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**THIRTEEN's *Nature* Covers Mission to Reverse
the Decline of
Giraffes: Africa's Gentle Giants
Wednesday, October 26, 2016 on PBS**

Dr. Julian Fennessy leads a team to relocate the world's rarest giraffes

It's ironic that the life of one of the world's most identifiable and popular wild animals, the giraffe, is still something of a mystery. As these giants began to be studied, it was revealed that they don't need to drink in the desert because they can get enough water just eating leaves. Another important finding is the role giraffes play as pollinators and seed spreaders which is vital to maintaining healthy landscapes in many parts of Africa. Much of what we know about these creatures is due to the work of Dr. Julian Fennessy, Co-Founder and Co-Director of [Giraffe Conservation Foundation](http://GiraffeConservationFoundation.org) (GCF), who has been studying giraffes for over 20 years.

Fennessy has exposed the shocking fact that giraffe populations in Africa are down by 40 percent in just two decades, prompting the featured mission in the film to move a herd of rare Rothschild's giraffes across the Nile River to a safer location. ***Giraffes: Africa's Gentle***

Giants airs Wednesday, October 26, 2016 at 8 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). After the broadcast, the episode will be available for limited online streaming at pbs.org/nature.

Dr. Julian Fennessy, an Australian, earned his PhD studying the tall beasts in the Namibian desert. He runs the GCF with wife Steph out of the family home in Windhoek, Namibia's capital. They are parents to Molly, age seven, and Luca, age ten, who share the Fennessys' love of giraffes. They've learned the huge bumps on a giraffe's head, called ossicones, are different from horns or antlers. They spot an old bull their parents studied before they were born and their dad estimates he may be the world's oldest recorded wild giraffe at over 20 years old. But with only 90,000 left, his goal is to identify which giraffes need urgent help based on his ground-breaking theory that there are four or five unique giraffe species, not just one.

As the film chronicles, Fennessy has to go to Ethiopia's border with war-torn South Sudan to complete his collection of DNA samples from Africa's wild giraffe population before he can run a species analysis. Searching for Nubian giraffes by helicopter, he gets one sample before gunfire aimed at the copter ends a final day's search for more.

It was Fennessy's research that greatly contributed to the very recent genetic discovery which confirmed there indeed are four distinct species of giraffe: the northern giraffe, southern giraffe, reticulated giraffe, and the Masai giraffe. This breaking news comes just as the world is learning of the endangered status of the giraffe and the need to preserve all four species.

Because a population in Uganda, called Rothchild's giraffes, are the same type as the Nubian and are endangered due to poaching and oil drilling plans, Fennessy and the Uganda Wildlife Authority work out an ambitious plan to protect the species.

A team of Ugandan veterinarians and park rangers go through training in how to safely capture a herd of young, healthy females and a few males. They guide them into trucks, drive four hours to the Nile River, cross via a ferry, and then release them in a safer habitat to breed far from the oil drilling. The film captures all the drama of such a difficult and dangerous operation in Uganda's Murchison Falls National Park as the Fennessys and the team hope a successful relocation will prompt more missions to protect these rare giraffes for generations.

Nature is a production of THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC for WNET. For ***Nature***, Fred Kaufman is executive producer. ***Giraffes: Africa's Gentle Giants*** is an AGB Films production with Gripping Films for THIRTEEN Productions LLC 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 700 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities and environmental organizations, including 17 Emmys and three Peabodys. 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. The International Wildlife Film Festival honored ***Nature*** executive producer Fred Kaufman with its Lifetime Achievement Award for Media.

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

WNET is America's flagship PBS station and parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#). WNET also operates [NJTV](#), the statewide public media network in New Jersey. Through its broadcast channels, three cable services (KidsThirteen, Create and World) and online streaming sites, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than five million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings. WNET's groundbreaking series for children and young adults include [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) as well as [Mission US](#), the award-winning interactive history game. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJTV News with Mary Alice Williams](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the daily multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. In addition, WNET produces online-only programming including the award-winning series about gender identity, [First Person](#), and an intergenerational look at tech and pop culture, [The Chatterbox with Kevin and Grandma Lill](#). In 2015, THIRTEEN launched Passport, an online streaming service which allows members to see new and archival THIRTEEN and PBS programming anytime, anywhere: www.thirteen.org/passport