

NATURE

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# LAKE BALATON EUROPE'S HIDDEN PARADISE

**4K**

1 x 50 min.

Written and directed by Szabolcs Mosonyi

4K, 5.1 and Stereo

Executive producers: Andrea Gastgeb, Sabine Holzer



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**T**here are few places left unexplored in the world, let alone in Europe. Welcome to a hidden paradise, Lake Balaton, the largest body of freshwater in Central Europe.

It was formed during the last Ice Age by tectonic forces. Originally, there were five small lakes that extended in a north-south chain across the landscape. Wind and waves gradually eroded the ridges that divided them, until they joined to create the 598 km<sup>2</sup> Lake Balaton.

On Balaton's southern shore, natural forces continue to shape dams and sandbanks. While in the north, small rivers flow down from the hills depositing rich silt that nourishes the reedy banks and swamps.

Every year, when melting snows bring fresh water to the flatlands, these swamps flood. But even without this annual inundation, Lake Balaton is always kept fresh, fed year-round by the waters of the Zala River.

In and around the shores, fields, forests and shallow bays of Lake Balaton, a huge variety of animals survive. Most of them are specialists, many are rare, and some have extraordinary behaviour!

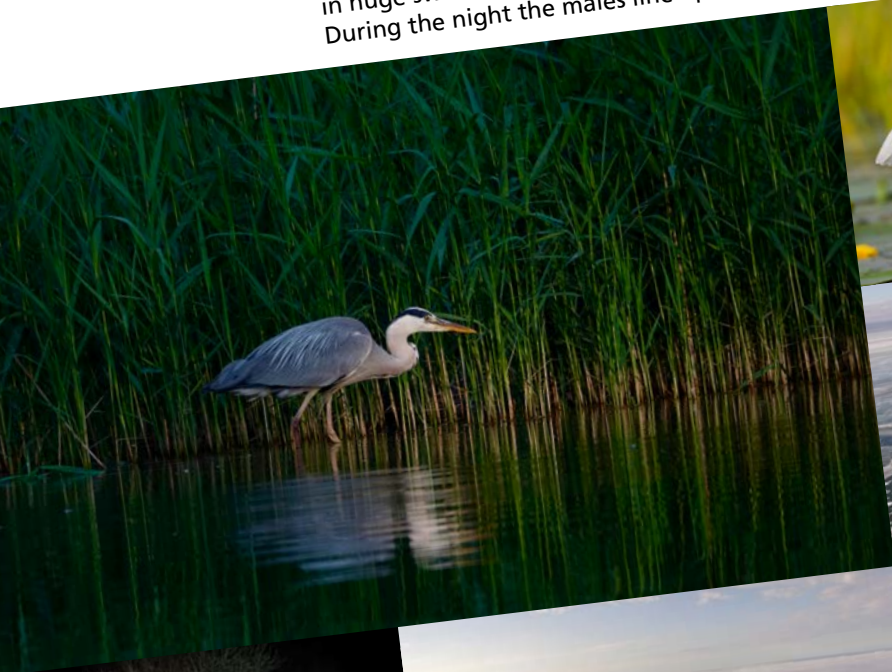
The asp is a fish—no, not a snake. Although, like a snake, this fish is a predator. In springtime, asps congregate in huge swarms to mate in Lake Balaton. During the night the males line up next

to one another, and as soon as a female swims into the group the dance of the asps begins! All of that action causes the female to press out her spawn which a lucky male immediately fertilises!

The shallow water also provides plenty of food for the birds and their young. The willow bushes, reed and sedges form a thick and impenetrable marshland—a perfect place to nest. During breeding season demand for nesting materials and space is high. Hundreds of different species converge. Squacco- and night herons, spoonbills, pigmy cormorants and the very rare glossy ibis, become neighbours in a bustling, ever-expanding bird community.

The surrounding land of Lake Balaton and the Tihany Peninsula is dominated by the remains of volcanic events. Around crumbling, ancient craters, lush fields and forests thrive. These are the hunting grounds of wild cats and peregrine falcons. In summer they keep their cubs and chicks safe in the wild grottos and crater cliffs that dot the landscape. While on lake shores dominated by grassland and sand dunes, the European ground squirrel and bee-eaters raise the next generation.

Follow us on this journey throughout the seasons to a rare, little known world to unveil the secret nature of 'Lake Balaton—Europe's Hidden Paradise'.



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