

WILD AT HEART

Photograph by: Taryn van Rensburg 083 445 3441

After working on more than 20 documentary films for National Geographic, Salt Rock videographer and father of two Graeme Duane received what is arguably the highest television award, an Emmy award, at the end of last year.



Seated outside on the wooden deck of Graeme's Salt Rock home you are hidden from the rest of the world by a canopy of trees that surround the house. It's not difficult to see why Graeme chooses to raise his family here.

Besides the natural beauty and rustic charm that Salt Rock has to offer, Graeme's other motivation for living on the North Coast comes from the fact that his great grandfather was amongst its first inhabitants. "I have some really old photographs of my great grandfather in Ballito ... I think he even has a pet monkey on his shoulder," he laughs.

Then there is Graeme's undeniable passion for the outdoors. His father, who Graeme says is a bit of a 'tree nut', always had him outside playing with frogs, fish and birds when he was growing up. He even taught him the Latin names for the flora and fauna.

"By the time I left school I already knew so much. I had been going on bird club outings, trips to game reserves and bat captures, all of which fuelled my fascination with the outdoors."

With a naturally strong compositional sense, Graeme has always been a very 'visual' person. That is why his decision to build a career making natural history films seemed to be an obvious one for him.

After studying fine art Graeme went straight into film school at Durban University of Technology. "I'm actually more practically minded than I am artistic, so I found it quite easy to understand the mechanics of all the technology and equipment I use."

Graeme started his career working for a small production company in Durban, doing mostly corporate and marketing work.

In 1995 he travelled to London and met up with a friend from film school who managed to get him a job working at Sky News. He worked there – mostly on off-

the-hour stuff – for just over a year before returning to South Africa. And that is when Graeme's career really took off.

"I didn't really have a plan for my return, but a producer friend of mind was working on a series for *National Geographic* about sharks, crocodiles and lions. Because I lived at the coast and had done a lot of spear fishing I asked him to give me a camera to let me see what I could come up with."

Graeme went to Mozambique and filmed some sharks and he was amongst the first people to free dive with Great White sharks. "We couldn't get good enough shots through the cage bars," he laughs.

The films did really well and Graeme immediately developed a reputation at *National Geographic*. Over the next 11 years Graeme continued to work for *National Geographic*, working on more than 21 films up until 2009, when he wrapped up his final project for them - Great Migration.

A two-year project, which started in 2007, Great Migration is a multi-part epic series about animals that migrate, why they migrate and their behaviour when they do. According to Graeme this was one of the channel's biggest flagship productions with an extremely high budget. The series featured shoots around the world, with Graeme working on two parts, namely the migration of wildebeest in Tanzania and the albatross in the Falkland Islands (close to the Antarctic).

"It was an amazing experience and we got to work with brilliant, high speed cameras. But it was also a lot of very hard work. In the Serengeti we spent up to 14 hours a day in a Landrover for a month at a time. In the Falklands we worked in extremely cold conditions of minus four degrees and in ice storms with 90-mile-an-hour winds.

"You had to be properly prepared - physically and with regard to your gear. We were caught in dust storms in the Serengeti

and had to tape our cameras up to keep the dust from getting in. We had cheetahs come and sit on the bonnet of the car! It was incredible because we went to places and did things that tourists just cannot do."

On hearing that the Great Migrations cinematography team were nominated for an Emmy award Graeme said he was excited and thought they might be in with a chance because it was such a big, expensive epic for such a well-known channel. The awards were held in New York in June 2011.

"It feels really great to have been recognized and awarded for my filming work. It's like the cherry on top of that stage of my professional life."

And Graeme says winning the award has helped him with the move onto the next stage of his professional life. He now works as the creative director for an Umhlanga-based production company called Earth Touch. The company makes entire documentary films right here in Durban. "We pitch our ideas to international television channels and then film, edit, compose and deliver the finished product to them."

A father of two boys, Daniel (7) and Aiden (6), and with a little baby girl on the way, Graeme says the change of career allows him to spend more time at home with his family. "In 2003 I spent a total of 243 days out of the country. Now I can spend more time with my children and my wife."

Asked whether he's bringing his boys up the same way he was brought up Graeme laughs, "Absolutely! We spend our time on the beach, in game reserves, camping and mountain biking and the boys always have pet snakes and scorpions!"

Catch Graeme's films: A Dog's Life and Leopard of Dead Tree Island on *National Geographic Wild* and (coming soon) *Croc Labyrinth* and *Dino Fish*.