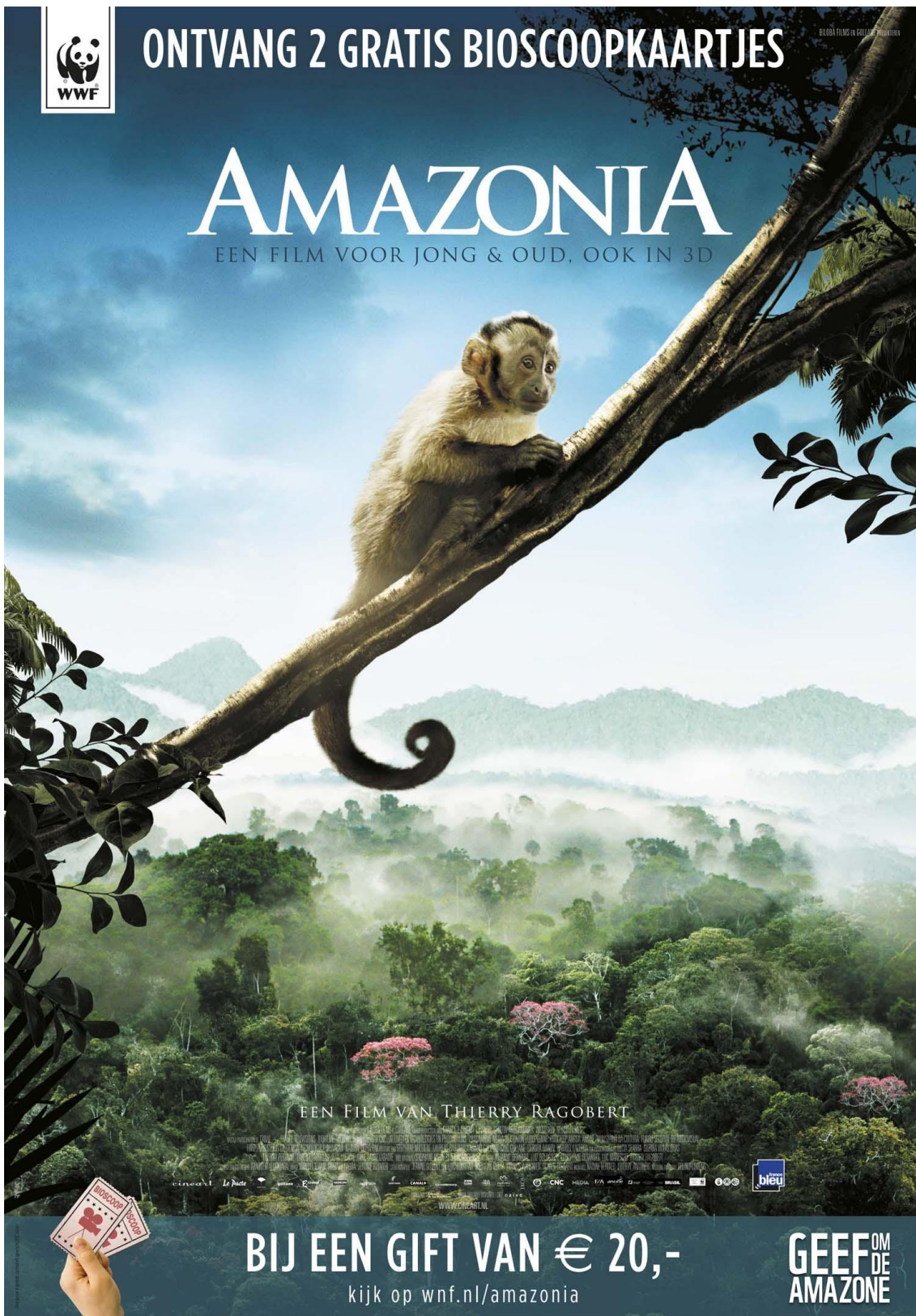


Persmap



ONTVANG 2 GRATIS BIOSCOOPKAARTJES

AMAZONIA
EEN FILM VOOR JONG & OUD, OOK IN 3D

EEN FILM VAN THIERRY RAGOBERT

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AMAZONIA

Een Film van Thierry Ragobert

Amazonia, a 3D Odyssey into the world's biggest rainforest: The Amazon Forest

Een jong kapucijnaapje dat in gevangenschap is opgegroeid, bevindt zich na een vliegtuigongeluk plotseling hulpeloos en alleen in het midden van het Amazonegebied. Hij zal moeten leren om zich staande te houden in dit uitgestrekte gebied waar overal gevaren op de loer liggen. De kleine held moet niet alleen zijn gelijken trotseren, maar ook enge roofdieren en giftige planten. Het wordt een lange fascinerende reis in dit ongekende universum, dat vaak weelderig en van een adembenemende schoonheid is, maar ook vreemd en vijandig.

