

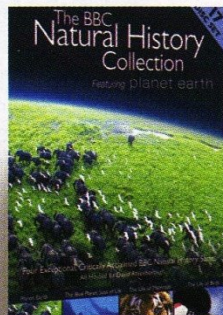
EARTH TO HUMANITY

In collection of nature docs, our planet is the greatest teacher **BY GORY ALBERTSON**

THE BBC NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTION

PRODUCERS: Alastair Fothergill, Mike Salisbury
STUDIO: BBC/Discovery
NARRATOR: David Attenborough
COMPOSER: George Fenton

The push to protect our planet has become fraught with celebrities and politicians trying to get us to listen to the Earth's cry for help. But perhaps the best "mouthpiece" for the cause is our planet itself. In 2006, the BBC, in partnership with the Discovery Channel, released the widely lauded *Planet Earth*—an expansive and exquisite documentary that gave voice (with a little help from narrator David Attenborough) to Earth's many habitats and non-human inhabitants. Now, the BBC has expanded nature's call with its new *BBC Natural History Collection*, which features *Planet*



Earth as well as slightly older documentaries *The Blue Planet: Seas of Life*, *The Life of Mammals* and *The Life of Birds*.

In both *Mammals* and *Birds*, humans,

oddly, get in the way of the series' goals. Attenborough, a British Broadcaster, guides the journey himself—in forests, in boats, on beaches and even in his own backyard. He gleans helpful and important information, but his presence robs viewers of complete immersion, which, consequently, robs them of greater emotional attachment to the animals. Fortunately, the producers of *Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth* relegate Attenborough to unseen narration.

While these two films easily stand out in the collection, they differ in tone. The best example is *Blue Planet's* footage of killer whales. The series' first installment shows a pod of killer whales violently drowning a baby grey whale, while the

last installment shows the killer whales beaching themselves in surprise attacks on sea lion pups. The breathtaking camerawork and boisterous score (written by film composer George Fenton) give nature's drama a level of intensity rivaling any Hollywood blockbuster. *Planet Earth*

The *Natural History Collection's* greatest achievement is its ability to inspire audiences to question their relationship to the planet.

also has its share of dramatic moments, but the series is largely a more intimate affair, ranging from heartwarming (a giant panda cradling its cub) to heartbreaking (a baby elephant getting lost from its mother). The series excels in delicately balancing animal journeys with undercurrents of environmental preservation.

After watching the entire collection, one has a sense of amazement and appreciation regarding the intricate relationship between animal and habitat. The collection's greatest achievement, though, is its ability to inspire audiences to question their relationship to the planet. The final installment of *Mammals* questions exactly how far we humans have come from our "mammalian heritage." The answer: far enough to destroy the habitats from which we sprang. Thanks to this BBC set, life—from polychaete worms to polar bears—has the opportunity to communicate that we have the power to both hurt and, hopefully, repair the damage we've done.



Photo courtesy of BBC