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## ARTICLE

# "As if eavesdropping on actual filming". The origins of the wildlife making-of documentary genre.

*Jean-Baptiste Gouyon*  
*University College London*

## Abstract

The wildlife making-of documentary genre has become a routine appendage to most prestige natural history series. However, the genre is a fairly recent one. The first attempt at producing a wildlife MOD was in 1963 the half-hour long *Unarmed Hunter*. The first wildlife MOD accompanying a natural history programme was in 1984 *The Making of the Living Planet*. In between these two films, the televising of natural history became a profession revolving around the technical mastery of the filmmaking apparatus. The article examines this history, and suggests that the MOD helped filmmakers to secure credibility as producers of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Making-of documentary; wildlife filmmaking; Science television; BBC NHU.

## Introduction

The trouble with nature is it does not know when it is meant to be collaborating. [Ö] So the makers of *The Living Planet* had to use all their natural cunning and perseverance in order to play nature at its own game. This is the story of how it was done. (*The Making of The Living Planet*, Brock, 1984b)

Wildlife making-of documentaries (MODs) are instrumental for wildlife filmmakers to publicly define, and shape audiences' perception of wildlife films as a trustworthy mix of entertaining spectacle and original knowledge about the natural world. The first MOD to be produced was *The Making of the Living Planet* (Brock, 1984b), which disclosed how the second of the so-called Attenborough series had been made. Although it is a first, *The Making of the Living Planet* is also the outcome of a twenty years history during which the genre was fashioned alongside the public definition of natural history filmmaking as a culture of knowledge production (Gouyon, 2011b). It is this early process which this article sets about to uncover, examining along the way the relationship between science and natural history television.

Looking at how the sciences and the media relate to each other enables us to understand the sciences' 'place and placing' (Cooter and Pumfrey, 1994: 237) in our late modern Western cultures. This relationship is two folds. As the history of science communication indicates, going hand in hand with the progressive definition of science as a professional pursuit, the media have been instrumental in fashioning the public uptake of, and expectations about science since at least the end of the nineteenth century (Gregory and Miller, 1998). This became especially true of the second half of the twentieth century, when television played a major role in shaping the public culture of science as it made it part of audiences' everyday

life (Boon and Gouyon, 2014). But media do more than simply producing facts about science and technology in the cultural sphere. They contribute in the production of factual statements about the natural world in the science sphere, and by ricochet in the social sphere (Gieryn, 1999; Lewenstein, 1995). Media make the production of scientific knowledge a distributed process, which involves many more participants than just laboratory bench workers (Latour, 1987), in particular producers of media content and audiences. Again, television's role in this respect can be recognised as significant in the post-war period, notably in relation to natural historical subjects (Boon and Gouyon, 2014).

Whether through their participation in shaping the public culture of science or in the production of knowledge, the media are pivotal to the definition of the cultural boundaries of science (Gieryn, 1995). 'Boundary work' (Gieryn, 1983) usually builds on a repertoire of familiar cultural features which will enable boundary-workers to selectively characterise a set of practices and activities as science, or not-science. This article is about one such instance of boundary work, how wildlife broadcasters attempted to move the cultural boundaries of science so that they would include their practice. In this process, they modified the accepted definition of both their practice, the televising of natural history, and science, so that the latter could accommodate the former. Looking at the genesis of the wildlife making-of documentary (MOD) genre from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, this article examines how natural history broadcasters enrolled science and scientists in their effort to carve a cultural space for the televising of natural history, out of the one occupied by amateur natural history. In so doing, they promoted a definition of filmmaking as a means to produce original knowledge of the natural world.

A routine appendage to most prestige natural history programmes, MODs are now considered, because they are so pervasive, as constituting a genre of wildlife programme in their own right (Dingwall and Aldridge, 2003). Pervasiveness, however, does not mean necessity. From the origins of wildlife filmmaking in the early 1900s, to the early 1960s, no MODs were produced. This could be down to economical causes. Practically speaking, MODs require more film to be exposed. At a time when wildlife films were shot on celluloid and film was an expensive commodity, producing films on how films are made may not have been seen as a priority. But another explanation is also plausible. It could be argued that until the early 1960s MODs were not needed. In which case, the task that lays before us is to understand why, from the early 1960s onwards, it became felt that MODs were needed.

