

THE WADDEN SEA

LIVING ON THE EDGE



GENRE: Wildlife Film / Documentary

TRAILER: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho6eaEhcoeg>

LOGLINE:

The first cinematic celebration of the Wadden Sea, the largest intertidal wet-lands in the world, one of the most extreme and unknown habitats remaining on the planet. A Unesco heritage site shared by The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. Shot in 4k packed with emotion, insight, humour and astonishing visuals.

SYNOPSIS:

LIVING ON THE EDGE goes inside the lives of (e.g.) a group of grey seals, shell ducks and a family of peregrine falcons in the Wadden Sea, a sea which changes completely over the seasons or even a couple of times per day. At one moment, it is kilometers of extensive tidal flats full of life and at another a mass of water with reckless waves; all tied to the invisible influence of the moon and the sun on the tides.

Below this seemingly tranquil mud surface, is life at it's fullest: underwater as well as on the ground. Animals must be well equipped to survive in the Wadden Sea. Life is challenging, they must conquer their

niche and above all adapt. Storms or extreme draught are continually changing shape and some- times even location of the multitude of tidal channels, sandy shoals, sea-grass meadows, mussel beds, sandbars, mud- flats, salt marshes, estuaries beaches and dunes. Home to approximately 5,000 species of flora and fauna, this mysterious, highly dynamic shifting place can host up to 6. 1 million birds at one time, and 10 - 12 million each year pass through this marine "runway".

LIVING ON THE EDGE is a landmark production that will transports viewers to a daring, remote and pristine marine environment that highlighting the rela- tionship between Earth and its plane- tary forces. A treasure trove of natural phenomena, facts and images that will mesmerize audiences worldwide.

REASON:

The Wadden Sea influences nature far beyond its own boundaries making it indispensable for the world. It is one of last remaining large-scale intertidal ecosystems where natural forces have free reign without a dominating in- fluence from human activites. Food is abundant making it a nursery for fish species in the North Sea, a transition area for fish that live in salt water during certain stages of their lives and fresh water at other times, an important tanking station for migrating birds and winter guests and exposed sandbanks and uninhabited islands provide areas for seals to rest and nurse their young. During preparations, the crew filmed previously unrecorded events like the birth of a wild seal pup) The Wadden Sea is one of the remaining strong holds of marine diversity on the planet.

GOAL:

To share the endless interplay between water and earth in the northern edge of Europe as never seen before. A must for audiences thirsty for grand nature inspi- ration and hope.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Suitable for a broad audience, focusing on families, BBC wildlife fans,

PREMISE:

Take an immersive journey into the amazing and unknown natural world of the Wadden Sea (World heritage site) as viewers discover the secret life of this spectacular location.

TECHNIQUE:

State of the art filming techniques; (3- axis) time lapse, ultra high-speed (slow motion up to 1500 fps), aerials (Cineflex, drones), extreme macro (10: 1 magni- fication), spy cams, wildlife cameras, underwater movie techniques: 4K, (wi- descreen), Dolby 5.1.

SCHEDULE:

Recording began in May 2013 until end of September 2018. The film has been released on October 1 in the Netherlands

THEATRICAL RESULTS:

Over 120.000 visitors, with a BO > € 1 milio (film is still running, Feb 5 2019), second best documentary in Dutch theaters ever



DIRECTOR'S VISION

(RUBEN SMIT)

PREFACE

The Wadden Sea region is a nature reserve of international allure which hasn't been declared a world heritage site for nothing. On a global scale, Wadden

Sea areas are extremely rare. In terms of space, scale and birdlife, there are only twelve regions worldwide that can compete with 'our' Wadden Sea region. Wadden Sea regions are just as rare as they are biologically diverse.

Because of the temperate climate, the Wadden Sea is relatively warm, which makes it the ideal nursery for many organisms, including fish, molluscs and all kinds of micro fauna, making it an optimal storage cellar for many animal species in the world.

Some mudflats contain a larger biomass and a larger number of (micro) organisms than a rainforest.

The Wadden Sea region offers food for species that are threatened on a global scale. As a result, many bird species visit the Wadden Sea region every year during their migration to build up their strength. The Wadden Sea region is one of the most important stop-overs on

a global scale for millions of migratory birds on their migration flyways. Each species arrives at the exact moment that the food they require is available; meals on wheels in huge quantities at the right time.

Only the specialists can survive in this capricious area where one is constantly on the brink of life and death. The different animals must take various considerations into account; the hunters among the fellow species, the rhythm of night and day, the climate and above all, the tides that drain or flood the region twice a day. Since the course of each tide is related to the position of the moon and the galaxy,

all inhabitants of the Wadden Sea region are at the mercy of the cosmos. The risks for the various animals on land, mudflats and in the water are enormous, especially at full moon and new moon (spring tide) and at half-moon (neap tide). Death, therefore, is an omnipresent factor in the Wadden Sea. This applies even to the ambassador of the Wadden Sea region, the grey seal.

Unparalleled is the fact that the Wadden Islands are also constantly in motion. The landscape must continually adapt to changes in tide, season and thus in sedimentation/erosion processes as it literally moves forward. The Wadden region is continually changing; gullies, mud flats, salt marshes and dunes are perpetually in motion.

MOTIVATION

Already at the time of and prior to the production of the theatrical film, *The New Wilderness*, maker/director, Ruben Smit, wanted to make a great nature series about the Wadden Sea. The most important reason is simple: no significant, high-quality nature series has ever been made about the (Dutch) Wadden area!

