

Wildlife Television: Eyes to See the Wild Animal's World

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Abstract: *This essay talks about the shooting, editing, and other perspectives of two wild animals documentaries *One Life*(2011) and *The Hunt*(2015), to show how TV presents and interprets wild animals and how it draws the distance between humans and the wildlife world through TV, so as to create the audience's closeness/immersion and emotional resonance for the wild world.*

Keywords: *Wildlife Television, Shooting technique, immersion*

1. Introduction

Since the Neolithic age, more than 10000 years ago, when humans learned to train hounds and raise poultry, animals have been forced to divide into domestic and wild animals. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Domestication, October 23, 2020)[1] Thus, just as lions do not know that they are wild animals, the emergence of the word wild animals is only for human beings, who gave the term to those non-domestic animals. With the continuous progress and development of human society, the living areas of wild animals have been invaded and occupied by human beings, and even wild animals suffer from the hunting and killing brought by human beings. As a result, today's wild animal community has become very rare on the earth; the vast majority of human beings do not have the opportunity to contact wild animals. Their understanding of wildlife's definition is forced to be constructed from books, television, or the Internet. In this case, television has become one of the most intuitive media for people to learn about wild animals. In the following part, I will analyze the shooting, editing, and other perspectives of two wild animals documentaries *One Life*(2011)[2] and *The Hunt*(2015)[3], to show how TV presents and interprets wild animals, and how it draws the distance between human and the wildlife world through TV, so as to create the audience's closeness/immersion and emotional resonance for the wild world.

2. Cruelty in the wild

As early as 500 years ago, a Chinese Ming Dynasty novel <The Journey to the West>(Chen Wu, The Ming dynasty)[4] introduced an idiom called "E Hu Pu Shi" It is used to describe a person's action, which is fierce and swift, just like a hungry tiger rushing to food. The use of hungry tigers in the book also shows that humans have been afraid of wild animals since ancient times and believe that wild animals' lives are cruel. In order to survive, their lives are often related to hunting and being killed. As the media of that era, books vividly explained wild animals to readers in the form of narration. As one of the main media of modern society, TV effectively models and presents the coldness, ferocity, and wisdom of wild animals to survive by using sound effects and pictures, and other factors. For example, *The Hunt* (2015), a television documentary with seven sub-themes, tells about the struggle between predators and potential predators in different geographical environments.

Take the first chapter, "The Hardest Challenge," as an example; it focuses on how the leopard passes through many challenging obstacles to approach the antelope and complete the hunt. From the video, it can be found that although the process only took place in five minutes, the BBC perfectly recorded the cheetah's hunting and the antelope's attempt to alert and try to escape in many aspects. It makes people wonder how the documentary can be filmed in a state of high vigilance during wild animal hunting. In what kind of way can the documentary achieve an all-around candid camera? In response to such problems, the BBC website published an article entitled "How 'The Hunt' was Filmed"(BBC Earth) in 2015, which explained how the film crew contacted and filmed wild animals within three years. In

addition to the enormous amount of waiting time during the shooting process, the article also mentioned that the crew tried to place the Cineflex - a helicopter shooting stabilizer on the car to achieve a stable tracking shot effect. In order to make the film crews go deep into the wild animal's world safely, they even put the camera on trained elephants and then follow the elephants' steps to get close to wild animals such as cheetahs and tigers. In addition, the hidden camera was placed in the area where animals often hunt, so the BBC team successfully exploited multi-directional shooting and the recording of wild animals' hunting process. In the video, the shooting team mainly narrates the whole hunting process through a panorama, the leopard's subjective perspective, antelope's emotional perspective, aerial photography, and close-up. When the antelope eat the grass on the alert, the leopard hides its body in the gully and lurks close to the antelope bit by bit. These subjective perspectives from animals give the audience a more intimate and involving view, which makes the audience feel the intense stimulation of the hunting scene and the prey's cruelty and helplessness from the animals' perspective. In addition to the perspective of shots, sound design is also an essential part of narrating wild animals' living conditions. First of all, the video uses the natural background sound ambience(chirp, wind, etc.). The sound effects of an antelope eating grass or a leopard's footstep create a real and robust immersive world of wild animals for the audience; also, couple the background music that conforms to the tension of hunting, the deep and attractive voiceover of narration enables the video to give the audience a corresponding emotion in each main plot. Take a moment when the leopard starts to catch the antelope as an example; the leopard finally begins to attack the antelope group after a long period of stalking. At that moment, the video's original, low background music suddenly enters the climax. The animal's sound and footsteps sound are amplified, and the narrator's voice and tone become firm and tense. To let the audience feel and watch the hunting moment more clearly, the filmmakers especially choose slow-motion at this moment. All the editing and shooting techniques are designed to allow the audience to observe the feeding state of wild animals and feel the tension of the scene at that time and the fear and helplessness of the antelope. [5]

It can be said that through *The Hunt*'s(2015) presentation and interpretation of wild animals, viewers can safely and easily watch dangerous wildlife hunts from their homes; It reduces the difficulty for humans to understand wild animals; And bring people closer to the wildlife world; It has played a role in popularizing science to people who do not know about wild animals in the city. The wildlife documentary enables the audience to feel the intense emotion of hunting in the wildlife world through the infectivity of the video in a safe and comfortable urban environment to increase human understanding, sympathy, and even awe for wildlife. As <Waitrose & Partners Food and Drink Report 2018-19> (Waitrose & Partners, 2018) points out, about 88 per cent of viewers have changed their bad habits after watching BBC's Blue Planet II and become more environmentally conscious. In this way, the audience can effectively understand the danger of wild animals and their survival difficulty, thus triggering the audience's desire to protect wild animals (environmental protection, donation, etc.) and know to keep a reasonable distance from wild animals. [6]

