

AFRICA

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

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Africa is a continent associated with great open plains and savannahs as well as beautiful but inhospitable deserts. However, the feature of this continent that most often captures interest and admiration is its wildlife. The animals of Africa face daily challenges they must overcome in order to survive. This daily battle for survival is very aptly summed up by the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. The struggles these animals are forced to deal with lead to only the strongest of a species surviving and in this way future generations stand a better chance of survival in an unforgiving world.

The mammals of Africa have always been a source of wonder due to their majesty and ability to survive the harshest climates and numerous other obstacles. The following documentaries allow us to gain some insight into how they manage to endure what must be a constant battle in an environment in which only the strongest survive.

The Library Service has acquired a number of documentaries on DVD, which captures the struggle for survival in the African wild and allows the viewer an opportunity to gain a clearer perspective

of the lives of these majestic and often fear-inspiring animals.

Africa the Serengeti / producers, Paul Novros and George Casey; director, George Casey.

This was one of the most popular films shown at the Imax Theatre in Cape Town and even viewing it on video one can see why. The visuals must have been wonderful on the big screen and the occasional distortion of vistas seen from the air would not have accounted for much. As far as the script is concerned, it is more or less what one would expect from a film with a title like this. Lots of wildlife, generally structured around the migration of the wildebeest, with the expected massacre by crocodiles at the river crossing.

Besides the Serengeti, there is also a visit to the Ngorongoro crater and to Olduvai Gorge, with a brief sequence on the Masai.

Africa's elephant kingdom / producer and director, Michael Caulfield.

Narrated by Avery Brooks in the role of an old bull elephant, this documentary, originally made for screening in Imax theatres, depicts one herd's struggle for survival in the

face of dwindling food and water; a situation relieved just in time when the rains come. Filmed in Kenya, sometimes within sight of Kilimanjaro, it provides the usual factual information concerning elephant life and behaviour; but it boasts some outstanding cinematography by Tom Cowan. It is impressive viewing even on the television screen, so on an imax-sized one it must have been astounding.

Etosha: place of dry water / producers, David Hughes and Carol Hughes.

The Etosha National Park, in the north of Namibia, is one of the continent's great wildlife reserves. Though situated in a dry area, many of its waterholes are fed the year round by underground springs and during the rainy season part of the giant Etosha Pan is transformed into a vast shallow lake, barely two feet deep and some fifty miles across. This programme follows the cycle of life in the Etosha National Park over the period of a year; from the wet months, when plants and animals multiply in abundance, to the dry season, when the water evaporates and the plain bakes to dry clay. Beautifully photographed, it contains many unique sequences and contrasting scenes of idyllic beauty with others depicting the harsh struggle for survival. It is narrated by Alexander Scourby.

The lions' share / producer, Patrick Morris.

There are so many wildlife documentaries about lions that one often longs for something else. In addition many of them have been shot in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park and this title aired on Discovery Channel is no exception. Having said that, however, one must admit that it makes for interesting viewing. It focuses on two prides in contrasting parts of the reserve, a large one of 25 adults and their young, and another consisting of just 10 members. It provides all the footage one has come

to expect of such a programme - hunting, scavenging, mating, raising cubs and coping with all kinds of adversity, especially drought - but it also includes useful information on aspects of social behaviour; notably on what happens when a pride outgrows its food supply. Other creatures also feature, but primarily as potential prey, specifically baboons, warthogs and wildebeest. It is attractively photographed by Sophie Buck and actress Brenda Vaccaro is a good narrator. There is some distressing material, notably of an invading male killing two cubs, but all in all a successful film.

***Relentless enemies: lions and buffalo** / produced and directed by Dereck Joubert and Beverly Joubert.

This is the story of a pride of lions and one herd of buffalo isolated on an island in the Okavango Delta of Botswana. As a result of their isolation in the swamps of the delta these lions have not only become specialist buffalo hunters but are also completely comfortable wading and swimming in water which is unusual for the big cats. The abundance of prey has enabled the pride members to become extremely large and powerful, which serves them well when hunting their large, robust prey. The film also shows the struggles within the pride that could endanger its entire survival. **Relentless enemies** is a visual feast and the filmmakers have captured the struggle between buffalo and lion expertly in addition to showing the viewer the challenges this pride of lion face together, amongst others, an encroaching enemy pride, a cub killer and the constant bother of hyena scavengers.

The wildlife of Africa is spectacular but not all are fortunate enough to see the animals in their natural habitat. Now librarians can bring these magnificent animals to their users by organising screening sessions at their local libraries. The above-mentioned titles are all excellent productions and will allow library users to discover the wonderful

world of the animals in Africa that so enthral us. Displays in the library with the vibrant covers of these titles are sure to elicit interest from a multitude of users - so, get cracking!

Other African wildlife titles on DVD

Africa's deadly dozen

Lions of the African night

Meerkats united

Snake killers: honey badgers of the Kalahari

White lions of Sanbona.

Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop and Charl September ()*

