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HOTSPOTS

HOTSPOTS: The race to reverse Earth's 6th mass extinction

A made-for-TV documentary feature film from the Dancing Star Foundation

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HOTSPOTS racks focus on 6th mass extinction and the race to reverse it

Premieres November 2 on KQED public television serving Northern California

LOS ANGELES - Just as humanity comes to grips with global warming, the world's leading biologists now warn us that a larger evolutionary event looms on the horizon, an unprecedented mass extinction already underway that threatens to exterminate up to 60 percent of all life forms on Earth before the end of this century.

HOTSPOTS, a sobering but optimistic made-for-television two-hour feature film documentary by husband-and-wife producing team [Michael Tobias](#) and [Jane Gray Morrison](#), takes cameras deep inside critical conservation areas on the front lines of efforts to hold ground for besieged biodiversity and find common ground for economic and ecological interests.

"The time to act is now. Never have the stakes been so high, so much biodiversity at risk. World leaders, community organizers, the vast constituency of scientists and social scientists, NGOs, philanthropic organizations and individuals, students, volunteers...everybody needs to address this crisis of extinctions as the most pressing challenge any generation has ever faced. We can, we must change the paradigm to save what is left," say Tobias and Morrison with the [Dancing Star Foundation](#), the film's producer.

Explorer and conservationist [Dr. Russell Mittermeier](#), president of [Conservation International](#), serves as the documentary's optimistic field guide on a 3-year tour of conservation solutions emerging in hotspots around the world, places that if lost will result in the extinction of half of the plants and vertebrates alive today.

Supported by 20 years of compelling science and critical data, [HOTSPOTS](#) introduces viewers to many of the world's lesser-known species whose numbers are so low that every last individual is known by name, and the conservationists committed to bringing them back from the brink.

“With this year’s presidential elections one of the most important in history, [KQED](#) immediately recognized that **HOTSPOTS** offered a wonderful opportunity to enable discussion about what is one of the most-discussed topics of the election: the environment,” said Scott Walton, executive director of communications for KQED, the San Francisco public television station premiering **HOTSPOTS**. “Our mission is to present documentaries that make people think and make up their own minds. **HOTSPOTS** is a perfect addition to our schedule as it not only presents a balanced view of a perplexing problem but, with its exotic locations and beautiful photography, provides entertainment at the same time.”

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About the film

HOTSPOTS opens against the backdrop of some of the few things still standing on Easter Island, the Moia, megalithic man-made monuments that cast ancient shadows over the now near-barren landscape of this once-island paradise—an isolated place pushed to the point of total ecosystem collapse by early human activity.

The action begins in Washington D.C., at Conservation International's satellite imaging facility, before heading to the film's first hotspot, Madagascar. Located 400 miles off the East coast of Africa, numerous local conservation initiatives are working to save this living island laboratory. Madagascar is an isolated evolutionary experiment underway for 160 million years that has produced a prolific population of globally unique plants and animals, 80 percent of which are found nowhere else on Earth.

Over the past 12 years, indigenous locals have studied the science and learned the languages necessary to take foreign visitors on a firsthand tour of Madagascar's natural heritage, an unrivalled genetic life bank that is also home to a rare primate called the Indri, the world's largest living lemur. The film also chronicles the Blue-Eyed Black Lemur, marking the first time this critically endangered species has ever been filmed.

Next, the **HOTSPOTS** crew crosses over to Brazil's Mata Atlântica, a biodiversity hotspot where over 93 percent of the original forests have fallen to farmland, fueling the explosive growth of the two of the largest cities in the world, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Here, we witness another primate pushed to the edge of extinction, Coimbra's Titi monkey who struggles for survival in isolated pockets of tropical forest surrounded by plantations. At the fragile biological border between farmland and forest fragment, the **HOTSPOTS** crew comes upon a fire in the impoverished state of Sergipe like those deliberately set by sugar interests to illegally expand farmland into otherwise pristine forests.

In the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, we are introduced to Senhor Paulo Abdala whose remote family farm is using the power of private property to protect a critical habitat of the Northern Muriquis monkey, one of the world's most endangered primates, with fewer than 1,000 remaining. The Abdala family is representative of a growing global movement of private land owners who are setting aside sanctuaries to save species and bolster chances for beleaguered biodiversity to bounce back.

“We’ve raised concerns for years about primates being in peril, but now we have solid data to show the situation is far more severe than we imagined,” the *New Scientist* quotes Russell A. Mittermeier, longtime chairman of the IUCN Species Survival Commission’s Primate Specialist Group and the president of Conservation International. “Tropical forest destruction has always been the main cause, but now it appears that hunting is just as serious a threat in some areas, even

where the habitat is still quite intact. In many places, primates are quite literally being eaten to extinction.”

