Jekyll was transformed into Mr. Hyde, in the same way man's most faithful friend often changes, at night, into a ferocious delinquent, roaming through the countryside attacking chickens and herds of sheep. The next morning the dog is the usual affectionate, overgrown puppy it always was. This is the first step down a road leading slowly towards the backup of the animal's alliance with man and a return to the wild life of its ancestor, the wolf. Today in Italy feral dogs number more than a million and those who have gone back to the wild are almost 100,000. This phenomenon has reached alarming proportions and even threatens the survival of the last wolves remaining in Italy, estimated to be no more than 200 to 250 specimen. Bands of stray dogs are numerous in Central Italy and threaten to make the wolf extinct. It may be the domestic dog that deals the final blow to its ancestor. Suddenly rearing up, kicking, biting and chasing each other, the stallions of the Camargue flight fro possession of the harem. "Wild Side Of Europe" filmed daily life of one of the last groups of wild horses still existent in the world. We discovered how little we still know about the natural behavior of an animal that has lived close to us for so long.



Private property

Small and colorful, the kingfisher is a very difficult bird to observe in Italy. Its sharp sight allows it to seek cover before being spotted. an amateur cameraman with the enthusiasm of a professional - and a great deal of patience - spent all his free time observing a pair of kingfishers build their nest beside a small stream on the outskirts of Genoa. This film is the result of three years of perseverance and shows their life, battles, courtship, fishing excursions, nest-digging, egg-laying and even the birth of their fledglings. It was filmed from nature in a nest built more than a meter underground. The colorful plumage of the male sand martin signals its presence to rivals, while the gudgeon employs a strange strategy for the same purpose. All fish are mute. There are some who have learned to compress their swimbladders in order to emit real sounds. This is the case with the Patogobius martensis, better known as the fresh water goby. This tiny, insignificant fish uses sounds in at least two instances. When another male invades its territory, the goby grown dark in the face and launches a series of "howl" is used to court the pregnant female. The male continually launches its love call until the female agrees to enter the nest the male has prepared and lay its eggs. From the moment all parental care is performed by the male who, mute and mimicking the female, fans and cleans the eggs until they hatch.



"Flash", the imprisoned goshawk

The story of a hunting falcon is the cue for a journey into the world of nature. Falconers and birds of prey tell a real-life story about the survival of rare species and those on the verge of extinction. Going back to the middle ages, to the time of Frederick II of Sweden and the beginning of ornithology, it is possible to reconstruct the various stages of the destruction of nature in the Mediterranean. The film deals with the erroneous relationship between the hunter and the environment, the absurd plundering of small raptors of their eggs for bird-raising and the problem of animal collectors. Our protagonist is "Flash", a goshawk (Accipiter gentilis) stolen from its nest and raised by its falconer owner to be a hunter. "Flash" remembers its infancy and later life, re-living its most crucial moments. This gives us a pretext to illustrate the lack of equilibrium between man and the environment and to denounce the barbarities human perpetrate on birds of prey.



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On the side of the insects

Although the silkworm, which is actually a caterpillar, is famous for its strong filament almost a kilometer long, the larvae of all lepidoterons secrete silk for various uses. Some, like the cabbage worm, use it to make a safety-belt. Others, such as the processional caterpillar, construct an edifice together with other caterpillars which they only abandon to look for food. Still others, like the psyche caterpillar or the moths that get into our closets, prefer a movable dwelling they can park wherever they please. The documentary describes then infinitely imaginative uses of this silk filament. With the invention of synthetic, the silkworm fell into disgrace. Modern chemistry has not only solved man's clothing problems but has also provided him with all kind of insecticides. In just a few years, these chemicals have been poisoned, rivers polluted and even underground water beds contaminated. To defeat cunning, creeping enemies like the parasites who attack farm crops, there are other means besides chemicals. In order to avoid poisoning ourselves, new strategies are becoming more frequently used. This is called the biological alternative. The concept is simple: it is enough to ally ourselves with the natural enemies of these parasites and help them destroy the enemies of man. The camera of Nando Armati went snooping into the most advanced techniques in the biological battle. We see bands of ravenous plunderers being bred with great care and then launched at the right moment against the infesting insects.



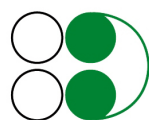
Mediterranean commuters

Storks, those legendary flyers, are spied on by the "Wild Side Of Europe" troupe during their roles of mothers of families and migratory birds. The film includes their courtship rituals, spectacular ceremonies, and the birds' peculiar behavior while weaning its young. There are also fascinating scenes of extremely long journeys from the African continent through Spain to the towers of Amsterdam and the windmills of the Netherlands. In addition to these enjoyable scenes which have made the stork the symbol of love and maternity, there are also the horrifying scenes of death that present man as a symbol of destruction. Chemical poisons in fertilizers, the double-barreled rifles of the taxidermists and the chain-saws of the woodcutters disrupt the ecosystem and render the survival of these majestic animal precarious.



A dog's life

It may seem incredible but the huge Great Dane belongs to the same species as the tiny Chihuahua: over 110 pounds compared to a few ounces of flesh and bones. Dogs have many different faces, and often they were created by humans. We've enlarged them, shrunk them, raised them, lowered them, stretched them, wrinkled them and deformed them. We've cut the tails and ears of dogs and made them ferocious or submissive. We've forced them to sit in living-rooms or chained them to posts. Though genetic engineering is a recent science, humans have always used their "best friends" as fertile guinea pigs for selecting and creating new breeds better adapted to particular needs. While in ancient times chiefly employed as guards and hunters, today they are also trained for social duties. As a result, dogs have become irreplaceable in police and anti-drug operations; in searching for people missing in natural disaster; and in aiding the handicapped. The documentary represents a scientific treatment of all aspects of this marvelous domestic animal, including the various theories regarding its lineage. A present-day problem is the return of these animals to the wild state, while stray dogs are beginning to cause worry in certain areas.



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