Amazonia is een film over het bijzondere avontuur van een kleine held in de krachtige natuur.



Slotfilm 70ste Internationale Film Festival Venetië

Land: Frankrijk – Jaar: 2013 – Genre: Familiefilm – Speelduur: 83 min.

Releasedatum: 19 december 2013

Distributie: Cinéart

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Persmap en foto's staan op: www.cinéart.nl

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CREW

Director Thierry Ragobert
Writers Johanne Bernard
Louis-Paul Desanges
Luc Marescot
Luiz Bolognesi
Thierry Ragobert
Director of photography Manuel Teran
First assistant directors Martin Blum
Vincent Steiger
Animal coordinator Pascal Treguy
Executive producer Laurent Baujard
Producers Stephane Milliere
Fabiano Gullane
Caio Gullane
Stereographer Jeanne Guillot - BINOCLE
Artistic consultant Araquém Alcântara
Sound Eric Boisteau
Miqueias Motta
Editing Nadine Verdier
Sound editing Francis Wagnier
Sound mixing Olivier Goinard
Original music Bruno Coulais – Editions Naïve

Amazonia in a few figures

- A set measuring over six million square kilometers.
- A dream cast including 40 capuchin monkeys, jaguars, an anaconda, a honey bear, an otter, an eagle, Amazon river dolphins, crocodiles, an armadillo, a coatis, a boa constrictor, trapdoor spiders and a family of sloths.
- Extras on a Hollywood scale: 5,000 animal species, 2.5 million insects and 40,000 species of plant.
- Two years of development, scientific research and writing.
- Nine months of acclimatization for the main animals.
- 18 months of filming in the heart of the Amazon rainforest.
- A crew of 80 with exceptional experience on projects such as OCEANS, WINGED MIGRATION, LA FORET DES PLUIES, LES SAISONS, THE FOX AND THE CHILD.
- Six months of technical research and development into cameras, lenses, 3D tools and machinery were necessary to be able to film AMAZONIA.



Interview with Thierry Ragobert - director

How did this crazy project come about ?

After THE WHITE PLANET which I shot in 2006, Stéphane Millière of Gédéon and I said to ourselves: “Why not the Green Planet?” That’s when we first thought about shooting in the Amazon rainforest. From the start, it was a matter of finding the balance between fiction and documentary, and immersing the spectator emotionally in the reality of this specific environment. In total, the project took more than six years to bring into being, from its initial conception to its release in theaters.

AMAZONIA is a Franco-Brazilian production...

Absolutely. In fact, the Brazilians had a similar project and, quite naturally, we thought why not pool our wishes and our resources? We could profit from the Brazilians’ knowledge of the terrain, while they saw in this collaboration the advantage an outsider’s viewpoint and a longstanding French wildlife cinematographic tradition going back to the films of Cousteau, Perrin and Cluzaud, and Rossif.

How did the research and documentation phase go ?

From the moment it became a Franco-Brazilian coproduction, we sought out scientific and documentary skills with French biologists and naturalists, and with their opposite numbers in Brazil for their expertise on the country. In addition, we worked with Araquém Alcântara, a Brazilian photographer who has been crisscrossing the Amazon for a quarter-century and who has published several photographic books on the subject. He’s no doubt the Brazilian who knows this territory best. We had long discussions with him so he could advise us on the zones to explore and to help us structure our ideas. It was a very pragmatic approach, characteristic of the documentary, and one I adhered to.

You then wrote a narrative framework ?

NFed with all this documentation, three screenwriters developed a story, and then I intervened with the Brazilian co-writer to come up with the definitive version which, at that point, included the specifics for 3D filming. As in THE WHITE PLANET, we didn’t want any dialog and almost no human presence, in order to paint the most accurate and most pertinent portrait of the Amazonian forest.

How did you prepare for this over-size shoot ?

