



Science Vision

THE ZAMBEZI

PART 1: SOURCE OF LIFE
PART 2: A RIVER UNTAMED

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ZAMBEZI

■ SYNOPSIS

Deep in the heart of Africa the Zambezi is one of the great rivers of the world, yet apart from the Victoria Falls most of it is unknown. THE ZAMBEZI tells us in two parts the full story of its journey and the life that the river controls from the source in Zambia to the delta in Mozambique.

"**Zambezi - Source of Life**" is the first part of this visually stunning two part series that follows the river from its headwaters to the thundering power of the Victoria Falls. As the river ebbs and flows with the season, the Zambezi dominates the life of both the wild animals and the human cultures that depend upon its waters. This is the story of the river through the times of rain and plenty to the dry months when its waters are the only source of life.

The second part "**Zambezi - A River Untamed**" follows the river from below the Victoria Falls to where it meanders through its delta in Mozambique. At the height of the dry season, where the Luangwa river joins the Zambezi thousands of hippos crowd together in one remaining channel. Finally the Zambezi gently flows into the Indian Ocean, but the story of the river mirrors the story of life itself. It is the story of Africa.

THE ZAMBEZI is a co-production of ScienceVision, ORF, WDR, NDR, Arte, National Geographic Channels International and National Geographic Channel.





ZAMBEZI

■ A FILM BY MICHAEL SCHLAMBERGER

It is one of the great rivers of the world, yet apart from the Victoria Falls most of it is virtually unknown to the world - it is the Zambezi. And the full story of its journey and the life that the river controls through its seasons of flood and drought has never been fully told.

THE ZAMBEZI is a visually stunning two part series that follows the river from its headwaters to its delta. Through the seasons and both the wildlife as well as human cultures the films tell the story of the Zambezi through the times of rain and plenty to the dry months when its waters are the only source of life for everything.

■ FROM THE SOURCE TO THE DELTA

In its three thousand kilometres course the river links the heart of Africa to the Indian Ocean. The headwaters rise in the uplands of Zambia and the mouth of its delta is on the coast of Mozambique, its waters flow through six countries on their course to the ocean, a course that is governed first by the ancient geology of the continent, and now by the domination of humans.

What starts as a trickle of water becomes a flood as the river spreads out across the floodplains of Barotseland in Zambia and the ancient home of the Lozi people.





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Downstream the Zambezi is joined by the Chobe River that flows out from Botswana and Namibia, home to the largest elephant population on the planet. In another few hundred kilometres the river drops over the world famous Victoria Falls. Named in 1855 by the Scottish explorer Stanley Livingstone, for ages before it was simply 'mosi-oa-tuna' - the smoke that thunders.

Below the falls the Zambezi has cut its path through basalt laid down millions of years ago, and then its course is stopped by the works of men. The Kariba dam was built in the late 1950's and is one of the largest dams in the world - and it changed the river. Above the dam now are the waters of Lake Kariba, below the flow of the river has been altered and controlled.

Now the Zambezi is a political boundary as it courses through an ancient rift valley. On the south is Zambia and the ancient floodplain of Mana. To the north is once again Zambia, and in the dry season along the Luangwa River before it joins the Zambezi can be found the largest concentration of hippos anywhere.

The Zambezi flows through two more dams, before finally its delta opens up into the Indian Ocean where bull shark, also known as the Zambezi shark live. This shark is one of the very few large sharks able to live in both salt water as well as fresh. One was once reported as far as 1,000 kilometres up river in the Zambezi.





ZAMBEZI

■ A RIVER UNTAMED

Along its course the Zambezi exerts its control over all life, and not just along the river but its influence reaches animals that live far from its banks. The Zambezi is a river that ebbs and flows with the seasons of rain and then the months when there is no rain.

THE ZAMBEZI tells the complete story of the river, of its animals as well as the people who have lived alongside it for centuries. The second part of the mini-series also acknowledges the recent human history, as well as some of the history, of this great river.

Downstream from the Victoria Falls the Zambezi was irrevocably changed by the building of the Kariba Dam, when wild water was changed to electricity. As the vast Kariba Lake began to grow, a remarkable operation never before attempted was put into place. Operation Noah rescued thousands of wild animals from certain drowning, and as they worked the wildlife rangers and volunteers rewrote the science of how to handle trapped animals ranging in size from small antelope to rhinoceros and elephants.

THE ZAMBEZI mini series was almost two years in the filming, and shows the river and the wild animals as the floods spread out across the Liuwa floodplains. Here the Lozi people have lived since at least the 17th century, their lives are still controlled by the river.





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■ LADY OF LIUWA

When the river swollen with rain floods across their farmlands and villages, the Lozi wait for their King, then in a dramatic ceremonial flotilla they move en mass to higher ground. It's been an unbroken ritual for as long as people have memory. The animals too must of course move. The Liuwa floodplains are home to a multitude of wildlife - hyena clans hunt the zebra and antelope, and here is the second largest migration of wildebeest after the Serengeti.