As world heritage, the Wadden Sea region has a global value. The challenge of this project is to provide insight into the natural processes that take place in this dynamic region. The central theme being: 'living on the edge'. Life in the Wadden ecosystem requires the utmost from plants and animals. This intense struggle forms a field of tension that is portrayed in a visually spectacular way. In addition to the intrinsic, aesthetic value of the Wadden Sea, this series shows the interactions between special Wadden organisms, both below and above water. The

central theme is the story about the unique biodiversity of the Wadden Sea. The objective is to show the complete Wadden ecosystem as much as possible, whereby various indicative and visual types of animals (and plants) are followed throughout the seasons. The characters of several individual animals will tell the story. These characters are derived from the various layers of the ecosystem. From very low (lugworms, diatoms) to very high in the food web (peregrine falcon, grey seal). The stratification in the ecosystem is also reflected in the stratification in form of the images, in which scale and thus the repetition of form gets an important interpretation. Furthermore, the focus is on the dynamics of many characteristic habitats of the Wadden Sea region, where the development (vegetation, structure) will be followed throughout the seasons. For example, the dynamics of a more natural reef (mussel/oyster bank), a young salt marsh and a primary dune.

Although I have a scientific background as an ecologist, I consider myself above all a storyteller who likes to present an overall picture. Within the mass of scientific insights about nature (and those beyond) I create an overall picture which opens people's eyes and lets them marvel. Only within a larger picture, does it become clear in my opinion that there's no such thing as coincidence in nature. All organisms (animal and plant) are interrelated with one another and are dependent on each other.

APPROACH

In 'The New Wilderness', I used this kaleidoscopic form for the first time in feature films. I consciously presented the animal species that live in and around the Oostvaarders lakes, in their surroundings, as part of an ecosystem to make it clear that each species is unique, but that there's no question of independence. Everyone's destiny is interconnected, and all individual tasks serve a common purpose.

I also use this kaleidoscopic approach in 'Living on the Edge, Wadden Sea World Heritage.'

To map out the globally unique ecosystem of the Wadden Sea region, I oversee all available scientific information about the Wadden Sea region, as well as carry out extensive fieldwork on and around the Wadden Sea. For four years I have been following life on the Wadden Sea with my camera crew and have gathered a wealth of (partly unknown) information about the environment and the animals that live there and those that pass through it. My research so far has not only confirmed scientific

findings but has also imposed a lot of meaningful new knowledge about life in the Wadden Sea region. A life that is much rougher, harder and more dramatic than life in the Oostvaarders lakes.

The main plot of the series revolves around the turbulent first years of life of a grey seal that is abandoned by its mother shortly after its birth. With this, the viewer is immediately confronted with the purity and ruggedness of life in the Wadden region.

Subplots are formed by story lines of other animals in the Wadden Sea region, such as shelducks and rabbits, which we mainly see in specific, dramatic situations throughout the year. The drama is always caused by a combination of tides, climate and the possible threat from other animal species. Other topics addressed include the game between hunter and prey,

the consequences of spring tide for different species in the Wadden Sea and that of storm and drought. Through the intense way of filming whereby main characters are filmed up-close at the most extreme moments, it becomes tangible and even tactile to the viewers what life in the Wadden region entails.

I am convinced that this intimate approach to this nature series increases the emotional involvement of the viewers towards the spectacular Wadden Sea region.

PERSONIFICATION & CINEMATOGRAPHY

A central role within the 'feature film approach' is the character choice of individual animals. The difference between life and death is very small.

For every species, it is a constant choice of which survival strategy do I use? This creates different characters within the species. An oystercatcher that wants to nest close to its feeding area must continuously fight and wait a long time before it finally gets a spot and can successfully work on its offspring. Another oystercatcher that decides to nest further away from its feeding area to avoid the stress, may experience more peace but has a smaller chance of raising youngsters successfully. So, there are winners and losers within every species but also dummies and geniuses. This approach based on many scientific insights leads to the necessary personification of animals and thus individuals. Individual animals get a character whereby recognisable behaviour comes into play. In addition to an emotional connection, this approach also leads to situations in which humour plays a role.

Furthermore, the photographic way of filming is particularly distinctive and decisive for the look & feel of the series.

In 'Living on the Edge, Wadden Sea World Heritage', the visual emphasis is primarily on perception. People must be overwhelmed by the different forces that influence the species living in the area from all sides.

I also underline the perception by paying a great deal of attention to extremes in climate, tide, landscape and lifestyle; and the extremity in mass in which different animal species are present. A grey seal is born in the middle of winter during sand storms and often at high tide. As a viewer, you feel the elements and thanks to the special camera work with mostly wide-angle lenses (via spycams and using drone techniques), you experience this struggle at very close range.

The magical character of the Wadden Sea region is expressed in the direct relationship of the Wadden Sea to the cosmos. By using unique images of the Milky Way, bright starry skies and moon phases, I want to continually prepare the audience intuitively for new situations. The use of the sky here is emphatically dramatic. This in contrast to many other nature series, where these images often serve as moments of transition.

The pulsating dynamics of the constantly turning tide will determine the visual rhythm and the style of the series. We not only see repetition in the tides, but also in primordial forms characteristic to the Wadden Sea region, which always return to different places in both large and small scales. The long-term dynamic of the Wadden Sea region is also addressed.