

Hugo van Lawick: Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee:

Hugo van Lawick

Name of interviewer:

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1. Hugo's childhood and how he became involved with wildlife filmmaking

Int: This is an archive recording with Hugo van Lawick. It is Thursday 12th October 2000. It is Michael Bright asking the questions. Hugo, can we take you right back to your childhood? You were born in Indonesia?

HvL: Born in Indonesia, 1937, Soerabja. Stayed there until I was four years old. My father was a pilot in the Navy so flying aeroplanes that landed on the water. He crashed just before the Japanese entered Indonesia and got killed. My mother took my brother who is two years younger than me and myself, I was then four, to Australia. Where we went to Perth first and then in 1942, I think it was, moved from Australia to England and that's rather extraordinary because it was, you know, very dangerous time of the war to start going to England. But of course everyone in Australia thought the Japanese were also going to enter Australia at that stage and we went through the Panama canal, boat travelling on its own, and I remember clearly, when we were getting close to Southampton, an aeroplane arriving over the horizon. We had a lot of soldiers on board and they all lay on their backs, with their rifles pointing in the air, but it was an RAF plane warning us of a submarine on our path. And so we then zigzagged, and I'm told, I don't remember that, another plane arriving and dropping depth charges, and we got to Southampton. So then lived in England during the war.

Int: So you were educated in England?

HvL: So yes, first of all I was educated in England, mainly in Devon.

Int: Whereabouts?

HvL: Near, to start with near Tiverton, and lived in a place called Stoodleigh, tiny little village near Tiverton. I don't remember where the other school was - somewhere out in the wilds.

Int: Now you were brought up then, your formative years were in England. Did you have an interest in wildlife at that stage?

HvL: Yes I did. I spent a lot of time in the woods, watching animals. I remember at school giving a lecture on owls, and I must have been, well I went to Holland when I was ten, so I must have been about eight or nine. I spent all my free time out in the woods, looking at animals. Now, where it came from originally I've no idea, although that's not totally true - it may have come from my mother, because in Indonesia she had all sorts of pet animals, mainly domesticated white rabbits and chickens and things like that, but also a squirrel. So maybe it came from there, I don't know.

Int: And then you went to Holland?

HvL: Then went to Holland in 1947, so was then educated further in Holland. Did my National Service in the army for two years, or a year and a half, and then joined a Dutch film company, because when I was fifteen, I always knew I wanted to work with animals, but I wasn't sure how to. And of course animal behaviour, yes there were two people doing animal behaviour in those stages, but I thought they did that in their free time. So I then discovered photography, filmmaking. And decided that was a way in which to work with animals. So, that's what I then aimed for. Joined a Dutch film company making commercials, to learn something about camerawork. And then was lucky enough to meet Armand and Michaela Denis in Amsterdam, where they were on a visit. And then a year later joined them in Kenya.

Int: So you worked on what programmes first, what films first, with them?

HvL: With them on the series, A Leopard in my Lap, or On Safari (1), I think it was called and the book was called Leopard in my Lap (2). On Safari (1), and the first film I did, this was with Des Bartlett, he was chief cameraman, and the first film I really worked on with him, was at Lake Baringo, filming crocodiles and also Lake Hannington, which is now Bogoria, I believe, also filming flamingos there and various other things. And also the people.

Int: How did you actually get the job?

HvL: Well I met Armand and Michaela Denis, and Armand said, "Well, how many thousands of feet of film have you shot?" I of course was an assistant cameraman with this company, but I had actually bought a camera, saved up and bought a camera, but I couldn't really afford the films. I'd managed to shoot five rolls, so five hundred feet. So my mouth dropped open in amazement when he said how many thousands of feet and I had to admit not even a thousand. But then Michaela came and had supper with my mother and I, and I showed him some 8 mm film that I'd taken, and she was very impressed by that, and told Armand. And they'd suggested for me trying to find a job in Kenya - not necessarily in filmmaking, and filming in my free time. And then ultimately they might take me on. I tried for a year, by correspondence, but that was hopeless,

so I then wrote to them and said, "Well, I'm just going to come to Kenya," and then I'll try when I get there, and as it turned out, Alan Root had just left them, so they were short of a cameraman, so they wrote to me and said join us.

2. Filming for Armand and Michaela Denis

Int: What was it like at that time? What was it like filming with people like that?

HvL: Well of course, you know, I'd finally got to Africa, where I wanted to be. It was absolutely fantastic. To begin with it was difficult for me because I didn't really have experience, very little. So I had to learn very very fast. Then going on safari, with Des firstly, Baringo, and then later other areas on my own. I suppose the first big chance I had was when I persuaded Armand Denis, after quite a long time, to let me go on my own into the Nairobi National Park every day for a month, to see what I could get. And, his argument, was well, Des has shot so much there, that you won't get anything that we haven't already got. But finally he relented and let me go, and I was so cautious as to what I filmed, that I actually end up, ended up with stuff that he'd never filmed, and a very high percentage was useable. So, and then I was sent out to do other things, including filming the capture of rhinos, which were caught in two ways - one with a noose from a truck, and the other with a crossbow and a hypodermic needle. And these rhinos, at least half of them, were re-located in National Parks. Because even in those days, and I'm talking now about 1962, I wouldn't say the rhinos were endangered then, there were a lot of rhinos, but it certainly was a problem, and the Game Department was trying to get them into safety, into National Parks, out of heavy poaching areas. So, I joined after that, after I left Armand Denis I didn't have work for a while, and I joined the one rhino catcher, Nick Carter, whose name was Carter the Darter, as he used a crossbow to catch rhinos, and assisted him for a month, catching rhinos.