Wildlife MODs have been described as being about expertise, and the disclosure of the practical means involved in producing a nature film (Dingwall and Aldridge, 2003). In other words, they are documentaries about the 'documentary process', about the encounter between the camera and its subjects, and the result of 'this collision between apparatus and subject' (Bruzzi, 2006:10). But at the same time, they are documentaries which allegedly do not operate along the lines of such 'documentary process', as they are supposed to be showing filmmaking as it happens when the camera is not there. In this article, I want to start understanding why this genre appeared when it did, and what ends historical actors involved in its development thought it could serve. Eventually my aim is to demonstrate that the genre emerged from a need to elicit trust in the audience for a way of making wildlife films which represented a drastic shift in ethic, from one based on non-intervention to one claiming artifice as essential to the truthful representation of nature on screen.

The first wildlife MOD was produced in Britain in 1963, a decade after natural history filmmaking had been relocated on television. As a social and cultural backdrop, the 1960s

have been characterised as a moment when expertise and authority were publicly questioned and required to be justified (Marwick, 1998). Preferably, this had to be achieved on technical and scientific grounds rather than through gesturing towards some kind of elite status symbols (Ortolano, 2009). The MODs examined in this article all emphasise filmmakers' technical expertise, by contrast with the ethos of earlier amateur naturalist cameramen, grounded in the values of the Victorian cultures of imperial big game hunting and amateur natural history. As the interpretation of *The Making of the Living Planet* proposed in this article suggests, these two cultural repertoires were eventually superseded by another one, recycled from the beginnings of experimental science in seventeenth century Britain, based on the notion of modesty (Shapin, 2010).

To film and documentary historians, the 1960s are marked by the advent of direct cinema, the movement premised on an observational style privileging 'the individual, the everyday, the contemporary', and which tended to 'follow action rather than dictate it, to see and record what happened to evolve in front of the camera' (Bruzzi, 2006: 74; see also Corner, 1996; Winston, 2008). The MOD genre can be seen as an offshoot of this direct cinema movement, of which it shares several features. Mostly intended to reveal the filmmaking process in action, the MOD presents itself as purely observational, involving minimal intervention on the part of the camera and the filmmaker. And just like direct cinema it seems 'capable of collapsing the difference between image and reality, of representing an unaltered truth' (Bruzzi, 2006: 78). But direct cinema also shares these beliefs with early natural history filmmaking. In both cases, non-intervention on the part of the filmmaker is highly valued, and the camera is conceived of as a means of recording events that would have occurred whether the camera was present or not, thus supposedly providing access to an objective reality. The MOD could thus be interpreted as wildlife filmmakers applying to themselves the naturalistic approach to filmmaking by those they aimed to replace: amateur naturalist cameramen. As we will see, in *The Making of the Living Planet* (Brock, 1984b) the narrative strategy of wildlife documentaries is humorously applied to the wildlife filmmaker.

In what follows, the article offers a snapshot of the situation of British natural history filmmaking in the early 1960s, which is characterised by the BBC losing its monopoly on the presentation of wildlife on television. The article then goes on to consider the trajectory of the wildlife MOD genre, from the 1963 *Unarmed Hunters* (Parsons, 1963) to *The Making of the Living Planet* (Brock, 1984b).

### **Natural history television in Britain in the early 1960s**

Since 1956 and the start of Granada television's programme *Zoo Time* (1956-1963), hosted by ethologist Desmond Morris from the London Zoo, and broadcast on the ITV network, the BBC was no longer the sole purveyor of programmes about animals to British television audiences. However, *Zoo Time* was only about captive animals, and was not considered a serious competitor to the BBC natural history output. In the words of Desmond Hawkins, who had founded the BBC Natural History Unit's (NHU):

The curious association with the London Zoo limits its [the Granada Zoo Unit's] range of subject matter and it suffers from a tendency to be used as a training area for other Granada activities. In spite of the personal success of Desmond Morris it has not made the sustained impact that it might have done. (Hawkins, 1962:3)

But in 1961 the advent of Anglia TV's long running series *Survival* (1961-2001) is a turning

point that marks the end of the BBC's monopoly on the representation of exotic wild nature. As Hawkins noted: 'Anglia, though a later arrival and professionally less competent, is potentially more dangerous' (Hawkins, 1962:4). *Survival* had been specifically set up to address audiences ignored by the BBC offering on natural history, distinctly pitched at the Southern-England middle classes. In the words of Colin Willock, who launched *Survival* in 1961 with Aubrey (later Lord) Buxton, the series was intended for the working classes, 'the great mass of viewers [Ö] available in the industrial areas of the Midlands and the North' (Willock, 1978: 28). One way in which the NHU reacted to the advent of *Survival* was to put forward its relationship with scientists, through such programmes as *Life* (BBC, 1965-1968) fronted by ethologist Desmond Morris (Gouyon, 2011b). Another strategy, discussed below, was to stress its own professionalism, a rhetorical move that was in line with the anti-amateurism discourse that prevailed in Britain in the years leading to the Labour victory in the 1964 general election (Sandbrook, 2005).

