



BORN OF DUST, BLAZING WITH LIFE



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BARREN BEAUTIES

Executive Producers: **Sabine Holzer, Walter Köhler**
2 x 50 min, 4K, 5.1



Nobody who has witnessed the breath-taking beauty of the stars on a clear night in the desert will ever forget the experience.

For many, deserts are the very embodiment of vastness, silence and loneliness. However, deserts are anything but tranquil: constant drought, regular sandstorms, searing heat in the daytime and icy temperatures at night combine to create a secretive world that is both harsh and beautiful.

The word 'desert' causes most people to think of the Sahara or the Gobi: vast sand dunes that cover large areas of countries and continents. Alternatively, inhospitable stony deserts like Death Valley or Australia's outback might come to mind – but the world's deserts are not limited to Africa, Asia, America and Australia. Europe's deserts are remarkable, not because of their dimensions, but because of their unusual history, characteristics or geographic locations in Spain, Italy, in the Highlands of Iceland or on the volcanic island of Fuerteventura. There are tiny deserts in Sweden and Norway, and large ones in Poland, Serbia and Ukraine. They all continue to expand, and their growth is being exacerbated by climate change.

Spain's **Tabernas Desert** is often compared to the Badlands of North America, and temperatures here can rise to above 45 degrees Celsius during the summer. It is an inhospitable, sparse world created by centuries of low precipitation, extreme heat and strong wind erosion. The animals and plants that live here are specialists that have learned to survive despite the meagre resources the desert offers: the desert flower **Moricandia foetida** only grows in a few select places, and Bonelli's eagles and scops owls are among the region's notable predators. Meanwhile, wild cats and foxes roam the **Bardenas Reales** semi-desert in northern Spain. Little apart

from saltwort grows on 400 square kilometres of sparse soil, and great bustards frequently fall prey to eagles and vultures.

The desert environment of **Fuerteventura**, the second largest of the Canary Islands, is home to few animal species. Some types of quail, coursers and houbara bustards have adapted to life in the difficult island environment, while rare Canarian Egyptian vultures circle above.

The **Highlands of Iceland** are an extensive stony volcanic plateau interrupted by shimmering green oases of grass. At first glance, the area seems completely uninhabited, and heavy rainfalls,

sandstorms and blizzards can occur anytime during the year. However, the desertification here is a result of human animal farming, rather than drought. The Highlands of Iceland are now the hunting grounds of arctic foxes, the island's original inhabitants.

The history and the stories of Europe's deserts are just as varied and fascinating as those of their larger 'relatives' on other continents. Europe's deserts have much to reveal about the development of our continent – and about its beauty, diversity, its constant evolution and its uncertain future.

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