



Wild about VIDEOGRAPHY

DVD Review - Successful Wildlife Videography

'Successful Wildlife Videography' is pretty much exactly what is says on the cover— a DVD which shows you, "how to make wildlife films". If this review ended there it would have pretty much given you the complete story—but that wouldn't really do either the DVD or our readers any justice now would it?

Before watching the DVD I must admit to having no specialist knowledge or experience in filming wildlife—and to be honest, not much of a hankering to do so either. I really enjoy and appreciate a good wildlife film but that's about as far as it has gone. Well, that's not entirely true as I started to keep bees about 3 years ago and will shortly be helping to produce some films on the subject. As one of the bonus tracks on the DVD was tips on filming bees I had an ulterior motive for reviewing this. And I have to say, I got a whole lot more than just a quick though useful tip on capturing my honey collectors.

Intended audience

I don't think the producers (Generic Pool) nor the presenter (Mike Linley) would mind me saying that this is really aimed at the novice producer. However, by the end of the DVD you should have gained enough information to take you from this point to one of having confidence in taking on what is a rather specialised craft. That is by no means a mean achievement.

The viewer is taken on a logical and well planned path through the kit, processes, techniques, ethics, field craft, writing for wildlife and tips of filming various species—both in the wild and in a studio controlled environment.

But even if you have no intention or interest in filming wildlife you'll also gain a lot from this DVD. There are some fantastic tips on macro photography, obtaining perfect exposure, long-lens practice and general videography skills which apply equally in any production environment.

About the presenter

It becomes very clear from early on that Mike Linley is very knowledgeable and experienced in the subject. His style is probably best described as, 'quietly confident' and at no point does he appear to be bluffing his way through.

Having developed an interest in wildlife from a very early age, Mike left school and went to Durham University to study zoology and botany under the inspiration wildlife filmmaker, David Bellamy.

After a period teaching, Mike went to Bristol University on a post-graduate course studying reptile behaviour. It was then that Mike was approached by BBC Bristol who were making the 'Life on Earth' series. Mike was brought in to help capture reptiles and amphibians acting naturally under captive conditions.

This experience gave Mike a clearer view of where his career should be heading, so in the early eighties he approach the Survival offices at Anglia Television and was soon working for them as a writer/producer. He has since produced over 70 Survival documentaries and many other wildlife programmes.

In more recent years Mike started his own production company in Norwich (Hairy Frog Productions) and continues to make his own programmes from a vast archive of films on various wildlife subjects.

It is important for any instructional video that the audience feels confident in the knowledge being passed on by the presenter—and that the

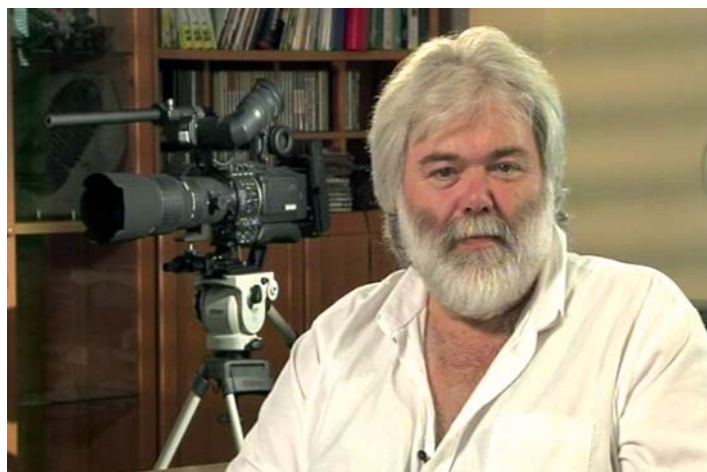
presenter is able to share that knowledge in a easy to consume manner. Mike's soft yet confident approach is spot on—and leaves you feeling that you've spent more than 2-hours in the company of someone at the top of their craft who is only too pleased to share their vast knowledge with you.

The Kit

I personally find it hard to advise people on what kit they should invest in as they rarely know exactly what they'll be using the kit for. This DVD is quite the opposite, as there's a clear objective in the specification process—and that's the right stuff to produce wildlife films.

Accepting that the intended audience is not going to have the same kit budget of the BBC, Mike concentrates on the virtues of HDV-level kit—and quickly establishes JVC's 100 & 200 series HDV cameras as the perfect choice at this level of investment.

As many of the techniques and situations faced by wildlife producers require specialist lenses and accessories, these JVC cameras offer the videographer a very flexible and adaptable solution. Mike is also very quick to establish the importance of being able to manually control the camera lens. The JVC cameras (even with their basic lens option) are much more akin to the TV and film cameras used in high-budget broadcast productions. Mike shows how you can combine the JVC cameras with relatively inexpensive photographic lenses to achieve quite astonishing magnification.





But Mike's recommendations go beyond the cameras and lenses you should be using. Essentially every piece of kit that you will need is covered—and more importantly he gives a convincing argument for why he would opt for one brand over another. The section on tripods is a good example of a convincing argument of spending a couple of grand on a Vinten tripod over a lesser, cheaper impostor.

Mike, Matte Boxes, Focus Controllers, Battery Systems... the list goes on until Mike's bag of recommended production tools is complete. And yet, by the end of this section you don't feel like you've sat through 30-minutes of QVC—just a friendly chat with someone who has been there and done it.

Techniques

Having presented his case for the kit, the real gems start to come out where Mike shares his knowledge of production techniques—not only covering general videography skills but also those particular to wildlife film production.

From composition and framing though to camera movement and lighting—these are skills which every videographer can utilise. Whilst these are related back to the main subject of capturing wildlife, they stand as good general instruction in camera craft.

I was particularly interested in the Macro Videography chapter for my own impending honeybee project, but again this



was all handy knowledge for anyone who needs to get up close in involved with any subject. From simple basic lens macro work through to using endoscopes—you get a real appreciation for how really great wildlife films are created.

The specific wildlife subjects of field craft, animal behaviour, camouflage, circle of fear, safety and ethics were also extremely interesting and well presented. And Mike's tips on writing wildlife scripts and planning the production will help you to avoid making productions which are bland and uninteresting.

Conclusion

I've already said who this DVD is aimed at, but it does extend beyond that shortlist. Anyone who has an interest in animals or wildlife in general but who doesn't have any experience in making films will be enabled to start documenting their interest and sharing it with a wider audience. I also think the more experienced wildlife producers will enjoy Mike's approach to the subject, and dare I say it, pick up the odd 'trick of the trade' hear and there.

But above all, I think this is going to be useful to anyone wanting to create interesting and well-crafted videos. Each chapter contains one or two gems of information which Mike manages to get over in a way that the information will stick.

At only £39.95 plus £2.95 P&P its little more than a few blank tapes—and contains more than enough information to take you from complete novice to an informed wildlife filmmaker in a little over 2-hours. ■

Kevin Cook F.Inst.V.

Note: More details and the ability to order your copy of this DVD are available from the official website—
www.wildlifefilmmaking.co.uk



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