

KINO LORBER
e x p e r i e n c e c i n e m a

The Land of Azaba

***A feature documentary
by Greta Schiller***



www.jezebelproductions.org
info@jezebelproductions.org

The Land of Azaba
A feature documentary by Greta Schiller
84 min. 5.1 Surround Sound. Color. 2020.

Short description:

“The Land of Azaba” is a closely observed film exploring the theme of ecological restoration, a worldwide movement to turn back the tide of mass extinction and restore planet earth to ecological balance. “The Land of Azaba” immerses the viewer in a magical world where humans and wildlife work together to restore the largest remaining tract of wild nature in western Europe. The survival of many rare and endangered species, including ancient oaks, insects, vultures, aurochs and horses, is at stake.

Director’s Statement:

I wanted to make *The Land of Azaba* because people need stories of hope and success to overcome despair. In contrast to the alarming ecological doomsday news we receive daily, *The Land of Azaba* has an exciting and optimistic premise: humanity can turn back the tide of mass extinction and restore planet earth back to ecological balance. It does, however, require a major shift in ethical-cultural perspective. The film’s pace is leisurely to evoke the cycles of nature. We closely observe the radical new experiment of ecological restoration as it unfolds, with the promise of bringing back our degraded planet to a balance that supports all living things. The film seduces audiences into the wonders of the natural world while communicating what biodiversity is, what eco-restoration is, and why they matter to all of us.

Director-Producer-Editor: Greta Schiller

Greta Schiller is an internationally acclaimed documentary director. Her career was launched in 1984 with the feature documentary, *Before Stonewall*, which premiered in the Berlin International Film Festival, had an extensive festival and cinema release around the world and won her two Emmy Awards. She makes “deeply researched, highly intelligent films,” according to the *New York Times*, and *The Atlantic Journal and Constitution* wrote that Schiller’s work “makes you glad documentaries were invented.” Her classic documentary, *Paris Was a Woman*, premiered in the London and Berlin Film Festivals and was broadcast in 16 countries. Her award-winning *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* was selected as retrospective highlight of the Berlin International Film Festival in 2019, twenty years after its premiere there. A double Fulbright Arts Fellow (1990, 2017), Schiller holds a BFA in Film/Video and MS. Ed in Science Education both from the City College of New York. Her alma mater awarded her the Townsend Harris Medal for Outstanding Contributions to her Field and inducted her into the Alumni Hall of Fame. She has earned two Emmy Awards and dozens of prizes at film festivals around the world. Her early film “Before Stonewall” was recently selected by the Library of Congress for the National Film Registry.

La Fundación Naturaleza y Hombre (Foundation for Humans and Nature):

The Foundation was created in 1994 by a small group of people passionate about protecting nature. One of the foundation's many projects is the Campanarios de Azaba Nature Reserve, where our film takes place. Through the Foundation's efforts, Campanarios de Azaba has been restored to the point where it is now considered one of the most biodiverse tracts of wild nature anywhere in the world.

Detailed Film Description:

Filmed in Western Spain on Europe's largest ecological restoration project, *The Land of Azaba* is an immersion into a magical world where humans and wildlife work together to restore a vast Mediterranean landscape.

The sun rises over the Campanarios de Azaba Nature Reserve. We hear a dawn chorus of the reserve waking up -- insects, birds, and ancient species of horses, cows, sheep and goats, all grazing harmoniously. It is a treasured hotspot of biodiversity and, connected to the river canyons and nearby protected areas, it forms the largest expanse of biodiversity and native Mediterranean landscapes in the world. But there is trouble in paradise.

The Dehesa was once a sustainable flourishing agro-forestry landscape, where human activity worked in harmony with the rest of nature. But fifty years ago, industrial agriculture came to Spain. In a very short period of time, trees were cut for intensive cattle and pig farms, pesticides polluted the water, overstocked cows polluted natural ponds and killed pond life crucial to birds. Farmlands have been overgrazed, invasive species took hold, pesticides have decimated insect populations, drought threatens ancient tree survival, and vultures die from lack of food and from ingesting poisons. Pesticides and herbicides are used to create vast monoculture crops; 1000 cattle are grazed on land that can only sustain 100; birds, small mammals, and insects die from lack of habitat.

Addressing climate change is the existential question of our time, but climate change and biodiversity loss are two sides to the same coin. One of the best ideas of the recent *fin de siècle* is ecological restoration, a paradigm shift from previous modes of environmental thought and practice. This is the first feature documentary on the subject of ecological restoration, and it is set in one of the world's first "hot spots" for increasing and maintaining bio-diversity.