Int: Were you shooting in colour, at that stage?

HvL: Yes, everything was shot in colour, shot on Kodachrome. The editing was done with the original. Even in those days, I looked on absolutely horrified, to see all this original being edited in Nairobi, in a fairly, in fairly dusty surroundings.

Int: And is that reversal film?

HvL: Reversal film, yes. But of course the disadvantage of it was, it was very slow speed, it was 10 ASA. The advantage was that it held its quality for a long, long time. So, it was a good one to start with.

Int: And the cameras then?

HvL: Cameras, all I could afford was a Bolex, I started off with a Bolex. And then ultimately saved enough money to swap the Bolex, and with a bit of extra payment, got a second hand Arriflex.

Int: So, that was, 16?

HvL: 16 mm, yes.

Int: And the Armand and Michaela Denis film?

HvL: Armand and Michaela Denis, it was all 16mm, yes. And of course filming in colour in those days was rather unusual for television, because it was all black and white television. But, Armand had, I suppose forseen, what would happen, and said well, "I prefer to have it all in colour," so that's what happened.

Int: He was looking at the future.

HvL: He was looking at the future, yes.

Int: Just staying with that period for a second, what were they like to work with? How did you get on with them?

HvL: I got on very well with them. Heavens I have to think now, he could be, well they could both be difficult. But generally I got on very well with them. She was a bit of an eccentric, but I suppose I got on more, better with her than with Armand.

Int: At that stage?

HvL: At that stage, yes.

Int: How did they determine what was going to be filmed, during those days?

HvL: To a large extent it was Des Bartlett who was deciding on, who came up with ideas, and decided what to do. Armand Denis relied very much on Des Bartlett. I mean, he was brilliant, in organisation and doing it all. So in my view, it was Des who did a lot of that. And then he would go off and film, or I would go off with him and film, and then Armand and Michaela would join us at a certain moment, and be filmed with the, in the location.

Int: Were there any rules that you had to follow? For example, did you always want to get the two shot of Armand and Michaela with the subject?

HvL: You certainly tried to do that, yes. But of course it was so different to filming today. It was, you know, driving through a National Park, and on your right, you see two zebras doing something or other, and then you drive on and then on your left, you see something else. To start with it was like that. And then it started being more concentrated, I suppose with things like the rhino capture. But it was difficult. I tried to persuade them to let me go into Nairobi Park for a month and make a film, just on baboons, but of course in those days you didn't make films on single, individual animals. So he said, oh no, you couldn't sell it. So, I wasn't able to do that. So there was a totally different view of how films were made, wildlife films.

3. Filming for National Geographic

Int: You then left. Why did you decide to leave that operation?

HvL: I, actually, I didn't decide to leave, it was sort of coming to an end, Armand Denis' series, although not totally, because after that Simon Trevor worked with them for a while. But, I think there were problems. So I left, and then spent a month working. I had no money at all. So spent a month working with the Game Department catching the rhinos, and that gave me enough money to survive for a month in Nairobi, and start looking for work as a freelancer. And then I was incredibly lucky, because a friend of mine was Richard Leakey, at that stage. And, I had met his father, Louis Leakey, and Mary Leakey, his mother. And Louis Leakey heard about this, and said well come and stay at our house. You know, it would be ridiculous to pay for a hotel. So, I moved into their house just outside Lengata, Nairobi, and I'd only been there for two days, and the telephone rang, and I took it, and it was the National Geographic Society, wanting to speak to Louis Leakey. And I was standing behind him, and what the conversation was, was they needed a lecture film on him. And time was running out, and they didn't have a photographer immediately available, and did he know of a cameraman who could start work, sort of the next day? So Louis Leakey said, yes, he's standing right behind me.

So that's how I got my first job with National Geographic. And then, they were happy with the results, and then invited me to Washington, and then I worked for them for five years, non-stop.

Int: So what sort of films were you making for them at that time?

HvL: To start with, it was lecture films. Because they weren't into television quite yet. Almost, but not quite yet. So, I made various lecture films for Dr Leakey, and then they sent me to Gombe to make a lecture film for Jane Goodall. And then they got into television. And the first two films of their series, one was Dr Leakey and the other was Jane's work (3).

Int: Just harping back on Leakey, Louis Leakey.

HvL: Yes.

Int: That would have been a film about origins of man (3), and the discoveries of —.

HvL: Yes, he gave yearly, he gave lectures to the National Geographic audiences. And so each year they would try and have a lecture film, and try and think up a different angle or whatever, so the first time I went it was a travelogue type film. Which is what the National Geographic was used to. And then the next one I did was comparing the bones of prehistoric animals with today's animals. Then after that I forget what the subjects were. There were other sites then Fortunan, and I went to Rusinga Island where he'd had digs before.

Int: Were they Olduvai as well?

HvL: It started with Olduvai, it was all Olduvai. And then I happened to be there when *Homo habilis* was

found, first time. And also when Richard Leakey found the lower jaw of *Zinjanthropus* at Lake Natron. And so I was able to film that.

