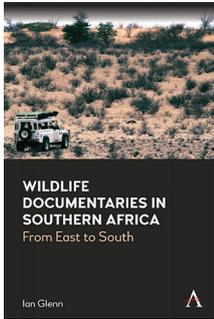




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# Ian Glenn's 'Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa: From East to South'

When Theodore Roosevelt, the former US President, led a scientific expedition to Africa in March 1909, he chose east Africa as his destination. The safari, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, set out to collect big game, birds, mammals, reptiles and plants for the US National Museum in Washington DC. In the end, Roosevelt and his son Kermit, a first-year student at Harvard University who accompanied his father on the trip, killed and collected 512 animals. As Ian Glenn explains in his marvellous new book, it is not surprising that Roosevelt and his son chose east Africa for their expedition. Starting in the early 1800s, east Africa – to which the world owes the word safari (Swahili for journey) – was the world centre for so-called 'big game hunting'. Any big game hunter worth their salt plied their trade in the region. In fact, Frederick Courteney Selous and Edward North Buxton, the world's leading big game hunters of their day, helped arrange Roosevelt's 1909 trip. Between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s, east Africa was the place to be for American and European hunters. It was also the destination of choice for monied tourists who wanted something other than old European cities for their vacations. It was not surprising, therefore, that when wildlife documentary emerged as a genre of filmmaking in the mid-20th century, east Africa occupied pride of place in that emergence. However, starting in the 1970s, east Africa began gradually to lose its place to southern Africa as both a premier tourist destination and the home of wildlife documentary filmmaking in Africa. Glenn's book offers a compelling explanation of this change.

As Glenn explains, "The big idea of this book is that, starting in the early 1970s, wildlife films made in southern Africa, mostly but not exclusively by southern Africans, started winning major international awards and mark a crucial move away from east Africa as the centre of African wildlife film. More than that, they start influencing modern trends in the genre and provide some of its most important achievements" (p. 2). At the centre of Glenn's wonderful book are many of these pioneering filmmakers, including Beverly and Dereck Joubert, who have won eight Emmys, as well as Carol Hughes and her late husband David who won six Emmys and a Golden Panda, the premier British prize for the best wildlife film of the year. The Hugheses won the very first Golden Panda award in 1982 for their 1979 film *Etosha: Place of Dry Water* (p. 1). This makes the Jouberts and the Hugheses South Africa's most successful filmmakers, as measured by international accolades. Given the ubiquity of wildlife films, filmmakers such as the Jouberts and the Hugheses are also likely to be among the most watched in the world. Through a series of interviews with many of the leading wildlife filmmakers, Glenn takes the reader mercifully away from David Attenborough. In fact, Glenn cuts Attenborough down to size by showing how Attenborough himself drew direct and indirect inspiration from some of the filmmakers that Glenn writes about. Glenn does this through a masterful analysis of which filmmaker worked with whom, how one influenced another, and how they all created an extended network through which flowed ideas, influences and personalities. For example, while Attenborough was listed as the presenter of the 1987 BBC documentary *Meerkats United*, once voted by BBC viewers as the best wildlife documentary of all time, Attenborough's role was basically limited to that of a voice-over artist. The South African Richard Goss made that film (p. 7–8).

As Glenn points out, "There is a massive disparity between popular interest in wildlife documentary and academic attention to the genre, particularly in southern Africa." (p. 6) This means, among other things, that we have no reliable data on how many people actually watch these documentaries. We know they are popular the world over; we just can't quantify that popularity. But we know from the awards won and the outsize influence that wildlife filmmakers from southern Africa have on the genre, that the region dominates the business. Part of the explanation for this dominance, Glenn argues, is that filmmakers from southern Africa have made the greatest use of new technologies (p. 8). They were also among the first to draw ethical implications from their work on wildlife. For example, Michael Rosenberg, a South African who spent most of his working life in London and won more Golden Pandas than any other wildlife filmmaker, produced *Fragile Earth*, one of the first series of documentaries to educate the public about environmental degradation and the importance of conservation; the Jouberts produced work that compared the emotional capacities of humans with those of elephants.

In his explanation of the shift in wildlife documentary filmmaking from east to southern Africa, Glenn argues that changes in wildlife policies in east Africa drove the shift. When, for example, Kenya banned hunting in 1977, hunters and filmmakers moved down south. This did not mean that the change in location was seamless. The Kruger National Park, for all its status as Africa's most iconic reserve, had none of the vistas offered by the Serengeti. But, as Glenn reminds us, southern Africa had places such as the Kalahari and the Namib, which could more than compensate for what the Kruger lacked. The change in location ushered in new directions in wildlife documentary filmmaking, thanks to discoveries of phenomena not found elsewhere. Among these novel finds was the Jouberts' discovery of a bitter rivalry in Botswana between large lion prides and hyaena clans. This led to *Eternal Enemies*, the 1992 award-winning film narrated by Jeremy Irons. One of my favourite stories in a book brimming with rich tales concerns the advent of open vehicles for game viewing. According to Glenn's informants, Mala Mala and Londolozi, two private lodges in southern Africa, pioneered this. Then African trackers took it a step further by inventing and designing the tracker seat that is now standard in all safari vehicles. Robert Maluka, a technician in the Londolozi workshop, made the very first of these seats (p. 47).

In *Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa*, Glenn has given us a fun read and much-needed inspiration for future research. The public and scholars from across a range of disciplines are going to find in this book wonderful stories and excellent ideas.

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