There were a great many preparatory journeys looking into the feasibility of the project, then reccies to draw up a working schedule. The first priority was, from the outset, to get close to the animals: was it possible to approach the species we intended, and how? And in particular, what about our capuchin monkeys? So the wildlife team drew up a sort of inventory of the locations where it was reasonable to imagine approaching the animals. Then reccies were done by two first assistant directors, Vincent Steiger and Martin Blum, to select the locations. It was the combination of these two – wildlife contingencies and filmmaking contingencies – which allowed us to arrive at the best possible solution. I took part in half of the trips, which allowed me to get a feel for the locations, and to make some choices about what we had imagined in the beginning, by including the planned sequences or not.

Once on the ground, were you surprised by unusual or unforeseen situations ?

More than 98% of the time! What happened, and what we sometimes envisaged, never took place in the way we expected. The material we ended up with amounts to miraculous moments of real life when the animals being filmed showed us atypical and unusual behavior which corresponded to the emotions we were after for the “characters” in our fiction. When you go to Amazonia, you have to maintain constant humility: even when you have prepared everything, you’re often confronted with

situations which force you to review everything. You have to stay incredibly flexible and remain open to whatever nature offers. As a result, we stayed attentive to the climate, the bad weather, the availability of the animals, and to fortuitous encounters – which is no doubt the watchword of wildlife documentary making. Then, we intervened to shoot certain transitional scenes, wide shots, and scenery. In short, shots which allowed us to craft the backdrop against which our story would unfold. That's what explains the energy that had to be deployed, the time required to achieve our goals, and the sheer folly of the project. Amazingly, after months of editing the rich material available, we realized that we were coming back to the initial project – in other words to the script which was the fruit of our imagination. Without really realizing, we'd dreamt of a location, then we filmed it, capturing the unpredictable, and we had finally come back to the project we'd first dreamt of.

Was 3D an integral part of the project from the start ?

It was a coincidence between the availability of more flexible and lighter technology, and the subject in itself: filming in a forest was perfectly suited to 3D. Whether for the landscapes, the undergrowth or the huge trees with their immense perspectives, or the animals approaching, we felt we could rediscover through 3D that which we are constantly fed through TV and cinema. That was a channel worth exploring.

The film avoids the traps of anthropomorphism...

We avoided any anthropomorphic temptation, but it turned out that our central protagonist, who is a primate, provided us with a reflection of man, since we ourselves are primates! Above all, the film aimed to portray an initiation quest, which itself could have tipped into anthropomorphism. That said, we adopted neither a journalistic approach, nor an altogether scientific one, but one that is deliberately emotional so it could be a powerful vector for the desired objectives: arousing curiosity, developing a sort of link with faraway, exotic nature, and raising awareness of the threat that hangs over the Amazon. Because I think that by accessing knowledge, we become more aware of the disorder in the world, and more inspired to act.

How did you handle “casting” the capuchin monkeys ?

It wasn't a matter of capturing our primate heroes. We took capuchin monkeys from sanctuaries for wild animals that had been rescued from trafficking, then we brought them together to make up a group. We then accustomed them to our presence in an open area for more than nine months, which enabled us to film a certain number of sequences. Then, we filmed some complementary images using a zoom lens in wildlife reserves for the wider shots. Since our “actors” were only used to us, but not trained, this meant we had to film them long enough to obtain the necessary elements to tell the story. As a result, we filmed an unbelievable quantity of rushes! On rare occasions, we intervened with the animal wranglers to apply some little strategies, and obtain certain scenes with the capuchins that we needed, by feeding and playing with them.

Tell us about the music...

It had to be Bruno Coulais. I'd worked with him on THE WHITE PLANET, and I'm a total fan of his very intelligent approach to film music. Once again, I thought he was the right man for the situation because it required weaving threads of emotion, bolstered by the 3D image, and he was perfect to fit with this vision. He achieved this by giving the film a score that shifts from narrative – close to the mood of PETER AND THE WOLF – to a music of feelings which passes almost unnoticed, but is nonetheless present. Only the great masters of film music can pull that off.

What's more, the music fits wonderfully with the sounds of the forest...

We had to find a musician who was smart yet humble enough to agree to work together with the sound editor. The film's success depends on this blend of sound effects and music, without one ever taking precedence over the other. During the mixing, we had a lot of discussions about how to

achieve a harmony between the two, in the best interests of the film. That was the case, for example, in the storm scene, which includes the power of the orchestra and the intensity of the downpour, without the two paraphrasing each other: you find yourself in the purest emotion. As with the use of 3D, it was our wish to let the audience to be immersed in this unique environment.