I was very happy to work at Olduvai and other fossil site, because when I had been young, as an early teenager, one of my main hobbies was trying to find fossils, and also stones, but especially fossils. There weren't many places in Holland to find fossils. So it was a big hobby of mine, and in fact I had seriously thought about making it my profession, before I discovered filmmaking, and a way of working with animals. So, I'd already had that hobby, and so it fascinated me. And in fact, it was very funny, because the first day I was at Olduvai, I filmed in the morning, in the middle of the day it was too hot to work down in Olduvai, but I was so keen I went down there, with Philip Leakey, and started looking for fossils, and found, found the skull of a hartebeest. So I took that to Dr Leakey, and it turned out it had been a new species, which they hadn't found yet. So I thought, whoa, this is easy. It took me ten years before I found anything else that was new. So it wasn't that easy - beginners luck.

Int: They didn't name it after you?

HvL: Well, he said he was going to yes - *Damaliscus lawickius*.

Int: Then in the same period as the early National Geographic films, you went to Gombe.

HvL: Yes.

Int: And what happened there?

HvL: The National Geographic wanted a lecture film, which would be used by Jane. And they warned me that I probably wouldn't get any material on chimps, because they were very shy. But that didn't matter, as long as I got material on her, and how she lived there, and so on. Because personally, I wanted to get the material on chimps. Now they sent me there for six weeks. That was the brief. But I actually stayed for three months. And it coincided when one chimp certainly, or three chimps, started visiting our camp and one was especially habituated. So I was able to film those three chimps. And I was very lucky, on my second day there I filmed meat-eating. And then at the end of the period, that's why I stayed on for so long - I was hoping to get termites, them catching termites, and managed to get it two days before I had to leave, to start another film. So, having accomplished that, and got some nice material on chimps, I was then able to persuade the National Geographic to send me back again for seven months. And then after that, then I stayed nine months, and then after that, back for a year, and so on.

Int: That early stuff that you, that early material that you filmed, was that controversial at the time? In the scientific community?

HvL: Jane had been criticised. It was controversial. I mean there was a scientist here, a very powerful scientist here in England, who poo poed what she was discovering and in fact said she was lying. One of the things was meat-eating. He said no, no, no, you know, apes don't eat meat. And the other one was the toolmaking. And of course once it was on film, he couldn't say anything. The proof was there.

Int: So your films were actually very important.

HvL: Oh they were very important, yes. And my brief from National Geographic was to start with it was a lecture film, but after that it was to make a scientific record, on the chimpanzees. Now, I slowly, more and more of the chimpanzees became habituated. The first year was very difficult. You couldn't move around really. And the first three months, even in a hide, they saw you immediately, and ran away - except for those three males. But ultimately they got used to me, and I quickly discovered I suppose, or realised, that there seemed to be one family who were especially interesting and really had a lot of character, each individual. So I concentrated especially on them. And it turned out to be a very lucky choice, because that whole family has become the most important family in Gombe, and with the research.

Int: This is the family that all have their —.

HvL: Frodo family with Fifi and Figan and so on. Yes.

Int: Now, that must have been the start of your liaison with Jane.

HvL: Yes.

Int: Can you talk us through that? What happened?

HvL: Well, not —.

Int: Not in detail.

HvL: No, I suppose when I arrived there, we were both interested in the same things and we worked together on the same things, so we got on very well together. And it took off from there.

Int: And you worked together for most of the time.

HvL: Oh yes, yes. And even when we got married, we decided, well how are we going to do this, you know, because she was interested in chimps, and I, Gombe didn't have enough animals, different types of animals to keep me full-time employed. So, we decided that six months per year would be at Gombe with the chimps, and six months per year would be Serengeti, or Ngorongoro, places like that. And by then, by then Jane had taken on assistants who could continue with the work while she wasn't there, continue with the observations. So that's the way it worked for a long time.

4. The African wild dogs film

Int: And when you went to the Serengeti, one of the classic films that you made there was the film about the wild dogs (4). Can you tell us about that?

HvL: Yes. I'd always wanted to make films about individual animals, and I'd never been able to persuade anyone to let me do that. Although of course surreptitiously I was already doing it on the chimps, but that was different. And then when I wanted to film wild dogs, I tried to persuade various people, where I needed financing, to try to explain what I wanted to do, but they didn't seem to understand. Obviously I wasn't explaining it properly. And then I persuaded Collins, the publishers, to put some financing up for the film. And then started filming the wild dogs. Now, my intention with the wild dogs because I had watched them and studied them for a book, was to show, they were considered vermin until then, shot on sight, and the intention was to show what a nice animals they were, and how wonderful they were and so on. And of course then this drama started developing in front of my camera, where one of the females was killing the puppies of the other female, and you know it was one and all drama. So it didn't actually show what I originally wanted, but was an incredibly dramatic story. And proved what I'd try to prove, that you could make a film on individual animals and make it interesting.

Int: And the character at the centre of this film was Solo.

HvL: Yes.

Int: Tell us about Solo.

