



NATURE



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***Nature* premieres *Ocean Giants*, a three-part special, on Wednesday, February 22, 2012 on PBS**

Streaming episodes available at pbs.org/nature

Whales and dolphins conjure a deep sense of wonder in us that's hard to explain. Now, ***Nature*** dives into their magical world in ***Ocean Giants*** to explore lives full of sex, violence, emotion, and song. From the Arctic to the Amazon, this groundbreaking three-part series goes on a global expedition with world-renowned underwater cameramen, Doug Allan (*Planet Earth*) and Didier Noirot (Jacques Cousteau's cameraman), as they capture spellbinding moments in the lives of these leviathans. The film explores how these mammals hunt, mate, and communicate with each other and with us. ***Ocean Giants*** also joins scientists as they pursue their ongoing research to uncover new insights about dolphins and whales that will help us better understand these still mysterious creatures.

Narrated by John Benjamin Hickey (*The Big C*), ***Nature***'s three-part ***Ocean Giants*** premieres Wednesday, February 22, 2012 at 8-11 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). The individual episodes will be rebroadcast on March 28, April 4, and April 11, 2012, 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). After broadcast, the series will stream online at pbs.org/nature.

Celebrating its 30th season, ***Nature*** is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET, 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.

In the first of three hours, ***Giant Lives***, we examine the world of great whales, such as the blue whale and the bowhead, the largest animals that have ever lived on our planet. To these mighty leviathans, size matters. In the Arctic, giant bowhead whales survive the freezing cold wrapped in fifty tons of insulating blubber two feet thick, making them the fattest animals on the planet. And in addition to being the fattest, they may live the longest. Some tissue samples indicate the whales may be over 200 years old, old enough to have lived through the great age of

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whaling over a century ago. But the biggest animal on the planet is the blue whale. Measuring a hundred feet long, and weighing in at 200 tons, it is double the size of the largest dinosaur. Surprisingly, scientists discover a group of “tropical” blue whales living in Sri Lanka’s warm waters, feeding on krill, tiny crustaceans usually found in cold polar seas. Once again, size is the secret to success. Baleen mesh in their enormous mouths makes the process of catching their tiny prey extremely efficient. Filming blue whales is a rare opportunity, and underwater cameramen Doug Allan and Didier Noirot are thrilled at the chance to fulfill a life-long dream.

In Hawaii, thousands of humpbacks gather each spring to compete for mating rights in fights so violent they can lead to death. Explosions of bubbles expelled by the biggest males both announce aggression and screen a female from challengers. Then, after competitions that can last all day, the female elopes with her chosen male to mate in private. Despite best efforts, no one has ever seen humpbacks mating. Off the coast of Argentina, however, are whales that seem to have no modesty at all. Twice the size of humpbacks, male southern right whales have a pair of enormous testicles and nine-foot penises, yet they are surprisingly gentle giants, whose annual love-ins have been studied for some 40 years. Unlike the violent humpbacks, these whales do not compete for females. All the males are allowed to mate, leaving the male with the longest penis and largest testicles to flush out the sperm of his rivals inside the female and win the mating game.

The size and strength of gray whale mothers are matters of life and death for their calves. Raised in the warm but barren waters off the coast of Mexico, calves must be escorted by their mothers through 6,000 miles of treacherous waters to reach the nutrient-rich seas of Alaska where they can feed. Along the way, killer whales team up and lie in wait for young gray whales. Only the most powerful mothers can protect their calves from the ferocious attack of killer whales.

The second hour, ***Deep Thinkers***, explores the cognitive and emotional lives of dolphins and whales, which have the largest brains of any animal. Like us, cetaceans have special brain cells called spindle cells that are associated with communication, emotion, and heightened social sensitivity. These cells were once thought to be unique to humans, yet research is showing that whales and dolphins have may have three times more spindle cells than we do, leading scientists to believe that their mental abilities and emotional awareness could be far greater than we imagined.

At Baltimore Aquarium, the cognitive abilities of bottlenose dolphins have been investigated for over 25 years in one of the world’s leading studies into what dolphins might think about themselves and the world around them. Observing how they react to seeing themselves in a mirror reveals they do grasp that they are looking at an image of themselves and experience self-awareness, a sophisticated cognitive skill only a very few animals besides ourselves possess.

In the Bahamas, Allan and Noirot dive with a group of dolphins that displays how clicks, whistles, and highly synchronized movements and vocalizations can establish personal identity as well as gang behavior. It’s a crash course in dolphin manners and communication that the cameramen find fascinating to observe. Equally fascinating is an experiment Allan is able to capture on film involving an underwater machine that blows bubble-rings, something the local bottlenose dolphins off the Caribbean island of Roatán have never seen before. Curiosity leads to temptation, at which point one youngster can no longer control her urge to explore. After having tested the silvery rings not just with her eyes, but with her sonar, she braves a tactile experience and, delighted, leads the others in hours of inventive play.

In the final hour, ***Voices of the Sea***, the extra sensory perceptions and communication skills of these extraordinary creatures are considered. Whales and dolphins use sound to hunt, to communicate with one another, and also to “see” and experience the world around them. Sending

out loud clicks, they use the echoes to form a mental picture of the world around them. They use ultrasound to see inside other creatures, clicks and whistles to speak, echolocation to navigate and hunt in the depths where the light cannot guide them. In the Arctic, migrating narwhals, “unicorns of the sea,” echolocate to map a world of shifting ice and pinpoint vital breathing holes hundreds of feet away. In the Amazon, pink boto dolphins find their way in waters muddied by floods, darkened by tannins and choked with branches and leaves. Using a special bulge on its forehead, a boto is able to focus its clicks and buzzes into a sound beam that allows it to navigate the dark waters while chattering away to its neighbors with a second, completely different sound system.

Noirot and Allen set out to film sperm whales, once known only by their fictional Moby Dick representation. They travel in families and communicate with complex “coda” clicks, which can also be put to more lethal use. A mile below the surface, the whales use another form of clicks to hunt in the dark. These hunting clicks are the loudest sounds made by any living thing, louder than a thunder clap. Unable to follow the hunt into the depths, Noirot and Allen experience a breathtaking encounter with a baby sperm whale lost and looking for its mother.

But the most famous and mysterious voice of all of the Ocean Giants belongs to male humpback whales. Every winter, these 40-ton giants gather off the coast of Hawaii to sing with voices that can travel thousands of miles across an entire ocean basin. It is a communal song sung by all the male humpbacks from Mexico to Japan, improvised together and evolving from year to year, a haunting performance that captures our imagination but remains wonderfully mysterious.

Nature is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET for PBS. Fred Kaufman is executive producer. **Ocean Giants** is a co-production of THIRTEEN and BBC in association with WNET.

Nature pioneered a television genre that is now widely emulated in the broadcast industry. Throughout its history, **Nature** has brought the natural world to 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. The series received two of wildlife film industry's highest honors: the Christopher Parsons Outstanding Achievement Award given by the Wildscreen Festival and the Grand Teton Award given by the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. Recently, Fred Kaufman was named the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for Media by the 2012 International Wildlife Film Festival.

PBS.org/nature is the award-winning web companion to **Nature** featuring streaming episodes, filmmaker interviews, teacher's guides, and more.

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About WNET

New York's WNET is America's flagship public media outlet, bringing quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. The parent company of public television stations [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#), [Tavis Smiley](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Noah Comprende](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [SundayArts](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJ Today](#) and the new online newsmagazine [MetroFocus](#).