In the early 1960s, the NHU underwent a substantial transformation, as it progressively shed the input of amateur natural history cameramen, developing in its stead internal capacities and starting to form external contributors to become free-lance filmmakers (Davies, 2000). In short the NHU engaged into turning the televising of natural history into a profession centred on the mastery of the filmmaking apparatus. Yet, '[a]ll broadcasting systems however organised and controlled have to command the assent of their audiences to their messages' (Collins, 1983:213). The articulation of its claim to professionalism around a filmmaking expertise forced the NHU to publicly redefine what was deemed acceptable practices for the production of wildlife films.

Indeed, from its inception, the culture of natural history filmmaking rested on the widely accepted idea of the unobtrusive camera. For instance Yorkshire man Cherry Kearton, pioneering wildlife cinematographer, would assert in the 1920s that only those cameramen managing to disappear in the landscape, so that animals ignored their presence, could claim that they were producing good footage of wildlife (Kearton, 1929). In other words, Kearton claimed that audiences for his films could trust him because he was showing them animals behaving as if the camera was not there. This idea of the necessary transparency of the filmmaking apparatus for the film to be a reliable source of knowledge of the natural world, originated both in the cultural space of amateur natural history, and the culture of big game hunting. Whilst the latter placed a premium on the capacity to outwit animals, the former valued patience, endurance, and the ability to blend in the landscape and observe without interfering, as virtues essential to the production of knowledge (Gouyon, 2011a). In order to be considered trustworthy and reliable, natural history filmmakers had to come out as 'silent watchers' (Parsons, 1969), paragons of patience, detachment, and transparency. In order to escape from the sphere of amateur natural history, the NHU had to redefine publicly what putting nature on TV meant, and who was authorised to do so. As this article shows, this work of redefinition was, in part at least, delegated to a new genre or natural history programme, the making-of documentary.

### **Showing how it is done**

The first instance of what amounts to a wildlife MOD, is the half-hour long *Unarmed Hunters* (Parsons, 1963). The title is a direct reference to Cherry Kearton, who defined himself with this phrase (Kearton, 1923). The film can therefore be seen as inscribing natural history television in the British tradition of wildlife filmmaking. Ascribing the label 'unarmed hunter' to much more people than to the lone cameraman in the field, it presents the production of nature

films as a collective process. Viewers are introduced to the various stages of programme-making, from initial research in the film and sound library, to the broadcasting of finished programmes, through the various stages of editing, dubbing, rehearsal of studio sequences, etc.. Visually, fly-on-the-wall type of scenes showing people at work, some of them clearly staged, alternate with close-ups of the material equipment of filmmaking. Throughout *Unarmed Hunters*, the camera lingers on steenbecks, stacks of reels, telecine machines, mixing consoles, and quarter inch tape decks, on hands pushing buttons and turning knobs. These close-ups suggest that these machines are the main object of the film. They highlight the materiality of filmmaking as well as the technical and practical expertise of those manipulating the apparatus.

The documentary was initially part of the NHU's offering for the first National Nature Week (Crocker, 1964), a festival taking place across Great Britain in May 1963 and promoted by the British Council for Nature, inviting '[t]he naturalists of Britain [to come] out to affirm their faith and show their work to their countrymen at a time when our heritage of wild life is in the balance' (Campbell, 1963). The aim was to gain public support for the pursuit of natural history, and to generate a social movement in favour of wildlife preservation. More than 200 local exhibitions, 100 public lectures and film shows, field meetings and other 'Nature trails' (Fitter, 1963a) drew audiences' attention towards the activities of various bodies engaged in increasing the public knowledge of British wildlife and countryside, or working towards its preservation. The highlight of the week was *The Observer Wild Life Exhibition* held in the halls of the Royal Horticultural Society, in London. There the Council for Nature and other 'voluntary natural history bodies' (Fitter, 1963a) presented their activities. The BBC had a 'special cinema', in which 'a continuous performance of wild-life films' was shown (Fitter 1963b). In this context, *Unarmed Hunters* was a promotional tool. It presented broadcasters at the NHU as natural history practitioners through their filmmaking activities, thereby contributing in the aesthetic, scientific and economic appreciation of wildlife, and therefore, it was implied, in its preservation (Campbell, 1963).

