

Audiovisual Reviews

YEAR OF THE WILDEBEEST

1978. Benchmark Films, (145 Scarborough, Briarcliff Manor, New York 10510). 16mm color-sound film. 55 minutes. Purchase \$745; rental \$75.

This film is one of the best developed to date to show interrelationships between organisms and their environments. From opening scenes of a herd of a million wildebeests ranging as far across the Serengetti as the eye can see, the film depicts the tremendous journey of a species that has evolved for millions of years. The excellence of the photography and technical work is a reason in itself for showing the film.

The subjects treated in the film include evolution, geology, ecology, animal behavior, and many others. Evolution is touched on during the discussion of Olduvai Gorge, where Dr. Leakey has found the footprints of human ancestors. Geology is brought to bear in the explanation of how the Serengetti and surrounding countryside were formed during the Volcanic Age and shaped by the wildebeests themselves. The greatest strength of the content, however, lies in the ecological and behavioral relationships between and among wildebeests, predators, scavengers, and the plant life on which the wildebeests depend.

The main principles of ecology and animal behavior that are shown in graphic detail include predator-prey relationships, territoriality, K-selection, symbiosis, niche differentiation, homeostasis, migration, courtship, displacement behavior, competition, and fitness. Natural regulation of population numbers receives repeated attention. Especially memorable is the section where the wildebeests are shown crossing a shallow lake on the last leg of their journey. Females and young become separated. What ensues would be a disaster by human terms: fifteen hundred calves die as mothers and young search back and forth across the lake for seven days.

The discussion potential of the film is enormous. The film can be stopped at various places for discussion of the main ideas presented. Possible topics for discussion range from what ecological principle is illustrated to what implications for humans and natural population regulation are apparent. Indeed, the fact that

the Serengetti is a renewable resource should point to the implications for humans.

The *Year of the Wildebeest* is a useful film for high school, college, and adult audiences. The nuances of behavior and interrelatedness of species with the environment might escape the younger viewer, but the film is still tremendously valuable. More sophisticated students will find a host of topics for discussion and further individual research. I recommend the film highly.

Robert D. Judy, Jr.
Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
Boulder, Colorado

Faith Hickman, Audiovisuals Editor, selects materials and coordinates the review process for this feature. Catherine Marble is her assistant. Their continuing contribution to the journal is deeply appreciated.

Readers interested in becoming audiovisual reviewers are invited to write to Ms. Hickman. General inquiries on this feature should also be addressed directly to her at:

Post Office Box 930
Boulder, Colorado 80306

WILD BABIES

1979. Marty Stouffer Productions, Ltd., (P.O. Box 15057, Aspen, Colorado 81611). 16mm color-sound film. 26 minutes. Purchase and rental costs not given.

This engaging film portrays the activities of a variety of wild animals in their natural habitats. Focusing primarily on courtship, mating, and rearing of the young, the film emphasizes ecological adaptation, natural selection and our vanishing wildlife. Some commonly held misconceptions about wildlife behavior are corrected. For example, the seeming death struggle of two bull elk is settled not with the death but with the withdrawal of one, leaving the leadership of the harem to the remaining elk. Lesser known details such as the community mating of mallards add to the film's gen-

eral interest. Emphasis is placed throughout the film on the improvement of genetic stocks by the various rituals of courtship.

Fast paced and colorful, the film moves through a variety of scenes of the behavior of wild animals in their natural habitats. Typical scenes include frogs courting in ponds, mountain goats scampering along rocky cliffs, and owls feeding at night. The skill and patience of the photographer is evident in such unusual shots as a mother raccoon defending her young against a cougar and eagles capturing prey and feeding their young in their remote nests.

Touches of humor add to the appeal of the film. In one scene, a mother raccoon leads her babies across a stream. One hyperactive raccoon offspring fails to negotiate the log successfully and ends up with an impromptu swimming lesson.

The uniformly excellent color photography gives the viewer the impression of being an unseen observer of wildlife in its natural setting. The sound track is contemporary and appropriate to the changing moods of the film. The accompanying narration provides a maximum of information with a minimum of terminology.

The accompanying teacher's guide is well prepared, providing background information beyond the film presentation. It lists both ideas for discussion and questions for students to answer from the film. One of the objectives of the film is to create awareness of the rapidly vanishing American wildlife and the guide provides a list of organizations that could be consulted by students concerned about this trend. Such a mechanism for channeling discussion into action is a very desirable addition.

The film would be useful with junior high, senior high, and adult groups. It is part of an award winning wildlife series (*The Wilderness World of Marty Stouffer*) and is suitable for studies in reproduction and embryology of mammals, animal behavior, evolution, and environmental studies.

This is a film your students will enjoy as they learn from it. I recommend it heartily.

Elva D. Aukland
T.C. Williams High School
Alexandria, Virginia