

NATURE

press information

25 YEARS



PBS

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WNET NEW YORK

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *NATURE* CHRONICLES AFRICAN ELEPHANT FAMILIES THROUGH STUNNING CINEMATOGRAPHY AND STILL PHOTOS IN *UNFORGETTABLE ELEPHANTS*, PREMIERING APRIL 1 ON PBS

Award-Winning Filmmaker Martyn Colbeck's Breathtaking Film And Stills Include Matriarch Echo And Her Family, Plus "Almost Mythical" Desert Elephants And Elusive Rainforest Cousins

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On the grassy Kenya savannah beneath the snowy peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, filmmaker Martyn Colbeck has filmed and photographed elephants for nearly 20 years. He patiently earned the trust of a matriarch named Echo and her offspring, and, with that trust, privileged glimpses into the most intimate moments of their lives. Colbeck has captured nothing less than a stirring family saga spanning generations, including poignant births and deaths, carefree play and ferocious fights, reluctant partings and joyous reunions – even every mother's worst nightmare, the kidnapping of her baby. Narrated by Colbeck, *Unforgettable Elephants* premieres Sunday, April 1 at 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings).

Along with his captivating footage and stills, Colbeck shares his insights into elephants' advanced social development – their ability to communicate and cooperate, their complex emotions and strong loyalty to one another. "I've witnessed the most incredible scenes: terrifying battles for supremacy, emotional births, and even the callous kidnapping of a youngster," he says. "Unexpectedly, these fascinating animals hijacked my life, and capturing them on film became my passion."

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Colbeck's visually striking journey also takes viewers to Namibia, where he spies a creature so rarely seen as to be almost mythical – the desert elephant. In one of the film's most arresting sequences, he captures a group's march across a sea of undulating, arid dunes for a precious drink of water. They need 70 to 90 liters of water a day, and Colbeck believes they must have powerful mental maps of the area's few-and-far-between water holes.

Traveling to the Congo rainforest, Colbeck documents the equally elusive jungle elephant. Only a fraction of the size of their savannah cousins, these small elephants and their small families congregate in scores near water holes, enjoying each other's company.

Back at Kenya's Amboseli National Park, Colbeck resumes his time with Echo and her family, which has grown from 14 to 30 members in the years that he has been documenting them. Among the many poignant scenes he records is the days-long struggle of her newborn calf Ely to fully straighten his front legs – the first time such a condition was caught on film. He captures a family's raucous greeting ceremony after time spent apart and the deafening chorus of snores from an elephant slumber party 15 strong. And in a gripping scene, he films Grace, a new mother in another family, tenderly using her trunk and sole tusk to move her prematurely born calf out of the blistering sun.

After determining Echo is once again pregnant and waiting through her 22-month gestation period, Colbeck is allowed a privileged, close-up vantage point to film the nighttime birth of her calf Ebony. Later, Ebony would be kidnapped by a rival family trying to assert its place in the elephant hierarchy, only to be rescued by a show of brute force by Echo and the other large females in her family.

Echo is now 60 years old, yet recently bore her eighth calf, a baby girl named Esprit, who may come to be a matriarch herself generations hence.

Now in its 25th anniversary season, *NATURE* has won nearly 400 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film community, parent groups, and environmental

organizations, including eight Emmys, two Peabodys and the first award given to a television program by the Sierra Club.

To celebrate the series' 25th anniversary, **NATURE ONLINE** (www.pbs.org/nature) has launched a redesigned and expanded Web site, including such new features as a weekly video podcast and newsletter, streaming video clips, an RSS feed, user bulletin boards and polls, new teacher lesson plans, photo slideshows, and more.

Unforgettable Elephants is a production of Mike Birkhead Associates and Thirteen/WNET New York in association with BBC. **NATURE** is produced by Thirteen/WNET New York for PBS. Fred Kaufman is executive producer; William Grant is executive-in-charge. Major corporate support for **NATURE** is provided by Canon U.S.A., Inc., and Ford. Additional support is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the nation's public television stations.

The series is closed-captioned for the hearing-impaired and distributed with Descriptive Video Service (DVS) for the sight-impaired.

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Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* - as well as the work of Bill Moyers - to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials, The Thirteen Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects - including the Celebration of Teaching and Learning - as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

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