We meet our characters as they go about building habitat for rabbits, protecting tall trees for nests, reintroducing large herbivores, all while running an ecolodge. The work is driven by the passion of Carlos Sanchez for environmental conservation. A hands-on guy, he builds hides for viewing wildlife and leads local ranchers on tours of pond restoration and tree plantings, projects that breathe new life into a dying landscape. MariMar, the feisty eco-lodge manager, sausage maker and wild horse wrangler, juggles her many tasks. Patricia Nieto, a forestry engineer, gives us a tour of the reserve. The landscape, trees, and animal families are also key

characters in this drama of ecological restoration at one of Europe's most treasured patrimonial sites.

Jon, the cuadrille jefe, moves a dead horse from a local farm to the muladar, a "trash heap" of organic matter that provides food for the vultures. These majestic birds that once coexisted with the dinosaurs, flying up from Africa to Spain to nest, are now a key species under threat of extinction. Scavengers that historically cleaned up dead animals, they perform a crucial function for the health of the ecosystem. But EU regulations now require dead animals to be removed within 48 hours. So vultures feed instead on dead animals that have been moved to the muladar, bringing into stark relief the cycles of life and death inherent in nature.

The bird-watching hides scattered around the site create a reverse zoo feeling: humans are caged and as they watch the animals, the animals watch them. The intimacy of the space—humans are locked in a small room where any movement can disturb the vultures—functions as a kitchen hearth, a place where whispers tell us the stories. Even Carlos can't refrain from excitement at the coming show, which never plays out the same way.

Biodiversity comes alive in a burst of spring colors and textures. Wild breeds graze on this rich mixture of wild herbs and flowers. The large herbivores—sheep, horses, and cows—frolic, playing an important role in turning the soil and fertilizing the land. Many insects live off their excrement. Patricia tours the nearby farms, pointing out the bad and the ugly of overgrazing, tree death, and loss of native understory.

Spreading the word about sustainability is at the core of their mission. Some neighboring farmers have agreed to breed rabbits, a crucial food group for predators. The reserve hopes to use the rabbits to lure back rare lynx and wolves into their ancestral lands, but local farmers remain skeptical about the wolves.

Local community members and the entire reserve team gather to watch deer run free into the Dehesa. The stage is set: deer and rabbits are reproducing, and their predators are at the door. We have one more scene to film: of lynx and wolves returning to their historic range.

In "The Land of Azaba," we closely observe the radical new experiment of ecological restoration as it unfolds, with the promise of bringing back our degraded planet to a balance that supports all living things.

Full Credits:

The Land Of Azaba

Produced, Directed and Edited by
Greta Schiller

Co-Producer
Andrea Weiss

Cinematography
Tom Hurwitz
Laura Sipán

Additional Camera
Greta Schiller
Carla D'Arnaude

Drone Camera
Konstantinos Mitsotakis

Location Sound
Sergio Fernández Borrás

Additional Editing
Alex Lora
Pamela Ralat

Fine Cut Editor
Andrea Weiss

Color Correction, Titles and Graphics
Haruka Motohashi

Sound Design
Sergio Fernández Borrás

Sound Mixer
Emilio García

Featuring
Carlos Sánchez Martínez
Jon Teixeira Casado
Francisco José Iglesias
Patricia Neito
Guillermo Gil
Lorenzo García Fuentes
Marimar González
Pablo Rodríguez Vidal
Juan Jose Pérez Marin
Jorge and Christina Casado

Ángel Fernández
Jesús Ángel (La Encina Charra)
José Martín Galán
Enrique Arias

Music
Changing Opinion written by Philip Glass and Paul Simon
© Dunvagen Music Publishers and Silva Screen Records.
Used by permission.

Metamorphosis 1 written by Philip Glass
©1988 Dunvagen Music Publishers. Used by permission.

Where Everything is Music written by Philip Glass
©1997 Dunvagen Music Publishers. Used by permission.

Translation and Production Assistants

Gele Fernández
Tyler Marlowe
Vivian Rivas
Rafael Samanez
Adriana Puig Cabeza
David Alvarado

Thanks to
Santa Arias
Mary Bassani
Alan Berliner
Eli Berliner
Rae Bolotin, BigCI Artist Residency
Lorena Bravo
Julia Buchheim, Bank Robber Music
Ella Callahan
Greg Cushman
Cosima Dannoritzer
Chele González
Marcus Hall
Keith Hefner
David Kaimowitz
Maria Del Pilar Martinez
Christof Mauch
Ana Isabel Osoro
José Manuel Sánchez
Marco and Carlos Sánchez
Ilana Schiller- Weiss
Madeleine Sheehan
Warut Snidvongs
Yibin (AB) Su
Bettina Walters
Georgia Wyss

With generous support from
Rachel Carson Center, University of Munich
U.S./Spain Fulbright Commission
New York State Council on the Arts



**Council on
the Arts**



**Rachel
Carson
Center**
ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

© 2020, Jezebel Productions