The team then traverses the Tropical Andes, the global epicenter of biodiversity with a lush series of unique ecosystems that support more species than any other hotspot, including 10 percent of the world's plants. Here, we witness evolution in action with the Southern Bamboo Rat, a tree-climbing rodent with primate-like paws that appear to be in the process of evolving into hands. **HOTSPOTS** marks the film debut for this unique evolutionary creature that gives us pause to consider our common origin.

Following a dangerous overnight expedition up river resulting in a boat wreck, the **HOTSPOTS** crew treks into the Tambopata National Reserve to meet with ornithologists who reveal how the global pet trade in endangered species like Macaws—which can sell for up to \$30,000—is perversely preventing the population’s recovery. Sodium-rich cliffside clay along tropical river banks in this 1.3 million hectare hotspot attracts flocks of thousands of brilliantly colored parrots, and other species, who eat the clay to neutralize acids in their diet. The sight of thousands of native birds in a daily survival ritual is a living reminder of a planet that until very recently was teeming with life.

The film's first U.S. stop introduces viewers to the Pacific Pocket Mouse—one of the most critically endangered mammals in North America—which is protected from Southern California sprawl by an unlikely ally, an American military base that separates the suburbs of Los Angeles and San Diego. Hundreds of miles east, at Sequoia National Park in the High Sierra Mountains, we get a glimpse of a deep cave-dwelling scorpion barely bigger than a grain of rice, but endowed with massive claws, and other darkness-adapted creatures for whom the subterranean sanctuary has been their only home since the last ice age ended ten thousand years ago. U.S. National Park scientist Joel Despain tells us, ensuring the survival of these unique organisms is “what we do in the National Parks, and hopefully what we do everywhere to protect all the animals and plants that we share the Earth with.”

Journeying through Big Sur's rugged coastline we see the majestic three-meter wingspan of a conservation success story soaring overhead, the California Condor. Following a population collapse in the 1980’s that left only 27 condors, this rare bird was bred back from the brink of extinction through a pioneering restoration program that has already repatriated over 150 back to the wild, in California,

Mexico and Arizona's Grand Canyon. As of May 2008, the condor's population had reached 332.

With grizzly bears long gone, the Santa Monica Mountain Lion is the bioregion's lone top predator, requiring a range of a hundred thousand acres per male. Here we see how park ecologists use transmitters to track the urban wildland area's last known lions. We learn that one lion used a freeway underpass 18 times in one month to reach critical open space, leading local scientists in Los Angeles to a new litter of wild cubs.

In New Zealand, one of the extinction capitals of the world, we witness one-of-a-kind animals like the Kea, an alpine parrot with an operatic voice, and the rare Kakapo, the world's only flightless parrot which is down to a population of just 92. We also meet a lighthouse keeper and his partner who re-trained to raise endangered species, as well as 285,000 trees for restoration of a denuded island; and visit with a major private/public partnership to protect a small surviving island of forest still standing within a sea of monocultural pasture.

Finally, we witness a community come together to celebrate the first time in a century that the Kiwi—a gentle ground-dwelling bird that is New Zealand's national symbol—will waddle in the wild at Maungatautari just two hours south of Auckland. In a poignant moment that symbolizes the power and promise of local conservation efforts worldwide, New Zealanders remember the tearful and rainy day of the Kiwi release as one when even the “sky wept for joy.”

About the filmmakers

From the award-winning writer/director/ecologist [Michael Tobias](#), President of [Dancing Star Foundation](#), and creator of such films as the ten-hour epic docu-drama, VOICE OF THE PLANET for TBS, starring William Shatner and Faye Dunaway; the highly acclaimed Discovery Channel special, BLACK TIDE (about the Exxon Valdez disaster), the PBS special from KQED, "ANTARCTICA -THE LAST CONTINENT" which, at the time was the 4th highest rated documentary in PBS history; the PBS film WORLD WAR III, based upon Tobias' book by the same title; the ABC Movie-of-the-Week, THE SKY'S ON FIRE, starring John Corbett and based upon Tobias' novel regarding ozone depletion; and more recent feature documentaries with KQED, MAD COWBOY and NO VACANCY. Produced by [Jane Gray Morrison](#), Executive Vice President of Dancing Star Foundation, whose work and field research have taken her to well over thirty

countries. Associate Producer, [Karine Dinev](#). Editor, [Marc Griffith](#). Co-Executive Producer, [Don Cannon](#).

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Background information

“Half of world’s primates face extinction,”

- by Andy Coghlan and Michael Marshall, NewScientist.com news service, 15:45
05 August 2008

With the current rate of extinction, 50% of species could be extinct by the end of this century.