But as producer and filmmaker Michael Schlamberger of ScienceVision Production recalls, there was one key animal that was missing. The lion population had been reduced through hunting and poaching to a single lioness.

She was named the Lady of Liuwa, and he wrote in his journal: "Day by day we went out on the plains to film the wildebeest migration. One early morning, when the rain was just about to set in, we had a touching encounter with this lonely lioness. She came close to the filming truck and every time we called her name, she answered with a gentle roar. She was used to humans, they've been her only friends for years.

But now things have changed. Two males, brothers, have been introduced by the wildlife authorities, one of the two males appeared and Lady followed him. He was firmly pushing her away, always keeping a daunting eye on us.





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The camera was still set up and rolling, when it happened: the Lion Queen of Liuwa was mating in front of our camera. This could have been the start of a new pride....."

■ BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

Michael Schlamberger was the principal cameraman for the series. He witnessed the drama of the Zambezi both in flood as well as drought. He filmed the mighty Victoria Falls in full flood when the mist can be seen from over 50 kilometres away. The production crew had realised that the only way to truly capture the river visually in stunning HD images was from the air.

The Victoria Falls seen from the air truly captures the power of water - but it wasn't all easy. Michael remembers the problems of getting fuel to remote areas for the helicopter, but even more than that the bureaucracy of the necessary permits:

"Whatever clearance we applied for was wrong and in the beginning we could not get the helicopter off the ground. We really learnt the hard way. But all the hardship and financial disaster was blown away the first time we got airborne. It was amazing to see how this mighty river changes character throughout its course and the seasons."





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■ THE CATFISH RUN

Yet for all the drama, one of the great highlights was being able to capture for the first time the remarkable drama when, at the end of the floods, tens of thousands of catfish hunt along the river in shoals that are measured in hundreds of metres.

The height of the drama was underwater, and there were problems: "The catfish run always happens at the end of the dry season and at this time of the year the water is absolutely murky. You can't see more than 10 to 20 centimetres when diving, and the numbers of fish also attracts lots of crocs. Probably this is why this has not successfully been documented before.

Day after day, from dawn to dusk, we spent idling up and down the river to follow the fish. It is no big problem to find them, you hear them as they slap their tails when herding the small fish. But the catfish are electro-sensitive and can sense the camera underwater, and so avoid it. To capture the drama we needed to be right in the middle of the fish run with our camera. Finally we modified a special tiny HD lipstick camera with an extreme wide angle lens where almost no electricity was employed in the underwater section.

The result was stunning: hundreds of catfish passing me, some even touching the lens and for the first time we could document this extraordinary behaviour under water."





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■ MANA POOLS

Meanwhile another crew was sent to Zimbabwe, a country deep in crisis in the middle of the global financial crash. For a month cameraman Rolando Menardi and director Jeremy Hogarth were based in Mana Pools, one of the only National Parks in Africa where walking is not only allowed, but actually encouraged.

Always accompanied by two highly skilled local wildlife guides, with their knowledge of wild animals and their behaviour there were no really dangerous moments, though both Rolando and Jeremy treated the herds of wild buffalo and female elephants with calves with great respect!

High on the list of 'must get' sequences was elephant behaviour normally only seen in the circus. At the very end of the dry season, when the only water for kilometres around is the Zambezi and a few pools that always remain on the Mana floodplains, food is scarce. There is virtually no grass, and the trees are browsed to a level that animals can't reach.

But some elephants can. Only a very few mature bulls have learnt that by standing on their back legs they can extend their reach by several metres and reach into the branches. It's a behaviour only seen in Mana at the very end of the dry, and a behaviour captured on HD after days and days of following a few bull elephants on foot.





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Also in Mana, in extreme heat the crew sat for days by a drying up waterhole to finally capture the moment when over seventy marabou storks flew down to take as many of the stranded catfish as they could.



Wild dogs were another priority, and the crew were able to film one of the few remaining packs left in eastern Africa, but this was where the crew were disadvantaged by being on foot. There is no way to keep up with wild dogs, except either by vehicle or from the air, yet intimate glimpses of their lives were filmed.



Before the crew left Mana Pools they filmed the very first rains of the approaching wet season, and the rhythm of the annual ebb and flow of the Zambezi had gone full circle.





ZAMBEZI

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■ THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Filming both from the air and the ground, the entire course of the Zambezi has been covered, so too the seasons of the flood and then the dry months when animals are stretched to the limits just to survive and their only source of water is from the river.

THE ZAMBEZI is a remarkable record of one of the world's greatest and least known of rivers.

A river that flows through the ancient continent of Africa, that has influenced both human culture and wildlife for millennia - and still does to this day

"THE ZAMBEZI"

A co-production of ScienceVision, ORF, NDR Naturfilm, WDR, ARTE, National Geographic Channel US und National Geographic Channels International.



Science
Vision

ORF
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NDR | Naturfilm

arte

WDR

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
CHANNEL





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