

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:**

I've worked in documentary film for a long time now and can attest to the tremendous amount of resources often required to create a film and especially a wildlife or natural history film. Crews are often very large and even in the case of specialized skeleton crews for specific sequences, the overall crew for many of these larger budget productions is often huge. Many of these personnel are flown all over the world in addition to the cameras, gear and assets that are often shipped back and forth. There is a lot of air travel and fuel use and specialized vehicles for stabilized shots and guides and fixers and biologists and on and on. Very often a wide variety of studios and post houses are used for the various tasks of narration recording, sound mixing, mastering, foley, online color correction, etc. Often directors and/or producers travel around to these various physical locations to supervise those aspects of post-production. Before production even begins there are often teams of researchers scouring the planet for stories and access. All of these things, and many, many others, represent components of the filmmaking process that require resources. The direct and indirect impact of the human resources alone are staggering - large teams of people who require food, transport, salaries, time, and office buildings with lights and heat built over the top of what used to be wildlife habitat. And filmmaking in this style is a business, very often driven by profits. Those big budgets don't appear out of thin air and all too often this enormous resource use is in the interest of filming some rare spectacle that viewers have yet to see, that is to say, something marketable - something that can generate advertising revenue.

My film Tracking Notes on the other hand was made with a very small fraction of the budget for most of these films. There are not any 5 consecutive minutes in most award-winning wildlife shows that didn't cost more than my entire film. Tracking Notes was shot and edited by one person in a 50 mile radius of where I live. There was no air travel, no shipping of equipment, no crews to transport, no hotels or rental vehicles, etc. The footprint of this film is virtually non-existent in comparison with the average nature film. I've worked on films for the BBC, National Geographic, Nature, etc. and I don't necessarily take issue with devoting resources to telling these stories. But I think my film shows that local stories told creatively with a minimum of resources and impact, can be just as meaningful and valuable as giant productions. And I think that is worth recognizing and celebrating.

## **BEHAVIOUR:**

Tracking Notes documents multiple important behaviors in mountain lions for the very first time. Chief amongst these is resource sharing amongst unrelated individuals. While recent research by Mark Elbroch of Panthera and others has indicated that these cats might be more social than previously thought and that such a thing might occur, nobody has been able to prove it definitively with genetically identified individuals, much less film it. Tracking Notes contains the

very first footage ever recorded of wild, genetically unrelated cats sharing food resources with each other. Additionally, these wild cats were uncollared and the behavior was documented on two separate occasions. Unprecedented footage like this is difficult to come by these days and requires a significant investment to get. The film, which relies heavily on a giant network of remote cameras, also contains many other shots and sequences of behaviors rarely if ever witnessed or recorded. Mountain lions killing foxes, mountain lions hunting and killing bull elk, wild interactions between mountain lions and black bears and between foxes and elk, Mountain lions listening to elk bugles and mountain lion kittens being abandoned - all of these things are behaviors that have never been filmed before. This film is a bonanza of revelations for people who are fascinated by the lives of wild animals but it's the documentation of unrelated resource sharing that makes this film a paradigm shifting contribution to wildlife science.

### **EDITING:**

This film started out as a short film about an interesting mountain lion research project being conducted in Montana's Bitterroot Valley. The research organization mentioned that they had a lot of trailcam footage that we could use in the film but I informed them that trailcam footage wasn't good enough for our purposes and that aside from the possibility of a few clips that showed extraordinary behaviour, we'd be shooting the film from scratch with professional equipment. However, when I eventually got access to the archives and started combing through the footage, I realized that I was sitting on a gold mine and would have to re-envision what the film was going to be. They had footage from somewhere between 200-300 cameras that had been continuously deployed for 10 years. Much of this footage had simply been copied by interns, backed up and forgotten about. Much of it had never been logged and much of it had never even been looked at by anyone. As the possibilities started to take shape in my head, I found myself staying up all night going clip by clip through thousands of false-triggers of branches blowing in the breeze, looking for those rare and special moments where an animal had passed by, triggered a camera and opened up a portal into the secret life of the forest. The more I looked the more possibilities I saw and I spent uncountable hours sorting through footage trying to connect the dots between individuals and species and places to tease out the stories of what had taken place. That in turn led to cross-referencing the camera data with the maps of genetic sample locations and dates to try to identify distinct individuals over time. Some of this had been done by the research team but much of it had not and my obsession with the footage led to a familiarity which in turn revealed a number of discoveries that had evaded the researchers, including patterns of movement between offspring and their mothers, footage of mating that led to the births of primary characters in the film and recognition of individuals across physically disparate areas of the mountain range. As I contemplated how to tell a story using these random clips recorded across a large amount of space and time, I decided that I

needed a visual way to zoom into specific spots on the landscape where cameras were located to show the bits of the story that had taken place there. The editing task of finding and putting all of these puzzle pieces together was huge and comprised by far the largest amount of effort put into the film. What started as a 15 minute video ended up being 3 years of connecting together random clips shot over the course of a decade to create a feature length film that tells the story of a lineage of mountain lions.