To appreciate the significance of this documentary, it is worth remembering that in 1963, Peter Scott's *Look* (1955-1968) and David Attenborough's *Zoo Quest* (1954-1961) stood as the epitome of natural history television. Both programmes forwarded a definition of wildlife filmmaking as an essentially field based activity, whereby a naturalist would spend weeks, if not months, in the wild, bringing back footage that were then presented, as if in the raw, in a studio based programme. By contrast *Unarmed Hunters* brings front stage the construction work that goes into making films and television programmes, showing that much more than naturalist field work is needed to produce natural historical knowledge on television. Accordingly, due respect is paid to amateur naturalist cameramen, but at the same time it is made clear that they are only peripheral to the professional culture of natural history television which is being performed on screen.

*Unarmed Hunters* enacts a change in the ethic of wildlife filmmaking from non-intervention to intervention. Contrary to the belief in an unobtrusive camera which prevailed amongst amateur naturalist cameramen, the intrusive filmmaking apparatus is here depicted as essential to creating cognitive value. The use of constructed film sets reproducing fragments of the wilderness, like fish tanks, is shown as allowing audiences to witness animal behaviour that it would be difficult, if not impossible to observe, as they take place in such hard to reach places as the sea floor. The interventionist approach is thus justified as it enhances audiences' experience of the wild. In the same vein, *Unarmed Hunters* sheds light on the post-production

phase, and shows that it is indispensable for the accurate reconstruction of the experience of being in the wild. In that respect, dubbing and the construction of the soundtrack are given a crucial role, and are presented as integral to the film's power of 'allusion' (Grimaud, 2006).

In internal correspondence, *Unarmed Hunters* was referred to as a 'BBC demonstration film' (Crocker, 1964). Demonstration films were used to promote the television service when transmission began in the late 1930s, and again in the early 1950s. Broadcast before the start of the actual programmes so that television sets sellers had something to show to prospective buyers, they were made of extracts from past programmes interspersed with test cards and specially shot announcements, accordingly, they had a rather low budget. *Unarmed Hunters* was a promotional tool, yet otherwise it represented a more significant investment than regular demonstration films. It does not contain already existing programme material, in order to produce it, material resources therefore had to be committed, that were costly. Film rolls, filming and editing equipment, as well as the people to operate them, and a producer. The film was thus considered an important element in the NHU's communication about itself. It is notable in that respect that the NHU ensured that they retained complete control over the film's circulation by taking and paying 'for full N/T [non-theatrical] rights (and t.v. rights)' (Crocker, 1964), this making *Unarmed Hunters* the only film in the NHU's library which they could circulate as they pleased. Notably they did not need to refer about it to Television Enterprise, the BBC department habitually charged with commercially exploiting the programmes (Crocker, 1964). It is notable in that respect that after 1963 *Unarmed Hunters* was screened during meetings at several natural history societies throughout Britain. For instance, on 24 February 1966 the NHU's sound librarian, John Burton, introduced it to the assembled members of the South London Entomological and Natural History Society. *Unarmed Hunters* thus served to spread the view, in naturalist circles, that natural history filmmaking, as it was practiced at the NHU, was a legitimate participation in the production of natural historical knowledge.

*Unarmed Hunters* defines filmmaking as a means of producing knowledge about the natural world. As a promotional film, it portrays the BBC NHU as a centre of expertise in that regards. Initially made to be shown during the 1963 National Nature Week, it positions the NHU and its work within 'the natural history movement'. This proto-MOD participated in opening a new space in the British natural history movement beyond the amateur sphere, that of television natural history. And throughout the second half of the 1960s, amateur natural history was pushed farther to the margins of natural history television, whilst science's participation was increasingly put centre-stage. This new step got sanctioned in the second documentary of this kind to be produced in Britain, *The making of a natural history film* (Rhodes, 1972).