Filmography

2013	AMAZONIA (DOCUMENTARY)
2008	TARA, VOYAGE AU COEUR DE LA MACHINE CLIMATIQUE (TV DOCUMENTARY)
2006	THE WHITE PLANET (DOCUMENTARY)
2005	THE BIBLE UNEARTHED: THE MAKING OF A RELIGION (TV MINI-SERIES DOCUMENTARY)
1997-2002	NOVA (TV SERIES DOCUMENTARY)



Production notes

Stéphane Millière - producer

The AMAZONIA project came to life in 2006 on the release of the film THE WHITE PLANET, the grand saga of life in the Arctic in the course of a year. It was after a conversation with Jean Labadie, the coproducer and distributor of that film, that we decided to follow up with a similar project, this time telling the story of another biotope that is essential for our planet: Amazonia, the Green Planet. Like the Arctic, it covers an immense area, an ostensibly hostile place, and yet key for the balance of life on our planet. Like the Arctic, the Amazon basin follows a great annual cycle. Here, it's not about cold and ice, but the rise and fall of the waters. Amazonia breathes, and all the fauna and flora that live there function in time with this breathing.

We didn't want to tell this story as an observational documentary in which we show the most beautiful sequences of animal behavior, as we did for THE WHITE PLANET.

To describe the workings of this incredible ecosystem, which is home to more than 10% of the planet's species, it seemed clear we had to find a way to make the spectator experience it almost physically, immersing him or her in the forest, with its sounds and smells, the humidity, that feeling of being crushed that one gets the first time one comes in contact with it, the fear of all that fauna that you can sense rather than see, but which is always present around you.

It was essential to convey this story through the device of a character who would have the same experience we would have ourselves. We needed a naïve animal, which would undergo this apprenticeship in the forest.

I first imagined this story could be led by a young marsupial which finds itself separated from its mother by the floodwaters, and which would be confronted by the perils of the forest. It was my partner Luc Marescot who came up with the idea of the capuchin monkey, because he'd had the opportunity to see how quickly this species of monkey can learn from its environment. The idea of the capuchin monkey was immediately adopted, and since it had to be unfamiliar with the forest, Luc thought of a monkey living in captivity which, due to a plane crash, found itself lost in the forest where it is forced to learn to live.

I thought the film should recount how this lost link with nature could be re-established, and how nature, at first dark and hostile when one doesn't know its codes, becomes beautiful and welcoming once you know how to read it.

In the forest, to those of his species, our capuchin monkey is a stranger. But by watching from a distance, he'll learn to understand the codes, and will end up knowing how to get by in this complex world.

We chose to film in the Amazon exclusively with the animals from the chosen area (around 120km north of Manaus), without special effects, without CGI images, with no sequences filmed in a studio. The film had to be true and authentic. To achieve this, we filmed with animals taken in by IBAMA, Brazil's environmental protection agency, which seizes young animals kept as pets in houses or cabins by inhabitants of the Amazon. They entrusted us for two years with these young animals,

which lived in a sanctuary, but didn't really know the forest they once came from – exactly like the protagonist of our film.

So that the experience of immersion in the forest could be as powerful as possible, the film had to be able to stand alone without any narration. It also had to be filmed in 3D, which had never been done before in the Amazon rainforest, and with animals that were new to the place and others that were wild.

Lastly, making this project required a director of talent, an expert in wildlife filming, and one who fully understands the driving forces of fiction. Naturally, we decided to work again with Thierry Ragobert, a companion for 15 years on my major documentary projects and the director of the feature film *THE WHITE PLANET*.

Filming stretched over two-and-a-half years, after almost six months during which the young animals had to get used to the presence of humans and cameras on their territory. All that was built up day after day, with infinite patience in the work with the young monkeys and other animals. We had to continually reinvent the scenes that had been written to adapt to the animals' behavior. And then there was the rain, the equipment breakdowns, the days when the animals wouldn't cooperate, and so on.

After more than four months of filming, the director started on the editing and a list of missing shots was drawn up. The two crews headed off again. There were two crews on the ground: one working with our little monkeys, kept safe and sound in a special area in the base camp in the forest; the other to continue its exploration in search of complicated shots of animal behavior or rare species.

This second period of filming lasted two months, and was then followed by many weeks of editing in Paris to continue constructing the film. It turned out that we were still missing some important shots, and the two crews had to head back to the forest yet again to film some more.

Editing took almost another year after this last expedition. It was a very important stage because in this film with no dialog or narration, all the emotion and narrative progression had to be conveyed by the image. It was all built up, day by day, by choosing images from the hundreds of hours of footage, to assemble, shot after shot, exchanged glances, encounters, combats, and in the end, a story that would keep the viewer in suspense for 85 minutes.