HvL: Well, Solo became a character a little bit later on in the film, of course, to start with it was a conflict between the two females. Which was Havoc, the dominant female, and Angel, the subordinate female. And they were sisters. Now Havoc had her own puppies, ten, and she tried to drive Angel out of the pack, but when Angel was due to give birth, which was a month later, she managed to get back into the pack and have her puppies there. And then Havoc killed all of these puppies, except for the one, Solo, which she kept. And I couldn't understand at the time, why she killed all these puppies. Later, after I'd completed the film, I realised that hunting had become very difficult because it was dry season. And so in fact, what she was doing, is making sure that there weren't too many mouths to feed. She was trying to save her own puppies, and the pack itself. So, but then, she also started to force the pack to move earlier, or at the right age for her own puppies, but a month too early for Solo. And so Solo, after walking about forty miles, couldn't keep up. And so I then took her, and took her back to camp. Kept her for a month. And now there was another sister in that pack originally, and she in the meantime had had puppies, of about a month younger than Solo. And she was with her own mate - they'd left the pack. So, then I couldn't find the original pack, the Genghis pack, so I released Solo with this male and female, who were related. But of course keeping my fingers crossed, because we didn't know, were they going to kill this unknown puppy to them? Or would they accept it, but they accepted her.

Int: And the book, that went with the television —.

HvL: And then a book came out (5), it came, yes.

Int: Now was that one of the first times when animals in wildlife films were seen as individuals, that I seem to remember at the time, that there was discussion about the fact that they had names.

HvL: Oh yes, I mean there was a lot of criticism in those days, in giving animals names. Scientists gave them numbers. To give them names was anthropomorphic, and if you give them a certain name, say you name them after a friend of yours, you might see characteristics of this friend in the animals, and I always thought that was ridiculous. And so I ignored that. But I know that I got a letter criticising me for calling one Brutus,

because he forsake Angel, so I'd obviously given him that name because of that. But I was then able to point out, that he should read my previous book, where Brutus already had his name, and hadn't forsaken anyone, so it was pure coincidence. But of course in those days, in animal behaviour, there were a lot of rules, and especially fear of being anthropomorphic. I think it was a result of when animal behaviour started becoming a scientific study, other scientists in other fields criticised it, and said, "Oh, it's not a science." And then the scientists who were involved in animal behaviour fell over backwards trying to prove it to be a science, and I think went too far. And now of course you see, a lot of things that used to be anthropomorphic are not anthropomorphic any more, including naming animals.

Int: We now see them as individuals.

HvL: That's right, yes.

Int: Was it at that time that you then started to live in the bush, in a semi- or permanent-tented camp?

HvL: I was in the bush most of the time, we did have a house outside Nairobi for a while, but that was mainly because we found if we were staying in a hotel, and I had a storage space at Dr Leakey's place, but it would take so long to get the next safari organised, that that didn't work very well. We then got a house outside Nairobi and that coincided, I mean Grub's, my son's birth, was part of that decision to buy a house. Then we found to organise the next safari, which was a matter of very short time - a week, two weeks at the most, and then we could be off into the bush again. So actually we were out in the bush most of the time. But permanently, a permanent camp in the Serengeti, yes - coincided with the Solo film (4). And it was supposed to be a temporary camp, but then it just stayed there for a while - for a couple of years, or a number of years, and then the then time conservator of Ngorongoro said well you can stay here forever. So then I made it into a much larger permanent camp. Because I'd decided that if you go camping normally, in little tents, it was all rather primitive and so on. But if I was going to live full time in the bush, then I would need, in my base camp, because it was only a base camp, I wanted some comfort in that. So I made this base camp quite large - large tents, quite a lot of comfort. Because of course most of the time, I didn't make films from there. Because the animals I wanted to film were elsewhere, or I wanted a change of scenery, so usually I'd then take some small tents, put up a safari camp somewhere close to the animals. But with a base camp providing me with food and supplies and so on.

5. Famous films

Int: Can we go through some of the films that you've made over the last few years, the ones that I've made a note of. People of the Forest (6) - was that the first chimpanzee film?

HvL: Oh no, People of the Forest (6) was very late on. No, the first one, I think it was called Jane Goodall and the Apes of —, Jane Goodall and the Apes (7) I think. The whole series on Jane, through the years with National Geographic Society. People of the Forest (6) - that only happened twenty years later. You see the material all belonged to the National Geographic Society, and I'd left them in the meantime. I'd always been a freelancer with them, I wasn't on their staff. I tried to persuade them to let me make a film out of this material, for them, or I'd take it over, or whatever. But early on they weren't interested in that. And then twenty years later, Jane said to me, would you be prepared to go back to Gombe, do some more filming. I hadn't been there for seven years or something. We were divorced by then. And I said no, I've spent enough of my life filming chimps. And then she said, well I think that Geographic would release the material to you, the old material. So I phoned National Geographic and four days later they said fine. So then we made a deal where I made a new film for them on Jane and the chimps. They release the material to me, and then I

started editing, and that took forever. That became *People of the Forest* (6).

Int: And Among the Wild Chimpanzees (8)?

HvL: *Among the Wild Chimpanzees* (8), that was —, the titles of films I don't quite remember, I mean that was also the title of the book I think, with National Geographic. But there's so, you know there's so many films with National Geographic that I can't remember the titles and when —.

Int: You mentioned that you wanted to make a film on baboons, and eventually you did, you had The Baboons of Gombe (9).

HvL: That is correct, yes.

Int: What was that about? Apart from the obvious.