### **The filming studio as truth-spot**

Whilst *Unarmed Hunters* was an attempt at contradistinguishing the televising of natural history from the culture of amateur natural history, *The making of a natural history film* (Rhodes, 1972) is an act of definition of the standards of natural history television. Throughout the 50 minutes long documentary, amateur naturalists' field craft is pushed further in the background, whilst science is brought in the studio, to the extent that the film studio emerges as a type of laboratory, a 'truth spot' (Gieryn, 2002), a place that lends credibility to knowledge claims, where the filmmaking apparatus is expertly deployed to make visible the invisible and in this way to produce truths about nature.

*The making of a natural history film* concentrates on the work of a group of former Oxford life

scientists turned filmmakers, in a specialised film unit called Oxford Scientific Films (OSF). One of the founders of OSF, Gerald Thompson, was an old acquaintance of the NHU, who had already appeared in *Unarmed Hunters*, together with his assistant Erik Skinner. Thompson and Skinner had originally demonstrated their mastery of macro-cinematography techniques with the film *The Alder Woodwasp and its Insect Enemies* (Thompson and Skinner, 1960), which came first in the 1960 BBC-Council for Nature sponsored natural history film competition (Parsons, 1982). It had been praised in a viewing report as ‘an excellent film with outstanding CUs [close-ups] of a difficult subject. The story is extremely well covered and imaginative in treatment, apart from being technically good’ (Anonymous, 1961:15). Throughout the 1960s the NHU nurtured Thompson’s efforts that would lead to the formation of Oxford Scientific Films (OSF) in 1968. Quickly OSF became synonymous with remarkable close-ups of challenging subjects and technical virtuosity (Crowson, 1981).

One reason for the BBC’s active support to OSF, even before it was formally established, is that it shared in the belief prevailing at the NHU that filmmaking should be integrated within the sciences. From this perspective filmmaking was conceived of as both a valid way of producing knowledge of the natural world, and as a means of circulating it to the largest possible audiences. In Bristol, this belief served as a foundation to the idea very present in the 1960s that, as a centre of expertise in filmmaking, the NHU ought to participate in the scientific enterprise and become a part in a fieldwork institute for the study of animal behaviour, where scientists would work alongside filmmakers for the joint purpose of producing scientific knowledge and television programmes (Gillard, 1962; Hawkins, 1962). The embodiment of this synthesis of science and filmmaking, OSF chimed with the project to integrate science and the televising of natural history.

This approach had found an expression on screen in the BBC2 programme *Life in the Animal World* (1965-1968) commonly referred to as *Life*. From the outset, *Life* had been defined as having to break away from the previous natural history television offering. In the words of Nicholas Crocker, Editor of the NHU:

It is important that the natural history programme for BBC-2 should be substantially different in style, outlook and presentation to other natural history programmes which are shown on BBC-1. The programme will therefore, be aimed at a completely adult audience, and the approach will mainly be one of enquiry, scientific analysis and clinical investigation (Crocker, 1965).

*Life* had been the NHU’s initial riposte to Anglia TV’s *Survival* (1961-2001), which was branded in Bristol ‘pop. nat. hist.’ (Willock, 1978:78). Foregrounding the NHU relationship with scientists, it was the flagship of their programme offering for the then new channel BBC2 (Parsons, 1982:287). Hosted by ethologist Desmond Morris, it featured studio discussions between scientists investigating aspects of animal behaviour. Specially shot film sequences, some of them produced by future members of OSF, were used in the discussion, to support scientists’ claims. With *Life*, filmmaking was integrated within the scientific debate (Gouyon, 2011b).

From the perspective of programme-making, *Life* introduced the idea that the visual pleasure associated with the contemplation of nature could be harnessed to convey scientific knowledge to audiences. David Attenborough, Controller BBC2, spelled out this conceptualisation in a letter to Solly Zuckerman, the secretary of the Zoological society in London, justifying the employment of Desmond Morris, Curator of Mammals at the London

Zoo, as host for the programme.

I would like to emphasise that it is not simply another natural history programme showing the beauties of nature. Indeed, it is precisely because we have done so many such programmes for so long that I felt it very important to create a new programme which would build on the widespread public appreciation of natural history, by examining in a serious and critical way new trends and ideas in zoology. (Attenborough, 1966).

