

NATURE



4K **THE WITNESS
IS A WHALE**

1 x 50 min.

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4K, 5.1 and Stereo



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Factual Studios

A thousand years ago, there was an ocean full of giants.

Whales were at the heart of a global web, connected to everything. They were the architects of the sea, and in places, even the land. A whale's past glory is written in their behaviour, their character, their community, and the world that was formed around them. A huge Blue whale engulfs a hundred tons in one mouthful, humpbacks sing, grey whales fight off orcas, bowheads carry the scars. Southern Right whales reveal their history in the colour of their skin, and sperm whales carry their secrets to the deep and back. The whales are the witnesses to a glorious past of giants and also to an untold human history. The clues are everywhere ...

In a basement in Odessa, top secret Soviet whaling reports are hidden. During the cold war, illegal whaling was out of control, run by the KGB, and few suspected how many whales were killed. In a thrilling and interwoven story, ships logs appear from garages, attics and cellars. For the first time, we know how many whales were killed, and so, how many there once were.

We used to think that whales were rare specialists that reach gigantic size, a natural curiosity. But if there were ten times more than was thought, or a hundred times more, then their role in the ocean was more important than anyone imagined. Suddenly, the whales themselves, their behaviour, make more sense. They are the witnesses, not only to Soviet and Japanese secrets, but to their own past.

Humpback whales travel thousands of miles to the South Eastern Pacific to feed on anchovies, working together as a team. They then head to the tropics to calve, via the Cook Strait, between New Zealand's two islands. The New Zealand whalers remember the year that no whales came. Their numbers are building back now, and arriving at their tropical Pacific paradise, the males sing and the females give birth. The song reaches out over the ocean, a legacy of when whales affected so much of life underwater.

The missing part of the puzzle is Sperm whales. They were the most valuable and secret catch. In a state archive in Vladivostok, an undercover researcher risks all, and finds the shocking truth.

The threads are tied together. The discoveries of cold war secrets reveal a bigger truth. A thousand years ago many millions of whales dominated the sea. An early description is of so many whale blows, plumes of spray, that the surface of the ocean resembled a forest. The implications to how we think of the modern ocean, and help it back to health, are profound.

A mother grey whale approaches a boat half her size and allows herself to be petted by visitors. She could easily be old enough to remember whaling and would have known the loss of most of her kind, but she is now witness to a whale's gentle vulnerability, and the hope of our understanding.



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