HvL: Well, I started the study on baboons in Gombe. I was always fascinated with baboons. And discussed it with Jane, and we got a student out to start a baboon study. Which has now become the longest continuous study on baboons that exists. Anyway that was a nice excuse to get all, well 'excuse' [Hugo uses manual speech marks] to get a lot of research done on the baboons. And then when I got the chance to make a film on them. As so often happens in my type of films, because I'm trying to deal with individuals, the ultimate story is quite different to what you sort of imagined you might get. Now, the year before I was filming, the baboons, almost the whole troop, would dive into the lake and would swim underwater and we weren't sure what they were doing underwater. So I imagined I'd be getting these wonderful shots underwater of baboons swimming there. And in fact the year I filmed there only one young baboon went into the water, and so it changed. And the film became, really about aggression between, within a troop and between two troops. So it concentrated very much on aggression and dominance.

Int: Race for Life (10)?

HvL: *Race for Life* (10) - well, I'd always wanted to make a film on the wildebeest migration, now I really wanted to do that for the big screen, but I couldn't get the financing for it. So, I then decided to do it on 16 mm. So that's what I did.

Int: Was that a difficult film to make?

HvL: It was quite a difficult one. It was quite difficult to get material - in this film there were a lot of kills, there was a lot of drama - probably a bit too much. I would have preferred a little bit more lighter-hearted stuff in between. Of course to get the kills and things like that, it was very time consuming - and to try to get enough material to try and make it beautiful, and yet also have the drama.

Int: Did you identify a character?

HvL: No, that was the first film I think where there were no characters. Originally what I'd hoped to do was follow one single wildebeest. Even if it was staged using various individuals, but they had to look alike obviously. And to look through that individual's eyes as to the adventures of what happens. But this was almost impossible, because if you actually look at wildebeest, you see a big herd of wildebeest. You think they're all alike. But if you actually look at them they're not. All different - and quite obviously different if you start filming close-ups, or even medium shots of a young wildebeest. Some have got black hair here [Hugo indicates forehead], others have got reddish hair here, some have got a lot of white, others don't. They're all totally different. So it would be an impossible task. And you couldn't follow one individual in a migration of a million. So then it became a much more general film on the wildebeest migration.

6. Making films for the cinema

Int: You mentioned that you would like to have made it as a cinema feature.

HvL: Yes.

Int: Eventually you did make cinema features. Can you tell us how you got to that stage?

HvL: Yes. Well I always felt that with the Serengeti and its incredible sceneries and large numbers of animals, that there's no way you could really portray this on television. You can give an idea on television, but you can't get a feeling of the enormous landscapes and so on. So I really wanted to make a film for the big screen. And preferably one about the wildebeest migration. Now when this started coming about, Tim Cowling of the Discovery Channel approached me, and they wanted a 35 mm film. But what they really wanted was leopard, a film on leopard. And they said is that possible? And I said, "Well," I had studied leopards for a book once, and I said, "Well I don't think so. Yes, it would be possible if you give me two and a half years filming. Then we probably could do it. But I can't give any guarantees. It would be far too difficult." So we decided to make a film on the big cats, the three big cats - lion, leopard, cheetah. And I decided to start off with filming the most difficult one, leopard. And I went back to an area where I'd studied a leopard, fifteen years before, something like that. And lo and behold, there was a leopard with a youngster, and I was able to find her every day. So then I sent a fax to Tim and said, well I think we can make this leopard film. So then it became the leopard film (11).

Int: And that was The Leopard Son (11)?

HvL: The Leopard Son (11). Yes.

Int: Hugo, we were talking about films for the cinema rather than the television screen, how did you have to change you're thinking about how you actually made the film?

HvL: The main thing I knew I'd have a problem with was depth of field focusing. I knew it would be far more difficult than 16 [mm] but I'd no idea until I started doing it how difficult it would be, with long lenses. The depth of field was so little I can give an example. I once filmed just a leopard's head and it was looking like sideways onto camera, slightly sideways to camera. And I couldn't film it because this eye was sharp and this one was totally out of focus, and it just didn't look good. So I had to wait for the leopard to do this and then get the shot. So the depth of field was absolutely minute with a long lens on a close up. A similar problem when you've got interactions between leopard - hyena, say. If you had one in the foreground, the

other in the background you just couldn't get them both into focus unless you could get very close with a wide lens which wasn't possible. So you would have to try and manoeuvre to get them parallel to each other. That was incredibly difficult. And also of course with 35 mm, with larger format cameras, the weight already slows you down, everything slows you down. Including starting the camera and waiting for it to get up to speed, so you have to anticipate thing two seconds ahead of time, or so, to be able to actually get it. That was very difficult. So there were a lot of difficulties with it.

Int: In terms of story structure and so on, were there differences there?

HvL: No the story structure wasn't the problem, the problem was getting enough material, enough cut aways, to be able to edit it into a story, and that was very difficult.

Int: How was it received?

HvL: It was received very well at the time, yes.

Int: Did it go onto the cinema circuit?

HvL: It went on the cinema circuit in the States, and in the Netherlands. It hasn't been on the cinema circuit elsewhere as far as I know. So it wasn't a sudden —, it wasn't a blockbuster, but then wildlife films rarely are on the big screen. It was a question of whether it would actually appear on the big screen.

Int: But you did it again?

