



# NATURE



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## **Radioactive Wolves inaugurates *Nature* 30<sup>th</sup> season Wednesday, October 19, 2011 on PBS**

*Exclusive content and streaming videos available at [pbs.org/nature](http://pbs.org/nature)*

What happens to nature after a nuclear accident, and how does wildlife cope with the world it inherits after the human inhabitants have fled? That is the provocative subject of **Radioactive Wolves**, the 30<sup>th</sup> season premiere of *Nature*, airing Wednesday, October 19, 2011 at 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). Harry Smith narrates.

Moving from its traditional Sunday evening slot, new episodes of *Nature* will now lead PBS primetime on Wednesdays. After the broadcast, the program will stream at [pbs.org/nature](http://pbs.org/nature).

The season opener will examine the health of wildlife populations in Chernobyl's exclusion zone, the area around the reactor that remains too dangerously radioactive for human habitation 25 years after the meltdown of the nuclear power plant on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986. Focusing on the status of the native wolf population as an indicator of the effects of radioactivity across all of the contaminated countryside, scientists are piecing together a picture of the entire surviving ecosystem. This portrait of wildlife in the so-called "dead zone" provides a surprising "what if?" window into an apocalyptic future that exists today..

Celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> season, *Nature* is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET New York Public Media, the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21, New York's public television stations and operator of NJTV. For nearly 50 years, WNET has been producing and broadcasting national and local documentaries and other programs for the New York community.

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When disaster struck a quarter-century ago, everyone living in the exclusion zone was evacuated and relocated by government order, and a no-man's land of our own making was left to its own devices. What has happened in the interim has been remarkable. Forests, marshes, fields and rivers have reclaimed the land, reversing the effects of human reversing the effects of human cultivation and development, returning everything to its natural state. In the absence of people, the "dead zone" has become a surprising post-nuclear Eden, populated by beaver and bison, horses and birds, fish and falcons – and ruled by wolves.

Now that access to the zone is permitted, at least on a limited basis, scientists are trying to learn how the surviving wildlife is coping with the invisible blight of the land. As the top predators in this new wilderness, wolves reflect the condition of the entire eco-system. If the wolves are doing well, the populations of their prey must also be doing well. Accordingly, a key long-term study of the wolves has been initiated to determine their health, their range, and their numbers.

The exclusion zone around Chernobyl is now monitored separately by the new nations of Belarus and Ukraine, formed when the Soviet Union broke up. Their borders are strictly maintained, even within the zone. We follow teams of scientists on both sides of the zone as they gather data, taking appropriate precautions to protect themselves from radioactive contamination as they go about their work.

German scientists Barbara and Christoph Promberger radio-collar wolves in the zone to track their movements. Their study will help answer questions about the size of the wolf population, whether or not they are indigenous or migrants, and how these wolves are different from populations in clean areas. Their work is taken over by local wolf expert, Professor Vadim Sidorovich, from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, and his researcher, Grigori Ivanovich, who use their local knowledge and field experience to compile the data.

On the other side of the border, Ukrainian wolf expert Maryna Shkvyrka tracks wolves in the very shadow of the reactor, in an effort to create a map of wolves in her study area. She finds their tracks in every area of the zone.

We enter the ghost city of Pripyat, once a thriving metropolis of 58,000 people near Chernobyl. Once populated by the cream of Soviet engineers and scientists, it is now overgrown and overrun by wildlife. Falcons have taken up residence in high rise buildings, where they lay their eggs and raise their chicks.

It's an amazing exploration into a world we hoped never to see which yields answers we never expected. Across the countryside, wildlife has returned in sizeable numbers, thriving in the absence of humans, despite the low level radioactivity that remains. It is found that wolf numbers in the zone rival those in clean areas. And the area has even been turned into a unique refuge for endangered species with the release into the area of groups of rare Przewalski horses, which until now have survived only in captivity. Though it may be too soon to tell about more long-term effects, the animals seem to have found an ironic safe haven here.

**Nature** is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET for PBS. Fred Kaufman is executive producer. **Radioactive Wolves** is a co-production of epo-film, ORF/UNIVERSUM

and THIRTEEN in association with NDR and WNET New York Public Media. Written and Directed by Klaus Feichtenberger. Narrated by Harry Smith.

**Nature** pioneered a television genre that is now widely emulated in the broadcast industry. Throughout the series' history, **Nature** has brought the natural world into the homes of millions of viewers. The series has been consistently among the most-watched primetime series on public television.

**Nature** has won more than 600 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities, and environmental organizations including 10 Emmys, three Peabodys and the first award given to a television program by the Sierra Club. In October 2010, the series won the Christopher Parsons Outstanding Achievement Award, given to "an organization or individual that has made a globally significant contribution to wildlife filmmaking, conservation and/or the public's understanding of the environment." The award, given by the Wildscreen Festival in Bristol, England, is one of the wildlife film industry's highest honors.

[PBS.org/nature](http://PBS.org/nature) is the award-winning web companion to **Nature** featuring streaming episodes, teacher's guides, and more.

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#### **About WNET New York Public Media**

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