Attenborough's letter echoes similar conversations on the use of visual pleasure as a means to scientifically inform audiences, conducted in the 1960s at the Science Museum in London. There, the outcome of this reflection had been to recognise the necessity, on the part of curators and exhibition makers, to develop good showmanship, the skills to construct displays that would be attractive, pleasing to the eye. As one of the Science Museum's curator put it in 1966: 'The art of the curator is to beguile, and by so doing to educate' (O'Dea, 1966, quoted in Gouyon, 2014:40). Likewise, on television, if the pleasure associated with the contemplation of the beauties of nature was to draw viewers' attention towards science, showmanship was of the essence. To be able to construct attractive representations of the natural world, through the use of inventive camera techniques and imaginative points of views, became crucial. From this perspective, the filmmaker's technical expertise takes precedence over the craft of the field naturalist because it adds value to the mere contemplation of nature.

*The making of a natural history film* (Rhodes, 1972) plainly celebrates filmmaking over field craft. In two parts, the documentary focuses on the camera work that goes on in a filming space where many creatures (bats, owls, mice, and various plants) live freely, awaiting to be filmed. The first part of the documentary depicts the different techniques and equipment devised and used at OSF. It presents the filmmaker as an inventor, who creates ingenious devices that will enable audiences to see the natural world from original perspectives, thus discovering new aspects of it. The second part focuses on the shooting of a film commissioned for the purpose of the documentary. Here filmmaking is presented as a succession of problems of representation to be solved, mostly concerned with having living beings behave in front of the camera according to expectations. Throughout the documentary, naturalists' core belief in non-intervention and self-effacement is openly repudiated, as the filmmaker's active, physical engagement with the natural world is foregrounded.

The key characteristic of the filmmakers portrayed here is their initial scientific training, which frees them from the natural history constraint of non-intrusion and liberates their creativity when it comes to deploying innovative filming techniques. OSF filmmakers' field expeditions are shown as boisterous occasions, with little in common with field naturalists' ethos of self-effacement. In like manner, the filmmaking apparatus no longer serves to record the naturalist's observation, conveying it to audiences. It reveals the natural world has neither the filmmaker nor the audience could ever see it with naked eyes.

In one visually remarkable sequence, OSF member Peter Parks is shown preparing a pitcher plant in order to film a fly being trapped in the plant. Having cut in half the cavity formed by the cupped leaf of a pitcher plant, the upper half is then glued onto a glass plate and filled with the liquid that attracts insects in the plant. The whole is positioned above a mirror inclined at 45 degrees, reflecting to the camera pointed at the mirror the view one would have, had a camera been placed at the bottom of the pitcher. In this sequence, the act of observation is delegated



to the filmmaking apparatus. A place is claimed for the interventionist approach to wildlife filmmaking within the scientific sphere (Hacking, 1983; Daston and Galison, 2008). The filmmaker's use of a quite literally denatured plant demonstrates that distancing himself from nature enables him, and viewers with him, to adopt an unconventional perspective on it, and to obtain a richer knowledge than passive naturalist observation would have authorised.

OSF contributed many sequences to *Life on Earth* (Parsons, 1979), to which we briefly turn now. David Attenborough reminisced, in an introduction to a book on OSF, of 'those simple blobs of jelly, ribbed with cilia, drifting through the sea, that are known as comb jellies, which Peter Parks transformed by ingenious lighting into shimmering globes of ethereal loveliness' (Oxford Scientific Films, 1981: 7). All these sequences demonstrated natural history television's technical capacity to reveal previously unseen aspects of the natural world.

### **Producing knowledge on the television screen**

*Life on Earth* (Parsons, 1979), by all accounts, marks a turning point in the way natural history was put on television. Three years in the making, with a budget close to £1,000,000, and having mobilised not just the Bristol unit but the BBC in its entirety, it marks the entry of natural history television in the era of high production value blockbuster series which are also international co-production deals, the so-called Blue Chip documentaries. The series involved the collaboration of half a thousand scientists, advising on what to shoot (organisms, behaviours), where and when. Following the release of the programme, all these advisors asked for copies of the series to use as teaching aid. Some of the forms of life and behaviours represented in the programme had never been filmed before (Bousé, 2000; Davies, 2000; Gouyon, 2011b; Parsons, 1982).