HvL: I did it again, then I, this was suppose to be, originally I thought the wildebeest film but then I thought about it a lot. I thought this is going to be impossible, again following this individual and also very difficult to cut if the film is about wildebeest. I wanted to show as much of the Serengeti and as many different animals as possible. That's going to be impossible because you keep distracting from the story by going to something else which dramatically just doesn't work. So I then thought, no - the only way I can do it is by comparing animals to their behaviour and I wanted to have a totally new way of doing that and so decided to edit it as rhythmically as possible and then to have music and not add narration. So that's what happened.

Int: And that became?

HvL: That became Serengeti Symphony (12).

Int: In 1998?

HvL: Yes. That was my last film.

Int: And again how was that received?

HvL: It was very well received in the Netherlands but it actually didn't go on the big screens elsewhere. It went on Discovery, I think, in the States and most places it hasn't been yet.

Int: In the Netherlands you were honoured by Prince Bernhard can you tell us about that?

HvL: Yes I received the Order of the Golden Ark which was for conservation and that was really a sort of lifetime award for the work I'd done through films, getting people interested in wildlife. My attitude was that there were a lot of films which would point out to people this needs to be saved, along that line. I decided to approach from a different aspect and that was if I can get people really emotionally involved with this animal that I'm filming, then automatically they're going to be a conservationist.

For instance with the wild dogs, the first wild dog film (4), this worked. A friend of mine was a big game hunter or used to be a big game hunter, and after he saw the film he said, "I'd never be able to shoot a wild dog again." And the whole attitude to wild dogs changed after that film in East Africa, and they then became protected and they weren't considered vermin anymore.

Int: You've seen during your lifetime probably a big change in East Africa, what has been that change, what have you seen in terms of the wild places?

HvL: The main change has been that the roads have become better and there's tourism. Which in those days there was a tiny bit of tourism, and I mean if you stayed at Olduvai during the rainy season maybe a car would pass in a month, now you'll have fifty, a hundred cars pass in a day. That's been the big change. As a result the Serengeti seemed so big at that stage, but now with tourism, with hotels in various places in the Serengeti it seems a bit too small.

Of course the other thing is that in those days Jane and I, and with my son when he was young, we would drive out to go and film animals and photograph them. Nobody new where you were going, we didn't know ourselves. We'd go out, drive out, we might see animals in the distance and say lets try there or lets try there. We'd end up right out in the wild. If we'd broken down, nobody would have found us. We would have had to walk back, either repair it or walk back. And looking back at it now you wonder how did you dare go there, because now of course you've got radio contact and it's all much easier. But in those days you didn't think about it that was normal, you took as many safe cars as you could but that was it.

7. Lucky escapes from dangerous animals

Int: Did you have any near misses - scrapes with wildlife?

HvL: Well, yes I had a few close scrapes with lions, mainly in camp, because they wanted to play with us. Two three year olds, those are the dangerous ones.

Int: Can you tell us the story?

HvL: Well they are fairly long stories, so I don't think I'll get into a great amount of detail. But basically Jane and I were sitting in the tent working and it was just after sunset and the cook called out and said, "Oh there's a lion." But there had been a lion there every night about thirty yards away, roaring. So we took very little notice of it until the cook called again and we couldn't look outside because we were working next to a pressure lamp. So I walked outside and saw one lion creeping up towards me about fifteen yards away and I dashed back to the tent which was a few steps to Jane and said, "Quick we need to get in the car." We took one step and there was another lion alongside the car and the car was fifteen yards away. So all we could do was dash back into the tent and zip it up and wonder what was going to happen next. I quickly lit a kerosene stove and put paper there so that if a lion tried to get in I could hold up something burning. Then the Tanzanian staff who were in the kitchen, two of them, they thought they'd frighten the lions by putting their radio on full blast which they did, so we heard this radio. Then we heard a sudden shout, and pots and pans all over the place and the radio went dead. Then I called out and said, "Are you alright?" No answer, and I thought oh dear the lions got either one or both of them. And I started unzipping the tent because I thought now the lions are there I can make it to the car. Started unzipping the tent but there was a lion right next to me, so I had to zip it up again. Then suddenly I heard two pairs of feet running to the car but to begin with it sounded to me like one chap had survived and was being chased by a lion, but then I heard two doors slam so I knew they were alright. And they then got to us and managed to get in the car. Then it took us half an hour to chase the lions out of camp with the car. We thought we were finally playing with them and it turned out what had happened when we couldn't see in the tent, that the staff had put on the radio the lion had walked up to the kitchen poked his head in there so they'd thrown pots and pans at him, so the lion had retreated, they then switched the radio off. Then they decided that any sound was the wrong thing to do so didn't answer me. And then, I'd also heard canvas ripping, then the lion - one of them - had gone to the tent next to them, their sleeping tent in fact, and had just ripped it open and gone inside there and the other two lions started playing behind the kitchen. Now they could see the lion so they then decided to run which they were very lucky to get away with, because of course running away is about the worst thing you can do. But anyway they managed. And the final payoff of course was that we took half an hour to get these lions out of camp about a hundred yards away, turned back to camp and there was my tent, Jane and my tent, up in flames because there was strong wind and it had blown onto this kerosene, quite funny.

Int: A very eventful night. What about in the field when you were actually filming have you had any encounters there where you've maybe read the behaviour wrong and something happened?

