

# How To Do It: Becoming A Wildlife Filmmaker

There is no right or wrong way to become a filmmaker, and in fact, there are many ways to start a career in film! This PDF contains some advice from our experience with making a living in the nature film world, but it is by no means the only way forward. We hope that this roadmap provides inspiration and guidance as you set off on your own journey into this exciting career field. - Julie Busse and Sabine Probst

## Step 1: Fall In Love With Film

If you are interested in nature film, you most likely already love nature, animals, science, and conservation. But if you want to make nature films, you must love film itself, or you will not have the energy or vision to make it in this competitive field. Here's some advice on how to get started.

### Study Film History, Watch Films!

Look at popular cinema, nature cinema, arthouse cinema, and global cinema. Look for visual styles and trends that resonate with you. Take careful note on how stories are told and how films look.

Ask yourself,

- \* What films do I love?
- \* Why do I love them?
- \* How can this be translated to share my ideas?
- \* Why do I want to make a film, as opposed to write a book, be a scientist, etc?

### Assess Your Resources

Think about the gear you have access to right now, including smart phones, cameras you can borrow from friends, or local lending programs. And then go out and make short films. Davinci Resolve is a free professional level editing program you can use.

Collaborate with your friends. Becoming active in creating is the most important step you can take to get started. Even if you do not have a budget yet, you can make films.

### Make Films!

Do not wait for someone to tell you it's okay to make a film. Start today! Follow your personal interests and passions to develop your filmmaker's voice and technical skills.

Some suggestions of stories you could start with:

- \* What is the animal behavior of your pet?
- \* Tell a short story about the common wildlife in your hometown such as rabbits, raccoons, birds, etc
- \* Investigate your garden. Is there anything surprising in there?

## Step 2: Build Your Network

Almost all careers in nature film are created by networking - you must meet people in person! Since the industry is relatively small and the stakes are high, nature filmmakers usually hire people they know and trust, instead of posting online advertisements. So, even if you are just starting out, be active in making friends who are filmmakers at all levels, including established filmmakers, filmmakers at your own career point, and up and coming filmmakers. All of these people will be helpful to know in different ways. Be generous, inquisitive, reliable, and fair, and you will go far.

### Places To Build Community

- \* Your local cinema or art shows
- \* Local and regional film festivals
- \* Conservation/Nature/Science based organizations, clubs, zoos, societies, hiking groups, etc.
- \* Your friend groups who are interested in similar subjects
- \* Volunteer to make content for a local nature organization
- \* Join other film projects as an assistant

### Media Labs

- OKO Foto Bohinj
- Nature Through Her Eyes
- Jackson Wild Collective/Media Lab (USA)
- Earth In Focus Media Lab (Singapore)

### Film Degrees

- AGRFT Ljubljana
- Montana State University's Science and Natural History Filmmaking MFA
- American University's Center for Environmental Filmmaking

### Step 3: Be Able To Be Found

As you are developing your skills, ideas, and stories, make an online portfolio that you can show people. Make sure it is your best work.

#### Your Portfolio(s)

- \* A dedicated website to showcase your work and ideas Squarespace and Wix are two easy website services to work with.
- \* A social media account to showcase samples of your work as well as behind the scenes filming. Instagram is best for professional portfolios, though many people are discovered on TikTok if they are making short form content.
- \* A reel. A reel is an edited video that shows different samples of your work. When you are meeting new people in the industry, being able to show them a reel is a fast way to show them your ideas and filmmaker's identity.
- \* Trailers. Make short (1.5 minutes or less) film trailers of your longer work, so other people in the community can quickly get an idea of your films.
- \* Resume. Keep your resume updated with your projects.
- \* Physical or Digital Business Cards. Make sure that if you meet someone you can leave them with a way of easily contacting you.

### Step 4a: Specializing

As you're learning more and making more films, is there a particular role that you are drawn to? Do you love being behind the camera? Are you a great editor? Do you love writing? Do you have a special knack for being a "fixer"? Do you know a lot about a particular community, environment, or animal? One way forward in nature film is to find your special place and be the very best at it. Then, build up your portfolios to showcase that part of your offering, and introduce yourself as a camera person, an editor, a producer, etc.

### Step 4b: Pitching

If you want to direct, you can pitch a film for funding. But it is crucial that you do not jump to this step too early! Once you are ready and have built a community, there are industry opportunities to pitch your film ideas to organizations that can fund it. Important Note: It is our recommendation to NOT cold call distributors - it may hurt you in the long run.

#### What You Need To Pitch

- \* Pitchdeck: This is a pdf presentation filled with images and writing that describes the film you want to make and how you will achieve it.
- \* A pitch trailer: This is an exciting and short video that gives viewers an idea of what the film will look like
- \* Sample work and/or footage
- \* A team: Who are the filmmakers and experts you'll be collaborating with to make your film?

#### Where To Pitch

- \* Industry Summits: Jackson Wild and Wildscreen
- \* National Geographic Explorers
- \* Local television stations
- \* Local environmental organizations

### Step 5: Persevere!

Don't give up! A career in nature film is one of the most rewarding and exciting jobs you can have, but it takes a lot of hard work and persistence to break in. But once you're there, the community is extremely tight knit and supportive. Let every decision you make be in service to your craft, and help you move forward to sharing the stories you want to tell.