3. Survival and reproduction

Although wild animals often have to face cruel hunting and being killed in order to survive, just like human beings, most wild animals also experience birth, growth, feeding, and death. There is ferocity and cruelty in the instinct of wild animals and the ability to cherish life and the affection between companions as shown in the documentary *One Life*(2011), a wild animal community such as elephants or monkeys, although wild animals, also have a distinct hierarchy and play their respective roles in the community, protecting each other and raising their cubs together. *One Life*(2011) clearly shows the process from the birth of wild animals to the completion of inheriting the offspring's mission in plain and real forms of expression. The audience learns that wild animals are aggressive and have the ability to be emotional and think at the same time.

In his article, Jan - Christopher Horak once said that wildlife documentary is an extension of human vision and a means to enter the invisible world. (Film History: An International Journal, 2006)[7] The documentary *One Life*(2011) plays a fundamental and effective visual extension role, which allows the audience to see the survival and reproduction of wild animals. Taking the elephant community in *One Life*(2011) as an example, the camera team followed the elephants searching for water on the grassland. From aerial shots, we can see that a group of more than a dozen elephants is marching forward for a pool in the vast Kenya grassland. Then there is a cut to the small elephant in medium close-up, which is trying hard and struggling to follow the elephant's advanced speed, such a switch between a super wide shot and a close-up shot, combined with the narrator's voiceover, which clearly shows the vast, dry grassland. It is also more likely to let the audience identify with the elephant community, which struggles to find

water and desperately needs water. The audience can even feel the difficulty of the elephant community's survival in nature (especially the small elephant). But at the same time, through the camera and narrator, we can also see the care and the love of adult elephants for their child in the community. Especially when the baby elephant is stuck in the mire, the editor uses the close-up of the elephant mother's eyes and the anxious roar to create the mother's anxiety about her baby and her worry when she cannot rescue the baby elephant. The expression of animals is not as rich as that of human beings. When shooting wild animals in the wild, it is impossible to record all the animals' psychological states through the camera. The editing form adopted by the editor here just makes up for the lack of this aspect and perfectly presents the animal's psychological state at that time to the audience. As mentioned by Jan - Christopher Horak, "It is also characteristic of nature documentaries that despite their intention to reproduce the real iconically, they are never strictly documents of animal activity, but are artificial constructs which are largely dependent on classical documentary film techniques." (Film History: An International Journal, 2006) In wildlife documentaries, the production team will certainly meet the demands of accurately conveying information to the audience through some editing and production methods. Although these videos are not 100% real due to the design and processing of later post-production, they can more effectively show the life of wild animals to the audience and more powerfully convey the animals' genuine emotions to the audience. The reason why the production team's depiction of the relationship between elephants and baby elephants in *One Life* (2011) makes the audience feel the love between elephants and the efforts made by animals to survive is to let the audience find that the wildlife world is full of ethics, family affection, and even love factors as the human world by shaping the love and companionship between animal races. It can arouse the audience's empathy, help the audience correctly understand the emotional world of wild animals, arouse the audience's respect for wild animals, and thus better protect wild animals and their living environment.

4. Conclusion

Different types of wild animals TV bring different viewing experiences to the audience. But each wild animal documentary-style helps construct a wild animal world. These are all essential elements of the wild animal world, whether it is ferocity, danger, nurturing, or accompanying. The wild animal world has initially been very far away from human society. Without the support of television, books, and other media, human beings would not be able to understand and define wild animals deeply. Therefore, with the advantages of video and sound effects, TV can help people to achieve this demand more effectively. In wild animals documentaries, each kind of story is filled with different kinds of wild animals' life, and even the survival rules of wild animals. While people are expanding their understanding of the wild animal's world, they also imperceptibly increase their sympathy and awe for the wild animal's world because television can more effectively convey the emotions between wild animals and the audience (such as the tension in hunting, the helplessness of being hunted, the care and love when feeding the child, etc.). These are the emotions that human beings can obtain through watching TV. Human beings can empathize with their living conditions and struggle to survive, which is the most special factor that TV programs can help in constructing wild animals. The article "Wild" (Brett Mills, 2017)[8] states that the way we look at the earth will affect how we treat the earth. Television gives the audience more intuitive visual, auditory, and even emotional feelings. When the audience deeply perceives the wild animal's world, they can put themselves in their place. Therefore, TV's special emotions can even help human beings promote wild animal protection and let more people begin to pay attention to the equal relationship between wild animals and human beings.

In summary, people have a more convenient and intuitive way to understand the wild animal world through TV. Through the editing and shooting methods of the production, wildlife documentaries are endowed with emotions (excitement, tension, sadness, love, etc.) so that the audience can feel the emotional world of wildlife and resonate with it while watching TV. It enables the audience to enjoy the immersive experience of the wild animal world in the city and achieves the scientific popularization of the wild animal world. Like an eye, television helps people aid in constructing "wild animals" at a deeper level.

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