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MYSTERY OF THE HOMELESS HERD



Written and directed by **Ruth Berry**
Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Walter Köhler**

1x 50 min.
4K, 5.1 and Stereo

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It has been described as a storm of epic proportions with a sound like something out of a Mesozoic nightmare. It strikes in the middle of the night with 15 tonnes of muscle. The Homeless Herd. This is their story.

Fear and mystery surround a herd of nomadic elephants that terrorise people and raid villages along a 100 mile stretch of the Brahmaputra River in Assam, India. They swim downstream from the east, arriving in the highly populated areas around Kaziranga National Park at the end of the monsoons. Sometimes they leave after two months, sometimes they stay longer. Then they vanish. The visitations started in 1987 and since then the herd has doubled in size.

The behaviour of the homeless herd is unlike any other herd of Asian elephants. They have turned their backs on their natural forest habitat to pursue a life on the river with easy access to human food. Other Asian elephants live, mate and raise their young in the forest, they eat grasses, bark, leaves, fruits and roots.

In contrast, the Brahmaputra herd are at home on the river. They swim from sand island to sand island, where they mate and raise their young. They prefer human food, but when the humans try to scare these elephants off, they don't retreat to the forest. They stay around and wait for the next opportunity.

They're also discovered what a trunk full of home-made rice wine will do for the spirits. They like getting drunk and raiding. They are the Vikings of the natural world.

Why did they evolve to live this way? Where do they come from? Where will they turn up next? How long will they stay and where do they go when they leave? Our film will seek to answer these questions. Every villager has their own theory. Some say they used to inhabit a forest grown by a famous conservationist upstream but left when they ran out of food. Others say they were working elephants, used to humans, that were released in the 1980's.

The truth may be much simpler. Humans have cut down their forest homes for agriculture and blocked their ancient migration routes with roads and factories.

The story of the homeless herd is also the story of the plight of the Asian elephant. Alarming habitat destruction is threatening the entire population. Fatal confrontations between hungry elephants and poor villagers are the tragic side effect.

"When other animals have their habitat destroyed, they just quietly disappear, but not elephants. They fight back. They let you know their habitat is destroyed. Because they can't go anywhere, and you can't stop them".

Dhruba Das, Human / Animal conflict expert.

A production of Terra Mater Factual Studios



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