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Born to Be Wild: Swinging with orangutans, roaming with elephants

by Sr. Rose Pacatte

NCR Today

This new IMAX 3D documentary tells the profoundly moving stories of two women "super heroes" working to preserve two endangered species. These are Dr. Daphne M. Sheldrick at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Kenya and Dr. Birute Mary Galdikas at the Orangutan Foundation International in



central Borneo (Indonesia).

Both are articulate, experienced, quietly passionate and determined women who have spent decades rescuing, rehabilitating, and returning orphaned infant elephants and orangutans to the wild.

In general, I do not care for 3D movies but "Born To Be Wild" is a film 3D was made for. It had me from the opening scene.

The film reaches out and embraces the audience and the narrative gently calls the question: Why save wild animals when they offer humanity no practical benefit?

Though the film seems to contradict this, it is not because they are cute -- which they certainly are. As Galdikas said at the press day April 2, the forests are like the original Garden of Eden that people left, and the animals remained. Thus, she intimated, we have an obligation to preserve God's creation.

Morgan Freeman narrates the 40-minute film with conviction. He said that this project is "extremely important and well-worth doing because it highlights a couple of ladies whose courage and dedication should be trumpeted."

It also highlights the danger of what we are doing as humans in terms of the rest of life forms on the planet. We are not aware, as people, of what we are doing. We just blithely go along, eliminating habitats, killing off other creatures in order for us to have more room to grow more food for more of us. There is an inherent danger in this that we need to bring to light, that if we continue the way we are going, eliminating habits and other forms of life, we are going to eliminate ourselves.

The problem for orangutans is the palm oil plantations created by the destruction of the rain forests.

"Modern global culture is coming to Borneo; you cannot leave the global culture behind except in the depths of the rain forest," explained Galdikas. "Palm oil is in every product today and for someone to obtain a palm oil concession in Borneo is like a license to print money."

Galdikas admits that without government help she would not be able to rehabilitate orangutans, but the government "wants to eat its cake and have it, too" when they continue to expand palm oil franchises.

"It's like facing a tsunami," she said.

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"Elephants," explains Sheldrick, "duplicate human in terms of age, so they don't learn until they are 20. We take care of them until they are grown and then we return them to the wild, where they belong. I don't believe that elephants belong in circuses or zoos. Not do I believe in training them through brutal methods to do unnatural things for the benefit of humans. You can judge a nation by how it treats its animals."

Sheldrick has worked with elephants for fifty years near the Tsavo National Park, an area the size of Michigan, in Kenya.

"When you raise an elephant there are ups and down," she told journalists at the press day. "This space can give elephants quality of life but there is much intrusion of domestic life and animals into the national park that politicians permit and this compromises the environment."

There is no doubt of Sheldrick's love for the elephants:

"The memory part of an elephant's brain is greater than that of the human brain. They never forget the human trainers from the nursery. And elephants can read your heart; there is no pretense. Those who care for them, it has to come from the heart."



The stunning cinematography and IMAX 3D brought me totally into the film as if I were there, from the very first moment. This finished product was not easily obtained, however.

Filmmakers David Lickley and Drew Fellman described the challenge of carrying 30,000 lbs of equipment into the jungle and out again, and the difficulty in trying to manage a 500lb IMAX camera among the elephants. The good news for the crew is that a lightweight digital IMAX camera was available as a second camera.

What response does the film ask of viewers? In addition to a respect for creation, one can, through the film's website, foster elephants in Kenya or purchase forest in Borneo -- land that will be saved from deforestation for orangutans and other forest inhabitants.

There is no doubt that this film, like last year's Oscar-winning film *The Cove* sends a strong anti-animal capture message to audiences.

Born to Be Wild was too short. I want to know more. The film opens April 8.

Click here for IMAX theaters.

Dr. Daphne M. Sheldrick, named a Dame by Queen Elizabeth II in 2006, and the Kenyan reserve for orphaned elephants that she founded, were profiled twice by CBS *60 Minutes* news magazine in 2006 and 2008.

Dr. Galdikas and the Orangutan Foundation International at Camp Leakey (named for paleontologist and conservationist Dr. Richard Leakey) were profiled by *60 Minutes* in 2001 in the context of the Indonesian rain forest crisis and CBS *48 Hours* in 2009.

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