*A Making of Life on Earth* was discussed in 1977-78, with Warner Bros, the American co-production partner for the series, agreeing to contribute £ 4,000 in the MOD. In the words of the producer commissioned for this MOD, it was planned to disclose many aspects of what went on behind the scenes, but also to place the NHU in the limelight:

The BBC may be criticised for looking at its own Natural History Unit, much as the BBC looked at Oxford Scientific Films some years ago. The self-examination in this case, however, is not a form of indulgence but rather recognising the opportunity to capitalise on the inevitable excitement to be generated by the showing of 'Life on Earth'. (Goodman, 1978:7)

However, the project was cancelled half-way through, with only five sequences shot. This was principally due to a battle of ego between Derek Anderson, from the NHU, who administered the budget for the series, on the one hand, and Colin Goodman and Michael Croucher, from the BBC General Programme Production Unit, who had been commissioned to produce the MOD on the other (e.g. Croucher, 1978). Nonetheless, looking at the archival papers for it indicates in the first place that it was, here again, intended to highlight the necessity of filming under controlled conditions. The MOD was also envisaged as a promotional device for the series.

An early outline shows that half of the film would have been dedicated to showing cameramen at work, and to hearing them 'talk of their work and problem. The time and patience required will be emphasised which will lead into the *necessity* of controlled filming to intercut with "authentic" footage.' (Anderson, 1977, p.4, emphasis added). By contrast with *The making of*

a *natural history film*, this MOD brings back field work in the picture. But then at the end of the 1970s, shooting in the field, no longer the province of amateur naturalists, was practiced by professional wildlife cameramen. These disclosures about filming techniques were to work as selling points to advertise the series:

'The aim of this 30 minute film is to provide the viewer with an insight of what was involved in the making of the most complex wildlife television series ever made. ... This film will therefore attempt to convey this whilst involving viewers in rather more details on a number of biological filming problems – a formula that proved very popular in "The Making of Natural History Film". In doing this, we hope to provide an additional and tantalising promotion for the series.' (Anderson, 1977, p.1)

But here the question is what does the MOD promote? Concluding the preparatory outline for the documentary, Derek Anderson stated that '[t]he style throughout will be as if eavesdropping on actual filming, editing or whatever. [Ö] At every opportunity suitable footage from *Life on Earth* will be included to whet the appetite of the viewer for the series that is to follow.' (Anderson, 1977: 5). Juxtaposing a finished sequence from the series with footage depicting how it had been obtained focuses the attention on filmmaking. The MOD was thus envisaged as a means of educating audiences into a specific way of viewing the series, as a source of knowledge of the natural world but also as evidence of the filmmakers' skills.

The MOD was never completed, but eventually, some of these ideas found their way in the MOD for the sequel of *Life on Earth*, the 12 parts series *The Living Planet* (Brock, 1984a). *Life on Earth* had been made with the idea of providing proof of concept regarding the feasibility of this kind of mammoth programme, and was instrumental in cementing the professional culture of natural history television. *The Living Planet* is the work of a self-confident team assured in their professionalism. It is the first programme of its kind to be associated with a MOD, the aptly titled *The Making of the Living Planet* (Brock, 1984b). First broadcast on 12 April 1984, a week after the last episode of the series, the 40 minutes long documentary is presented by humourist Miles Kington. One reason that this latter was chosen to front the MOD is probably a column he published in *The Times* in 1982, on the occasion of the NHU's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, purporting to be the script of a documentary about 'the Natural History cameraman' (Kington, 1982), and in the style of a wildlife documentary:

The life cycle of the cameraman is highly complex, and we still do not understand all of it. Before he sets out on his daring mission from this little shack here in Bristol, he must first arm himself with vast amounts of money and equipment, provided through a fascinating courtship ritual between his producer and the BBC. (Kington, 1982)

The way in which Kington introduces Attenborough at the start of *The Making of the Living Planet*, shows that the 1984 MOD and the 1982 column share the same narrative strategy:

One thing that distinguishes men from other living creatures is that only men make films about other living creatures, and perhaps one of the most famous and interesting of these filmmakers is the species known as David Attenborough. [Ö] for this he has the necessary boundless curiosity and endless energy. What he doesn't have is the vast quantity of money and expertise that only the BBC can offer. He enjoys this rather strange, symbiotic relationship with the BBC, an odd and apparently friendly organism, whose workings we do not yet fully understand. (*The Making of The Living Planet*,

Brock, 1984)