HvL: I had a very strange one at Lake Manyara National Park where I was photographing elephants, now in those days there were a whole lot of families which moved around often together, so you'd have one hundred elephants together. There was a female there whose tusks met, points met. I knew her very well she had various youngsters and I'd often been photographing her, been close to her, no problem at all. Then one evening I decided it was time to go home. What I did, I need to give this as background, is that I used to get the animals, the elephants used to me, used to my car and trust my car by doing two things. If I wanted to move, first of all I'd start the engine and let it run for a while, then I'd move away very slowly and in a straight line if I could. And then the elephants would trust me, rather than erratic movements.

Anyway this day I did the same, switched on the engine started running it, and this female who was forty yards away turned around and came for me, full speed. I'd had elephants before charge at me and you stay there and they stop before they get to you. But I knew immediately this was serious she had her head right up, tusks pointing at me and her trunk tucked away, she was serious. So I took off, luckily I had a six cylinder Landover, I was off in first gear. Sandy little track I raced along that, I had my mechanic with me and my hand on the gear ready to change into two. But then I glanced at my mechanic his eyes were popping out of his head, he was looking back, and I glanced back and this female had her tusks this close to my back window. I knew if I tried to change gear she'd catch me. What I was worried about, I mean she could break the back window, but the track was very narrow and bushy on the sides and I thought, if she manages to push me off the track then the other elephants will come and then we've got real problems. So I kept going in first gear and luckily after 150 yards, or 100 yards, she gave up.

Next day I was back in the area, these hundred elephants were coming all in single file and I'd always wanted a picture of all these elephants in single file. And what I'd do I'd never drive towards them I would go and park where I knew they'd come and let them approach me, which they did, and then to my horror they split into two single files and one went in front of my Landover a yard, and the other, a yard behind my Landover. So I was stuck. And then along came this female who chased me the previous day and I thought now I've got problems, and she took no notice of me at all, I've no idea why that day she decided to come for me.

8. People of influence in the industry and how he has tried to help young filmmakers

Int: Looking now at people who have influenced you and people that you have influenced. Let's take the first, looking back who were the people that did influence you when you were filmmaking? Who were your mentors?

HvL: Well the first films that influenced me, I suppose were the Walt Disney films on wildlife. Living Desert (13), especially Living Desert (13) and after that Armand and Michaela Denis, Hans and Lotte Hass to a lesser degree as I was more interested in animals, not in the sea but on land. Then once I started work of course Des Bartlett who had a vast amount of experience by the time I got there, so I learnt a lot from him.

Int: What was peculiar about his style of filmmaking, did he have a style which you could identify with?

HvL: No, his style was totally different to mine. Totally different to what I wanted to do. He was very much recording behaviour at that stage, he's changed since then I think. Recording behaviour, taking less notice of lighting and things like that, in my view. A lot of his stills photography was very much portraits, which was true of, I suppose, all still photographers of wildlife at that stage. I was far more interested in lighting, that may have also come from working with a film company that made commercials. And I was interested in action stills if it were photographs, so I suppose that's where the difference lay.

Int: And people who have come to you, have you taken on young camera people?

HvL: Yes, to start with I couldn't in Tanzania because it was impossible to get work permits. Right in the beginning I had one or two students but not necessarily ones that were going to go on in filmmaking. But then things changed in Tanzania, I was away editing People of the Forest (6), which I did at Partridge Films, I rented an editing room from them. So I got to know Michael Rosenberg very well, who I had met a couple of times before but didn't really know well. So we got to know each other very well and started discussing about setting up something in Tanzania to make a whole series of films. And there were a lot of films that I wanted to see made which I knew I wouldn't ever have the time to do, so then I enlarged my camp, took on a whole lot of young people and started making films. So acting as an executive producer or producer in other people's films, but also always having a film myself where I could do the camera work, because my big interest is camera work, also.

What I tended to do was go for young people who hadn't actually proven themselves yet, in most cases. In most cases I insisted they have some experience in an editing room so that they would already know what sort of shots were needed to edit a film. But apart from that the main thing I looked at was will this person fit in with the group in camp, because we had such a good atmosphere there, they were such nice people that I

had to make absolutely sure that each new person fitted into that group and the good atmosphere would keep going. And so I got all these young people and I look at photographs now, look back and I think heavens they were young. I mentioned it to one of them yesterday. But they were all very determined and very talented. It's a highlight of my life that these young students that I've had have all become successful.

Int: Can you mention some of their names?

HvL: Yes, Patrick Morris at BBC2 now, who makes the most superb films. Sophie Buck as a camera woman, Gil Domb cameraman, Matt Aeberhard, who else, there're lots. I mean I'm not mentioning those as the best ones but they're all doing well. Tonight I have a reunion with 39 of them.

Int: Now you're involved, are you still involved, with —? You've stopped living in the —?

HvL: No, I've now retired from filmmaking. There is a film being discussed where I might be a sort of consultant on, or would help it on its way, but I certainly don't want to go into the field and get fully involved in filmmaking again.

9. Reflections on his career and projections for the future

Int: Recently you've been involved in nature conservation films in Holland is that right?

HvL: Well, yes. After Partridge, the 35 mm films, so the two 35 mm films were done as Nature Conservation Films. Because in Holland it was possible to raise the finance for such films.

Int: And the spin-off from that was Savage Paradise Foundation?

HvL: Yes. Now originally the film Serengeti Symphony (12) was going to be called Savage Paradise which was originally a title of a book of mine (14). So then some Dutch people established the Savage Paradise Foundation, which was there to also to try and raise money to be able to make it possible to make this film and support, also, other filmmakers.

