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BOHEMIA

A YEAR IN THE WETLANDS

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# BOHEMIA

## ■ A FILM BY MICHAEL SCHLAMBERGER & JIRI PETR

Bohemia has a long and ancient history; the name was first recorded as Boi-Heim around the first century BC. Then it was the home of a Celtic tribe - the Boii.

Today Bohemia is a part of the Czech Republic and seldom visited by outsiders. It is a hidden jewel in the heart of Europe, where an ancient and virtually unchanged world is surrounded by the 21st Century.



## ■ AN APPARENTLY UNTOUCHED LAND

Parts of Bohemia are a haven for wildlife and there are wetlands that provide a sanctuary for many species of birds as well as mammals that few would ever think of as being native to Europe.

But strangely, these wetlands are manmade; almost five hundred artificially dug ponds linked by channels and canals. Centuries ago the borders between natural and cultivated lands were never precise, but even by the Middle Ages the almost inaccessible swamps and marshlands between the Vltava and Lužnice rivers were being transformed into artificial wetlands. And the reason for this was a fish - the carp, an Asian fish first brought to Europe during the time of the Roman Empire.





# BOHEMIA

## ■ CYCLE OF LIFE

BOHEMIA - A YEAR IN THE WETLANDS takes us through the seasons of one year in this enchanted and extraordinary landscape known to only a few. Yet in this artificial landscape of ponds and canals, wildlife thrives.

More than one hundred and fifty bird species breed here, also many migratory birds fly to the wetlands to escape even harsher winters further north.

The ponds are a haven for water insects and in this world within a world bizarre and alien creatures stalk and hunt and fall prey in the never ceasing cycle of life and death.

Then they emerge from the water and we see them as dragonflies and damselflies, but without the wetlands they could not survive.

There are Red Deer in the riverine forests that border the ponds, otters too and perhaps most surprising of all there is a population of wild moose, an animal which few people think of as European being more commonly associated with North America.

But it is the ponds themselves which allow this amazing diversity of wildlife to continue to thrive in the heart of central Europe.





# BOHEMIA

## ■ MAN AND NATURE IN HARMONY

It was the Cistercian monks of the order of St. Bernard who began to breed carp, the reason being to supplement their diet during those times in the Christian calendar when people fasted and meat was not allowed.

This was especially so during the season Lent, a time of penance and fasting. The first ponds were built around the 13th century, but the oldest surviving big ponds were dug later.

Several engineers were associated with the building of these ponds, but the most famous is Jakub Krcín. He was the last of the architects and pond builders; not only did he complete the works that had been started previously, he built the largest of the ponds, named Rožmberk.

This pond covers almost 1,000 hectares and is sometimes called the Bohemian Sea.

Today the ponds have become a part of the culture of this region of the Czech Republic, and people still farm the carp in the traditional manner by draining the water and almost herding the fish into nets so they can be collected, sorted and sold.





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The locks and irrigation channels that control the levels of the water in the ponds are still used as they were in the Middle Ages and at dawn, as the fishermen wade out in the water, it is like taking a journey back in time.

BOHEMIA - A YEAR IN THE WETLANDS took more than one hundred days to film, through all of the seasons.

Michael Schlamberger of ScienceVision film production based in Graz/Austria worked closely with his long-time friend Jiri Petr who was born and still lives in Bohemia. Between them they were able to get remarkable access to the area and their beautiful cinematography brings both the region and the wild animals vividly to life for the audience.

There were many highlights during the filming through the seasons, but one of the most memorable for Michael Schlamberger was the first time he both saw and filmed the wild moose. The animals originally came from Poland, but today in the area of the ponds there is a small but stable population. Although moose are large animals, they are shy and difficult to see.





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Michael spent several weeks trying to film them and then as he recalls: suddenly through the thick reeds I saw the moose, such a large animal and unaware of me. That was truly amazing."

Michael and Jiri filmed the aerials using a hot-air balloon. The images are stunning; it is as if the viewer is gently floating above the landscape of woodlands and ponds. Being silent, the balloon does not alarm the wildlife, but also the balloon must go where the winds take it, and the crew.

Michael remembers one time when the winds changed and the balloon drifted way off track and there was the chance of having to land in the wetlands. But luckily, says Michael, we were able to make a landing on a golf course!





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BOHEMIA - A YEAR IN THE WETLANDS is a beautiful and gentle film which shows that even today in the heart of modern Europe there can still be space for wildlife.

And also that the pond engineers of the Middle Ages were able to construct a system of irrigation for aquaculture that has not only worked for centuries, but shows that it is possible for humans and wildlife to live side by side, not only in the past but into the future as well.



**BOHEMIA - A YEAR IN THE WETLANDS**  
A ScienceVision production for ORF UNIVERSUM  
In association with BR

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# TEAM

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MUSIC	Alexander Bresgen
DUBBING EDITOR & MIX	Martin Rohmoser
COLOURIST	Raimund Sivetz
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UNIT MANAGER	Eleonora Frey
PRODUCER	Rita Schlamberger
CO-PRODUCER	Udo Zimmermann
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