



**4K** PLANET  
**CALIFORNIA**

3 x 50 min. Written and directed by Rick Rosenthal

4K, 5.1 and Stereo Executive producers: Susanne Lummer, Sabine Holzer



**TERRA MATER**  
Factual Studios

It's a place synonymous with movies and fun. Yet the home of Hollywood, Disneyland and the Golden Gate Bridge is also a place of dramatic refuges for wildlife, from cougars and coyotes, to 2-ton elephant seals and great white sharks. From Baja California's inland sea in the south, to redwood forests in the north, California is bounded by deserts, mountain ranges, temperate rainforests and the Pacific Ocean. Together they create a vast region of unparalleled bio-diversity. Immense natural forces—earthquakes, wildfires, droughts, giant waves and El Niño, continually confront California. 'Planet California' is a 3-part series which tells the stories of wild California, combined with the science behind the forces that create and constantly re-shape its landscapes.

#### **EPISODE 01: A WORLD WITHIN—BAJA CALIFORNIA**

Baja turns back the clock on California. This is what wild Southern California once was like.

Here, in several Pacific Ocean lagoons, gangs of randy male grey whales pursue females that enter the protected bays to give birth and nurse their calves. The grey whales are unafraid of humans here. Mothers and calves approach small boats, allowing themselves to be touched by the passengers.

Not far away, ospreys nest in cactus on sandy islets. The desert-edged lagoons are home to the highest density of nesting ospreys in the world. Competition in the nest among chicks is lethal—only one youngster will survive—the weaker pushed out of the nest by its sibling.

On its other coast is Baja's inland desert sea, the Sea of Cortez, which like a giant fish trap, attracts a huge diversity of ocean animals, from menacing red devil squids as big as a man, to marlins in a sardine feeding frenzy. The sea is nourished by winter winds which blow from Upper California carrying nutrients. But when the global atmospheric phenomenon known as El Niño arrives, everything changes. For a time, almost all the sea's inhabitants mysteriously disappear, the sea empties and the waters go quiet.

Down the middle of Baja's 1,700 km long peninsula, run the Sierra de la Laguna mountains. Designated a UNESCO world biosphere, it is part of the Pacific Crest range, which runs the length of North America, and includes Yosemite in Northern California. Here condors and coyotes thrive near canyon streams that store year-round water, and which are replenished by tropical storms and the powerful hurricanes which regularly sweep across Baja.

#### **EPISODE 02: CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'— THE SCORCHING SOUTH**

Wildfires transform southern California's landscapes with devastating efficiency. Successive years of drought amplify their impact, but wildlife and the land adapt, and carry on.

Southern California's mountain lions prowl the Hollywood Hills, the Santa Monica Mountains and Malibu, close to freeways and multi-million dollar homes. The preferred prey of the California mountain lion is the black-tail deer, but when food is scarce, unattended pets and backyard livestock are also on their menu.

During El Niño, the Pacific Ocean warms, and some California beaches turn crimson with millions of small pelagic crabs which wash ashore. The crabs attract a host of predators, including visitors from the tropics like large tunas and sea birds by the thousands. For the rest of the year, red tuna crabs live a secret life at sea, appearing only when El Niño warms the ocean waters. Once every ten to fifteen years, when its low-lying mountains and deserts receive enough rain, southern California explodes with colour. The seeds of dozens of species of wild flowers germinate and bloom, blanketing the hills in dazzling swathes of intense yellows, purples, orange and blue.

California's deserts claim one of the hottest places on earth—Death Valley. Yet even here, there is life. Desert palm groves hold the last drops of rain collected from wetter times, and are a refuge for hundreds of venomous juvenile Mojave rattlesnakes. But a predator stalks these deadly princes of the desert—the brilliantly coloured King Snake, one of few animals immune to rattlesnakes' venom. The roadrunner, a Hollywood cartoon star as well as a real-life desert bird, also hunts rattlesnakes. Often working in tandem with another Roadrunner, one will distract the snake by jumping and flapping its wings, while the



other sneaks up, pins its head, then bashes the snake against a rock. If it's too long to swallow all at once, a roadrunner will walk around with a length of snake protruding from its beak, swallowing it a little at a time!

On rare evenings, when the moon is on the wane, the desert night sky presents a star show of unmatched beauty. The surrounding desert is so dark, and free of light-pollution, that it has been designated an International Dark Sky Park, one of few on our increasingly populated and illuminated planet.