Int: Have you seen changes, or what changes have you seen in wildlife filmmaking over the years? Have you seen fashions come and go or has there been a general sort of evolution of styles?

HvL: Well I suppose the big changes I see are in the quality of camera work, it's absolutely superb, and of course now the use of all sorts of special effects in wildlife filmmaking, so those are the big changes. Unfortunately what I'm also seeing is less money available to make **blue chip** films. So a lot of films are made far cheaper, which means that the camera people and producers don't have enough time in the field to really get the top quality in a lot of cases.

Int: Is there a future for the industry?



HvL: I think there's a future if one develops **blue chip** films again. You see the general public knows what's quality when they see it. I'm absolutely convinced of that, so if you can produce top quality films the general public will go for it. And of course if they're top quality they're re-saleable - they'll be re-shown again. But if you make quick, cheap films, okay you may make your money immediately, but ultimately the danger is it may kill the industry, because ultimately people may turn around and say it's all a bit of the same. I think that's the general danger if it starts getting too second rate, third rate or whatever it is.

Of course I'm retired now I'm not involved in filmmaking anymore but there's one thing I would still like to do and that is, help to train some Tanzanians in wildlife photography - filmmaking. And there is a move afoot where I would ask my ex-collaborators to come over to Tanzania for two weeks, or a month, or whatever time they can spend and reach some of the local the local television people, how to film wildlife. They don't necessarily need to be aimed at people who want to make wildlife filming their business. But my feeling is, there was a very famous Dutch producer Bert Armstrong film maker - documentary also other films. But he also in his films, documentary films he always had animals appear in it. After all wherever you are there's a bird or there's a what. If I can persuade Tanzanian filmmakers, while they're making their normal films for television to include some of the wildlife as a background or a little aside, then I think that would be very nice. And some of them may then also become wildlife, full-time, filmmakers.

Int: And capture the wildlife on their doorstep?

HvL: And catch it on their doorstep, yes. And help the local population, educate them for conservation. The Tanzanians are interested in conservation, they're very good.

Int: When you've been out and about in the field filming, how does the local population react to you being there? You must come across a lot of people in the countryside.

HvL: Well I mainly dealt with the Masaai - they were always very friendly. I have some Masaai friends in the Vall Mountains. So always very friendly. But it's always struck me that sometimes people say they're not interested in wildlife, it's not true. Every person I've had working for me, and I didn't choose them for that - I'm talking about Tanzanians, and I must have had about a hundred work for me through the years. All totally fascinated with wildlife.

And the ones at Gombi studying chimpanzees, if they caught anyone trying to harm one of those chimpanzees then they'd probably kill them they're that involved in it. And it's not only people that work in wildlife, the Tanzanians generally are very proud of their National Park, of their heritage. And this, I think, quite unusual in Africa - I think most countries: yes, wildlife parks, useful, bring in tourists, that sort of attitude. But the Tanzanians are really, by nature, interested in their wildlife, I think.

Int: I think it was Bernhard Grzimek said, "The Serengeti will not die," but from your perspective how do you see that?

HvL: Yes, I always felt that was a wrong translation of German. Because as far as I know a bit of German, it should've been, "The Serengeti must not die," and it was translated as, "Serengeti shall not die." Sorry what was the question?



Int: From your perspective, from what you've seen are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the countryside that you've seen?

HvL: I've tended to be optimistic in the past but I must say I'm a bit more pessimistic now. The problem is that a lot of these parks are not, not necessarily about the Serengeti, but Serengeti included, a lot of the parks are very small and are being closed in, and there have been recommendations now for thirty years, we've talked about making corridors from one park to the other, but it didn't happen. And now of course there are farms there, now it would be politically almost impossible to do it. So these small areas are going to have tremendous problems. One of the parks is Tarangire where there are hunting concessions around it, there are farms, more and more of it's being farmed, and sadly the elephants of Tarangire, they can't survive by just being in Tarangire they have to move out during the rainy season, and they're going to be enclosed. So I think a park like Tarangire doesn't have a very good future.

But even the Serengeti, large though it seemed to be, could do with enlargement to safeguard it for the future, so even a large park like that. And of course the wildebeests there are in danger. Go up to the Mara, leave the protected areas, soon they won't be able to. Already there are farms in a lot of areas, later on there will be the fencing and then the wildebeest migration will be cut down in size because a lot of them will starve or die of thirst. So even there it is, "How's one going to manage?" There are ideas of buffer zones which is a very good idea, but often there's the idea but it isn't carried forward or somebody wants to establish, let's say, a private National Park next door, and that isn't allowed for various reasons or, you know, there are all sorts of problems with it. But if one could encourage private National Parks as they did do in Zimbabwe and unfortunately those are endangered now with all the problems there, I think that is a way forward. And try where possible still to make corridors, but in most places that's not possible anymore.

END

Glossary

Blue chip: a prestigious style of wildlife documentary which can be described as a depiction of mega-fauna, following a dramatic storyline, using only images of visual splendour, giving a sense of timelessness and with an absence of reference to controversial issues.

Zinjanthropus: originally named *Zinjanthropus boisei* by Louis Leakey, it was later shown to be an australopithecine and renamed *Australopithecus boisei*. Possibly recently renamed again as *Paranthropus boisei*.

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