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## Octopi, elephants big winners at film fest

Jackson Wild offers free access to to more than 80 films through Oct. 15.

By Danielle Johnson

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Two skywalker gibbons looking for love. A female ranger unit fighting elephant poaching in Zimbabwe. A team of researchers on a quest to identify the pollinator of the ghost orchid.

The films submitted for this year's Jackson Wild Media Awards, dubbed "the nature equivalent of the Oscars," saw no shortage of romance, action or mystery. And the 30 award winners, announced as part of the 2020 Jackson Wild Summit, which took place virtually from Sept. 28 to Oct. 1, demonstrated excellence in science and nature storytelling.

Big winners included "My Octopus Teacher," a documentary on an unusual friendship between diver and octopus, which won the Grand Teton Award and three others, and "The Elephant Queen," a film documenting an elephant mother and her herd's journey across Africa that won Best Feature Film and three others.

Winners were selected by over 150 international judges who spent 1,200 hours watching more than 620 films sent in from 30 countries.

In addition to the festival taking place online this year, this year was the first time the summit occurred annually rather than biennially, as it had done until 2019.

"We understand that there really isn't that much time in front of us to change the trajectory of where we are in conservation," Jackson Wild Executive Director Lisa Samford said. "And in really examining how media can be used to amplify, impact and accelerate change, we determined that with every two years you lose momentum — it's just simply too long to wait."

Though the summit was virtual, the online platform used for the sessions mimicked the way the event usually takes place at Jackson Lake Lodge in Grand Teton National Park, with participants virtually "sitting" in "seats" around "tables" to join in conversation.

The format helped promote Jackson Wild's goal of inclusivity, as viewers from around the world and as far away as Kenya and India were able to attend alongside local and regional filmmakers. One result was more attendees than ever before.

Samford said Jackson Wild will hold hybrid events in the future, regardless of pandemic conditions.

"It absolutely fits," she said. "We have a really strong core focus on inclusivity and building, training, hiring global voices and diverse perspectives," all of which the virtual format encouraged, she said.

The 30 awards this year included short- and long-form films in major categories such as Best Conservation Film and Best Animal Behavior Film, as well as a new award for Best Impact Campaign, given to the film with the greatest beyond-the-screen reach. The winner was "Sea of Shadows," about efforts to rescue the world's smallest whale from extinction at the hands of an international crime syndicate.

Just as the virtual format helped more filmmakers access the summit, the public can access 80-plus films and sessions for free through Oct. 15 by using discount code "Wild100" at Jackson Wild's website, [JacksonWild.org](http://JacksonWild.org), thanks to generous donations from Sophie Craighead, the Charles Engelhard Foundation and Old Bill's Fun Run contributors. The nonprofit is also working to provide free access for students and educators beyond Oct. 15.

With this complimentary access and ongoing environmental activism, the films offer a way to explore other parts of the world and be inspired by nature to make a change.

"I think this pandemic has demonstrated that it's a transformative time," Samford said. "It's a disruptive time, and it's an opportunity that no one wants to miss to really engage as many people as possible to actively think about how they interact with nature and what can they as individuals and groups do to elevate their engagement so that they become active participants in the process of restoring and protecting natural systems that will make it possible for humanity to survive on this planet."

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**And the winners are ...**

GRAND TETON AWARD WINNER: "My Octopus Teacher," Sea Change Project & Off the Fence, South Africa

BEST ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FILM - LONG FORM: "The Octopus in My House," Passion Planet Ltd., USA, Australia, Madagascar

BEST ANIMAL BEHAVIOR FILM - SHORT FORM: "This Killer Fungus Turns Flies into Zombies," KQED, PBS Digital Studios, USA

BEST ECOSYSTEM FILM - LONG FORM: "Okavango — River of Dreams: Divine Journey," Terra Mater Factual Studios/Wildlife Films, Austria

BEST ECOSYSTEM FILM - SHORT FORM: "Chasing Ghosts," Grizzly Creek Films, bioGraphic, USA

BEST EARTH & SKY FILM: "The Edge of All We Know," Collapsar films, USA

BEST CONSERVATION FILM - LONG FORM: "Reef Rescue," Merit Motion Pictures, Capa Presse/Films à Cinq, ARTE France, Canada, France

BEST CONSERVATION FILM - SHORT FORM: "Akashinga: The Brave Ones," Produced by Avatar Alliance Foundation for National Geographic Documentary Films, Africa

BEST PEOPLE AND NATURE FILM - LONG FORM: "My Octopus Teacher"

BEST PEOPLE AND NATURE FILM - SHORT FORM: "Akashinga: The Brave Ones"

BEST CHANGING PLANET FILM - LONG FORM: "On Thin Ice," Altayfilm, MDR/Arte, Russian Federation

BEST CHANGING PLANET FILM - SHORT FORM: "Mermaids Against Plastic: TAMARA," Free Roaming Studios, Mexico

BEST SCIENCE IN NATURE FILM - LONG FORM: "My Octopus Teacher"

BEST SCIENCE IN NATURE FILM - SHORT FORM: "Chasing Ghosts"

BEST IMPACT CAMPAIGN: "Sea of Shadows," Terra Mater Factual Studios, Mexico

BEST NON-BROADCAST FILM: "Entangled," David Abel and Andy Laub

BEST LIMITED SERIES - LONG FORM: "H2O The Molecule That Made Us," WGBH and Passion Pictures, Germany, Greenland, Iceland, Chile, Brazil, South Africa, India, Maldives

BEST LIMITED SERIES - SHORT FORM: "Last Call for the Bayou," Encompass Films, USA

BEST ENGAGING YOUTH & FAMILY FILM: "The Elephant Queen," Deeble, Stone & Oliff, Kenya

BEST PRESENTER-LED FILM: "Wild Cuba: A Caribbean Journey," Crossing the Line, Cuba

BEST MICRO-MOVIE: "African Parks: Protected Area Management," Esri, Africa and #NatureNow, @tommustill film for Gripping Films, UK, Sweden, Rest of World

BEST FEATURE FILM: "The Elephant Queen"

BEST EMERGING FILMMAKER: "Life on the Rocks," George Pretty, United Kingdom

BEST 360° STORYTELLING: “ecoSphere: Kenya,” PHORIA, Oculus, WWF, Silverback Films

BEST GLOBAL VOICES FILM: “Flying Elephants — A Mother’s Hope,” Prakash Matada, Dr. Krithi Karanth, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Saving Nature, India

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY: “The Elephant Queen”

BEST EDITING: “My Octopus Teacher”

BEST ORIGINAL MUSIC SCORE: “Seven Worlds One Planet: Australia,” Natural History & Factual Productions Ltd.; Theme Music: Hans Zimmer and Jacob Shea; Original Music: Jacob Shea

BEST WRITING: “The Octopus in My House”

BEST AUDIOSCAPE: “The Elephant Queen”

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