### **EPISODE 03: LAND OF EXTREMES — THE WILD NORTH**

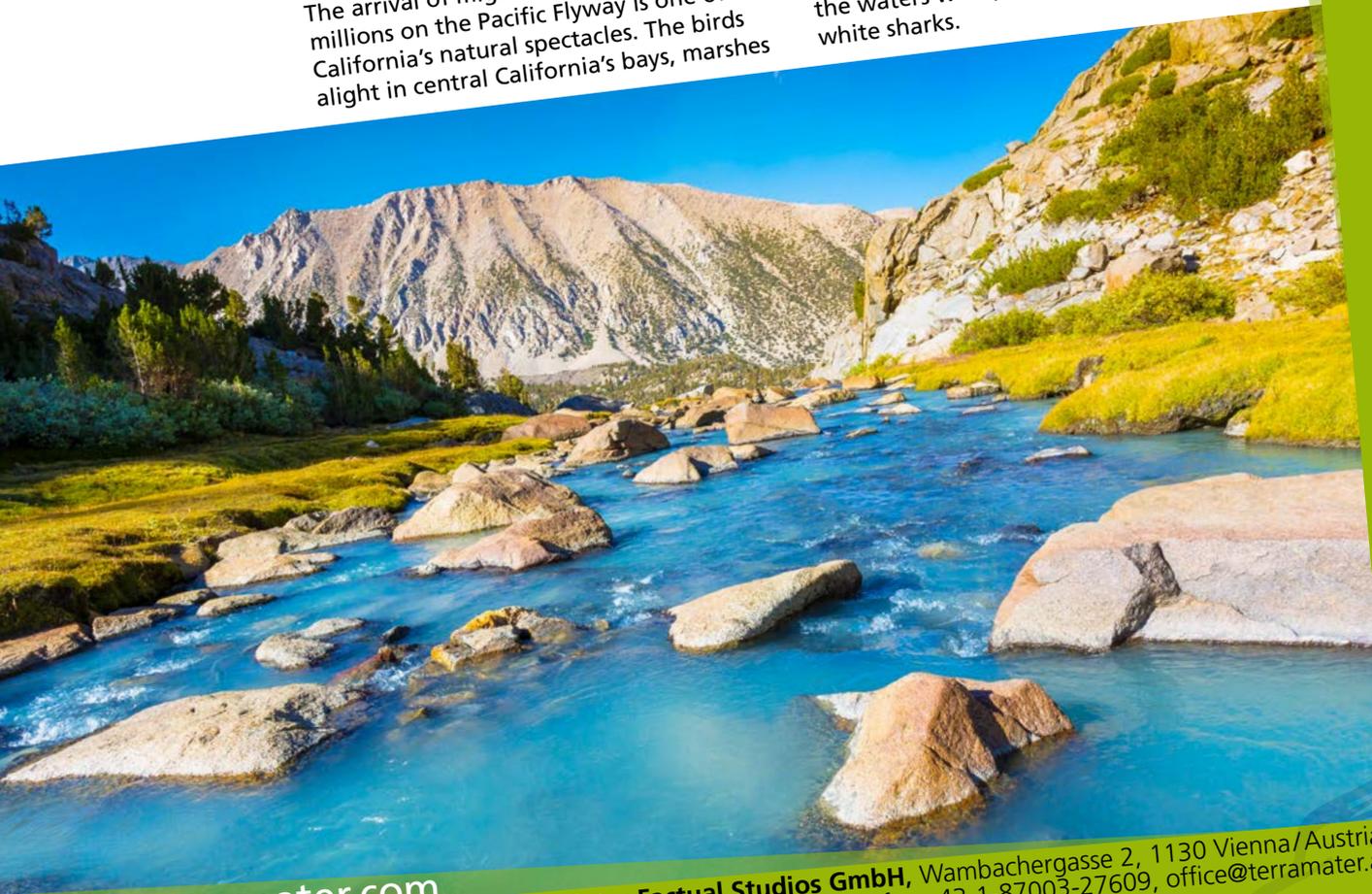
Moving mountains and carving canyons down the spine of California, the San Andreas Fault is the world's most famous earthquake fault. It has been shaping California's landscape since the beginning of time. Now, drought has forced groundwater depletion along the fault in Central California, causing farming areas to sink while actually raising the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and shaking all of California more frequently.

The arrival of migratory birds in their millions on the Pacific Flyway is one of California's natural spectacles. The birds alight in central California's bays, marshes

and rice fields, a vital stop in the birds' north-south migration, to rest, feed and nest.

Salmon and trout move seasonally from sea to stream to spawn. Their decomposing bodies deliver essential nutrients to the surrounding forests when the fish die after spawning. The trees in turn prevent erosion and protect spawning beds when winter floods ravage these same coastal rivers. Coastal Redwoods, the tallest trees in the world, thrive here. The near-constant fog layer where they grow nurtures an "aerial" ecosystem, 100 meters above the ground, where resident animals and plants species flourish without ever-touching the forest floor.

Elephant seals haul out on certain northern California beaches in vast numbers. Theirs is a rare comeback story for wildlife. From only 8 individuals in the 1900's, their numbers have grown to over 160,000 animals. This resurgence also explains the growing numbers of Great White Sharks—the elephant seals' only predator. In the so-called "Great White Shark Triangle" off San Francisco, the giant waves are as legendary as the sharks. Off a point called Maverick's, surfers ride waves 12 meters high and more, while sharing the waters with prowling 5-meter great white sharks.



**NATURE**