- E.O. Wilson in The Future of Life (2002)

According to the Global Biodiversity Assessment, species extinction since the year 1600 has occurred at 50 to 100 times the average estimated natural rate. This is expected to rise to between 1,000 and 1,000 times the natural rate with, already, more than 31,000 species threatened with extinction. This wave of extinctions and ecosystem destruction is an irreversible tragedy... Klaus Toepfer, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, UNEP. www.unep.org/OurPlanet/imgversn/105/editorial.html

Life on Earth is disappearing fast and will continue to do so unless urgent action is taken. There are now 41,415 species on the IUCN Red List and 16,306 of them are threatened with extinction, up from 16,118 last year. The total number of extinct species has reached 785 and a further 65 are only found in captivity or in cultivation

- IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/red_list/index.cfm

We are currently witnessing sixth major extinction event in the history of Earth, and the greatest since the dinosaurs disappeared, 65 million years ago.

- Global Biodiversity Outlook 2, UN Convention on Biological Diversity, <http://www.cbd.int/GBO2/>

Ecosystems across the planet have been impacted by biodiversity loss. 60% of world ecosystem services have been degraded.

- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

2005, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.aspx>

The average abundance of species is declining with 40% loss between 1970 and 2000. Species present in rivers, lakes and marshlands have declined by 50%.

- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

2005, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.aspx>

73,000 km² of forest is lost across the world each year 'an area 3 times larger than the state of Vermont.

- Global Environment Outlook , UNEP, <http://www.unep.org/geo>

About a quarter of the Earth's land surface is now cultivated.

Over a quarter of all fish stocks are overharvested.

Since 1980, about 35 percent of mangroves have been lost.

About 20% of corals were lost in just 20 years; 20% degraded.

- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

2005, <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/About.aspx>

The demand for resources at the global level now exceeds the biological capacity of the Earth by some 20%.

- Global Biodiversity Outlook 2, UN Convention on Biological Diversity, <http://www.cbd.int/GBO2/>

The Living Planet Index (LPI) is an indicator of the state of global biological diversity. Between 1970 and 2003, the index fell by about 30%. The main reasons for species extinction are pollution, farming and urban expansion, overfishing and hunting. During the same period, between 1960 and 2000, the world's population doubled.

- Collen, B., McRae, L., Kothari, G., Mellor, R., Daniel, O., Greenwood, A., Amin, R., Holbrook, S. and Baillie, J. (2008) Living Planet Index. 2010 and beyond: rising to the biodiversity challenge (ed. By J. Loh), WWF, Gland, Switzerland. http://www.wwf.org.uk/filelibrary/pdf/2010_and_beyond.pdf

Human activity is wiping out close to one per cent of every other species on Earth every year.

- Collen, B., McRae, L., Kothari, G., Mellor, R., Daniel, O., Greenwood, A., Amin, R., Holbrook, S. and Baillie, J. (2008) Living Planet Index. 2010 and beyond:

rising to the biodiversity challenge (ed. By J. Loh), WWF, Gland, Switzerland. http://www.wwf.org.uk/filelibrary/pdf/2010_and_beyond.pdf

Biodiversity is a contraction of biological diversity. Biodiversity reflects the number, variety and variability of living organisms. It includes diversity within species (genetic diversity), between species (species diversity), and between ecosystems (ecosystem diversity). <http://www.greenfacts.org/glossary/abc/biodiversity.htm>

The Convention on Biological Diversity is the first global agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity established by UNCED in Rio de Janeiro "Earth Summit" in June 1992. Its objective is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It recognizes-for the first time-that the conservation of biological diversity is "a common concern of humankind".

Text of the Convention from CBD website, <http://www.cbd.int/convention/convention.shtml>,

In 2002, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention adopted a Strategic Plan, with the mission to achieve, by 2010, a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

Parties of the treaty include 191 countries. Non-Party Countries are Andorra, Iraq, Somalia and United States. United States has signed, but not ratified the treaty. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-sustain-en.pdf>
<http://www.cbd.int/convention/parties/list/>

Graphs

Species extinction since 1800 ,Thomas et al., 2004 (Nature 427:145-148)
www.umaine.edu/sustainability/images/Image10.gif

World population development
http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/world_population_development

Examples of state, pressure and response indicators that have been adapted by the Convention on Biodiversity to measure progress towards the 2010 target
<http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/graphics/Zoom/5.02.jpg>



Please visit us on the worldwide web: DancingStarFoundation.org

Dancing Star Foundation is a nonprofit public benefit corporation based in California. Its mission is focused on international biodiversity conservation, global environmental education, and animal protection. The Foundation is involved in active ecological restoration efforts, field research, filmmaking and publishing, lectures and symposia. The foundation works with numerous partners around the world to help raise awareness about the importance of environmental stewardship, ecological ethics and conservation biology. The Foundation focuses on the interdisciplinary humanities and social justice movements as they concern humankind's relationship—in many guises—to the natural world, and is also concerned with indigenous peoples, human rights and holistic health; recognizing that healthy individuals make for a healthy planet. The goal of Dancing Star Foundation is to help sensitize people throughout the world to the critical importance of biodiversity, animal protection and conservation; and to instill a respect for all life, which can be demonstrated by even the most modest gestures of kindness, compassion and love in our everyday lives.

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