

AMERICA'S MARTY STOUFFER WRITES HIS OWN RULES

When Marty Stouffer first took up wildlife cinematography, the creator of the WILD AMERICA Television Series lacked formal film training. He was unaware of the complicated, though unwritten, rules of the business. So, Stouffer made up his own.

Even after discovering establishment norms, Stouffer largely ignored them. His innocence and audacity gave Stouffer's films and, eventually, WILD AMERICA entertaining freshness and extraordinary reality. As WILD AMERICA approaches its twentieth anniversary, other wildlife producers now follow Stouffer's rules: Rules about things like sex and death.

"I try to do things that haven't been done before," says Stouffer. "Until we started breaking the rule a few years ago, sex was literally taboo. Then we went in for closeups." In the WILD AMERICA Program "HOG WILD!," viewers saw that a wild boar's penis is corkscrew-shaped and, in the Program "ALL-AMERICAN ANIMALS," learned that an opossum's is forked. "The main reason we show these things is that I think it's fascinating as can be," adds Stouffer, a man clearly still excited about his work.

Realistic portrayal of predation, often in slow-motion, is another hallmark of WILD AMERICA. "I've always related to wildlife in practical and even brutal terms," says Stouffer. "They're out there killing and dying; 85 percent of rabbits die in their first year. It's not hearts and flowers. It's not Walt Disney."

Such innovation hasn't always been appreciated by everyone. Several years ago, Stouffer proudly displayed "Hog Wild" at a British wildlife film symposium. Besides the explicit mating scenes, the program showed a boar ripping open a hunting dog with its razor-sharp tusks. The audience was not amused.

"Not only do British commoners not hunt, they dearly love their dogs," says Stouffer. "They were booing, yelling, shaking their fists. They said it was too bloody, too confrontational. I'm sorry, that's the story of wild hogs in Georgia. They are violent, they are bloody. When a hunter chases a hog with a dog you get a confrontation and we were blamed for filming it."

A key part of WILD AMERICA's freshness and innovative reality is that, unlike conventional wildlife programs, Stouffer often shows the world from the animal, not the human, perspective. WILD AMERICA has offered a Cutthroat Trout's eye view of rushing rapids, an Otter's outlook of an Adirondack stream and more. The freshness and innovation will continue as long as Stouffer persists in writing new rules.