NATURE

RAPTORS
A FISTFUL OF DAGGERS

Written and directed by **Matt Hamilton**
Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Walter Köhler**

2 × 50 min.
4K, 5.1 and Stereo

TERRA MATER
FACTUAL STUDIOS

The planet's most successful large predators are a group of birds known as the raptors. United by a hooked beak, set of razor-sharp talons and a taste for flesh, they have conquered the globe. In doing so, they have won both our respect and an obsessive global following.

This two-part series tells the story of the raptor's unparalleled success. From familiar favourites to entirely new characters, we reveal the latest discoveries alongside extraordinary behaviours. We discover how raptors perfect the art of survival, how they adapt to the toughest environments, and what the future holds for these remarkable birds in a rapidly changing world.

From distant lands to stunningly lit studios, this series is an insightful and spectacular celebration of the world's top predators. It's time to see the raptors in a whole new light.

EPISODE 1: MEET THE RAPTORS

Our first episode is a tale from the top of the food chain. We reveal the ways in which raptors have come to dominate the planet, kill for a living and inspire both fear and wonder. Alongside astonishing visuals, insights and behaviours, we even introduce you to the newest, rather surprising, member of the raptors.

The raptors, also known as birds of prey, are an exceptionally diverse group. There are hundreds of species. We begin with one of the biggest. With talons the size of a grizzly bear's claws and a grip more powerful than a rottweiler's jaws, the African crowned eagle hunts monkeys and small antelope for a living. There is even evidence it once hunted us. On the other end of the scale, the Bornean falconet is no bigger than a soda can. Twisting and turning in an aerial ballet through the jungle, it plucks off moths with ease. It may be small but is every bit as deadly as the mythic crowned eagle.

Despite the immense difference in size, most raptors share two obvious physical traits; a hooked beak and razor-sharp talons. Talons come in all shapes and sizes. They're used to puncture, subdue, crush, even hook fish. If you want to know what a raptor hunts, the talons will tell you. Interestingly, the design of the beak is almost identical across all raptors, with one extraordinary exception. We reveal a jaw-dropping tale of evolution in action from Florida's Everglades, where the bizarre long beak of the snail kite has grown as much as twelve percent bigger in response to a dramatic change in prey availability. All in just ten years.

Shared physical traits make raptors instantly recognizable, but extraordinary superpowers make all the difference between the species. We meet the Houdini of the bird world, the African harrier hawk, which uses double-jointed limbs to reach for prey inside tree holes. In Siberia, the fire-hydrant sized Blakiston's fish owl spots prey below water in the middle of the night thanks to exceptional eyesight. And we put a turkey vulture's mind-blowing power of smell to the ultimate test.

With such varied superpowers, the question remains, what exactly makes a bird a raptor? How are they connected? Tracing evolution, the latest scientific definition has the answer and, what's more, it even welcomes a new raptor to the flock! Meet the seriema, a snake-hunting terror of South America's tropical grasslands. It turns out the raptors do all share common ancestry. And by this definition, scientists have discovered that seriemas also makes the cut. These strange birds have a unique way of neutralising prey; repeatedly picking it up and throwing it to the ground until completely immobilised. Not a pleasant end.

EPISODE 2: LIFE AT THE LIMITS

Life as a top predator is not as easy as it seems. Our second episode reveals the astonishing ways in which raptors adapt to the toughest places on the planet. We visit frozen wastes, deadly jungles, baking savannahs and remote, storm-battered isles. We bring stories of drama, tragedy and hope, as the world's top predators battle the odds to survive. Alongside a mix of new and familiar faces, we also consider what the future holds for raptors in a rapidly changing world.

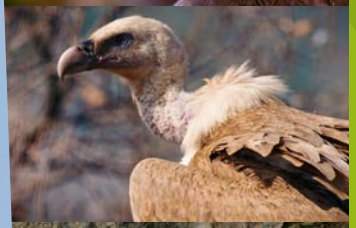
Winter in the high arctic. The sun doesn't rise and an icy wind whips across the frozen sea. This is no place for any living creature. And yet, a white figure stands motionless in the blizzard, her piercing yellow eyes the only hint of colour in the bleak landscape. She is a snowy owl. Able to survive temperatures as low as -60°C, she is one of the most formidable hunters on Earth.

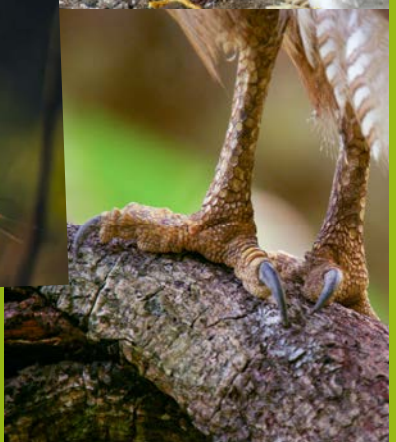










#terramatters

Whether it's a snowy owl enduring the arctic winter, or group of honey buzzards breaking into hornet nests in the mountains of Taiwan, raptors have adapted to face almost every challenge thrown their way. Some, like the strange secretary bird, are uniquely adapted to specific habitats. Their long legs, used to strike at prey with forces five times greater than their body weight, are perfect for stalking snakes on the African savannah. Other raptors are more opportunistic, appearing wherever the food may be. When that happens to be a spectacle of 20 million migrating bats, red-tailed hawks are all but guaranteed a meal.

As specialists or generalists, raptors have perfected the art of survival in almost every habitat. They are rightly credited with being highly accomplished hunters, but could there be more to it than that? On the storm battered Falkland Islands, well known for penguins and elephant seals, we meet one of the most extraordinary raptors of all, the striated caracara. Unusually, they patrol the islands in rowdy gangs. Their social dynamics and inquisitive nature are perhaps more reminiscent of crows, birds renowned for their intelligence. With relatively few studies into raptor intelligence, we put a gang of caracaras through some tests.

No matter how or where they live, the greatest challenge in any raptor's life is when the time comes to raise the next generation. Even here, raptors have evolved a way to tip the scales in their favour, by attempting to raise as many chicks as possible. This means when the hunting is good, lots of chicks survive. The flip side is that in bad years few, if any, chicks make it. Rivalry between nest mates is common and intense. We follow the drama as the breeding season unfolds.

For chicks that do fledge, the weeks and months after leaving the nest can be the toughest of their lives. Many are raised in such unforgiving places that they are forced to leave before winter. This can lead to immense spectacle, nowhere more so than in Nagaland, northeast India. For several weeks each year, the skies here swarm with over one million Amur falcons. Having nested in Siberia, the entire population, boosted by this year's chicks, is on an 8,000-mile journey to southern Africa. They time their arrival in Nagaland to fatten up on a seasonal eruption of winged termites before moving on.

A few years ago, the spectacle of migrating Amur falcons was nearly lost entirely. Huge conservation efforts have thankfully reversed that. But what does the future hold for raptors in our rapidly changing world? Some have adapted readily to our cities. Other, more specialised raptors, or those that live on remote islands, face a greater threat as their habitats change. Raptors are such extraordinary survivors that in many cases of decline, there is hope. However, to make that hope a reality depends on immense human effort. We join a dedicated team working around the clock to save one of the biggest eagles on earth.

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Terra Mater Factual Studios GmbH
Wambachergasse 2, 1130 Vienna / Austria
phone +43-1-87003-0, office@terramater.com
www.terramater.com