The general tone throughout the documentary is one of casual humour. It can be interpreted as a way for filmmakers to characterise themselves as truth-tellers, by presenting themselves as modest individuals. Historian of science Steven Shapin noted that one feature of the development of experimental science in 17<sup>th</sup> century England was to place a premium on experimenters' displays of modesty: 'a man whose narratives could be credited as mirrors of reality was a "modest man"; his reports should make that modesty visible' (Shapin, 2010: 101). One way for the experimenter to appear as a modest man was, for instance to present himself as 'a drudge of greater industry than reason' (Shapin, 2010:101). *The Making of the Living Planet* introduced the use of footage which usually ends up on the cutting room's floor. For example the final section of the MOD, an interview with David Attenborough, is punctuated with footage from the successive takes of one sequence in the series, in which Attenborough delivers a commentary on the Kakapo and but each time has to stop because the bird is moving out of the frame.

Overall, the self-deprecating tone of *The Making of the Living Planet* can be analysed as a means for filmmakers to secure credibility. Showing accidental footage of failures suggests to viewers that the artifice of filmmaking is not used to deceive. Humour is a rhetorical strategy to provide viewers with '(inadequate) grounds freely to withhold their assent, and hence permitting them freely to constitute the basis of the assent they ultimately [have] to give' (Shapin, 1994:223). Humour enables filmmakers to command their audiences' assent to their message: the notion that the filmmaking apparatus is a legitimate tool to produce valid knowledge of the natural world. In other words, the playfulness of the MOD is intended to defuse potential criticism of, and in effect to normalise the use of artifice in order to represent nature.

Just like the other behind-the-scenes documentaries discussed in this article, this MOD brings to the fore and legitimates the constructedness of the natural history series, disclosing the tricks employed to represent nature on screen. It is very complete in that respect, as it shows every aspects of programme making. Notably, a sequence explaining how views of the bottom of the Pacific Ocean were obtained highlights the role of music, composed by Elizabeth Parker, in creating not so much the illusion, but the allusive atmosphere (Grimaud, 2006) that will create the impression that the camera really captured views of the deep.

The whole of the filmmaking apparatus is thus shown to contribute in creating the conditions whereby viewers can obtain general knowledge of the natural world. Rather than a cause for cognitive disqualification, artifice enables wildlife filmmakers to create on screen the phenomenon they want to represent. In this respect nature filmmakers do not just show nature, they make it visible. Disclosure of the way this is achieved enables wildlife filmmakers to create a cognitive space for their practice alongside that occupied by science, and to lay claims to expertise for themselves within that space, by demonstrating their mastery of the technical means of filmmaking.

## **Conclusion**

This article shows that the wildlife making-of documentary genre started to be developed at a precise moment in the history of wildlife filmmaking in Britain. In the early 1960s, the televising of natural history was starting an important mutation, whereby it began to rely less on the codes and values of the culture of amateur natural history, and more on those of professional

filmmaking. One key aspect of this transition was a change in the understanding of the filmmaking apparatus. Amateur natural history cameramen thought of it as essentially transparent, as a means to record their skilled observations and convey them to audiences. Professional wildlife filmmakers understood it as a visualising technology, whose artifice is necessary to produce reliable representations of nature that could be valid sources of knowledge for their audiences. This transition entailed a necessity to organise audiences' agreement to this new approach to wildlife filmmaking. A task, for a good part, delegated to the MOD.

As the role of the big blockbuster series in this history suggests, the MOD genre co-evolved alongside another genre, the so-called blue-chip documentary, characterised by a high production value. These have been criticised as encouraging a view of nature as something to be enjoyed as a spectacle rather than engaged with in work and play (Mitman, 1999). And the genre emergence is often interpreted as signalling a change of ethic within the culture of wildlife filmmaking from hands-on (exemplified by programmes shot in zoos, for example, where animals were manipulated on screen) to hands-off, non-interaction. But as this article suggests, if a shift in the ethic of natural history film-making occurred it is the other way around, from distance keeping to hands-on interaction. In the MOD, the interventionist approach to nature film-making is valorised, as necessary, and filmmaking, even controlled shooting, is characterised as a valuable form of engagement with nature as it brings insights of the working of nature.

Finally, this article shows that when it comes to the relationship between science and television, the case of natural history filmmaking indicates that in the 1960s, the idea emerged that television was not subservient to science. On the contrary, as a visualising technology, it can contribute, as epistemological equal, in the production of knowledge of the natural world. And as MODs demonstrate, filmmakers, as technical experts, are key participants in this enterprise.

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