AMAZONIA fluctuates between fiction and documentary, with animals which are not trained to be actors, filmed in the heart of the actual rainforest and put together without the artifice of narration. The 3D adds the feeling of immersion in this primary forest. Thanks to the relief, we are right in the vegetation, alongside the little capuchin monkey, sharing his fears, his surprises, his moments of happiness and tenderness.

AMAZONIA is a journey of sensorial discovery, an intense film, sometimes funny, sometimes moving, which will change how we see the Amazonian forest forever.

Fabiano Gullane and Caio Gullane - producers

What first drew you to this project ?

Caio Gullane and I have always wanted to participate in a major project about the Amazon rainforest. Ever since we were young, we've often traveled there so we know the region well. We have already climbed the best-known peaks and explored the principal rivers. So when Stéphane Millière invited us to join the AMAZONIA project, we immediately saw it as the one we had always dreamed of making. Because not only would the whole film be shot in the Amazon, but also it was based on the principle that the main characters would be the animals of the forest and the forest itself. We were all the more excited by this project since it would be shot in 3D, using the very latest technology. As for Thierry Ragobert, we loved THE WHITE PLANET. He's a fascinating man who comes from a documentary background, and who turned out to be very personable, warm and authentic, and who expresses his feelings with great sensitivity. Working with him was very positive and uplifting.

How did you develop the script, between France and Brazil ?

I think the main challenge for this project was to make a great fiction film using elements of real life, like nature, animals, the climate, the rain, the floods and drought. As such, the script was crucial. The French screenwriters started out by doing extensive scientific research into the animal species, the great diversity of Amazonian fauna and flora. And when Gullane came on board, we really felt we wanted to bring more dramatic elements into the script. It was at this point that we called in Luiz Bolognesi, an experienced Brazilian screenwriter and dramatist. He allowed us to give a fictional dimension to the elements of nature and to turn them into «characters» to drive the narrative. So it was a collaborative effort between the Brazilians and French to arrive at the finalized script. It was on this basis that we could tell a fictional story from documentary elements.

What memories do you have of filming in Amazonia ?

It was one of the most enriching experiences we have ever had as producers. In Amazonia, climatic conditions are extreme: the humidity can easily reach 90%, it rains four or five times a day, the temperature is often more than 40°C, and its very difficult handling logistics. Often, we could only reach shooting locations by boat or helicopter, or after several days' walk through the forest. Bringing to life a 3D film in the world's biggest tropical rainforest was a challenge which marked everyone who took part in it: it's mind-boggling to think we ferried in more than 50 tons of technical and 3D equipment, tons of provisions, anti-mosquito lotion and medication for the crew. In total, it was the equivalent of three years' filming, given that during the first year, a crew of more than 150 people worked in the forest and had to confront many adverse situations. You could compare this adventure to Herzog's FITZCARRALDO, or AT PLAY IN THE FIELDS OF THE LORD by Hector Babenco – both epic films which left their stamp on the image of the Amazon throughout the world. As Tom Jobim said, Brazil is no country for debutants: I'd go further and state that Amazonia in particular is no place for debutants.

You called on scientific experts to act as advisors...

Yes, several groups of scientific experts, mainly Brazilian, advised us in different areas, such as primates, large animals, crocodiles, insects, the jaguar and harpy eagle. But at a given point, scientific consultants could no longer help us because it was dramatic issues that had to be resolved. People had to believe in the film. We worked notably with a very important consultant, who was also our set photographer, Araquém Alcântara, who has been exploring the Amazon for more than 40 years, and who helped us choose the filming locations and to find the specific animals. Araquém revealed to the French and Brazilians the idyllic and magical Amazonia that we were seeking for the film.

What did you think about filming in 3D ?

Shooting in 3D is an extremely interesting experience. It forces you to envision the film whilst always keeping the 3D dimension in mind. It's a whole new approach, which audiences are getting accustomed to around the world. It was an apprenticeship for Gullane and for the Brazilian and French crews who weren't part of the 3D crew. It's very complex technology which requires technical and artistic preparation: defining the place from which you are going to film and the angle of shot you need, or how far you can move the camera axis, since any change in its position requires more than one hour to realign the two 3D cameras.

Was the film hard to finance ?

Financing a film is always hard. Given the scale of the project, it was particularly complex, but not in fact the hardest in Gullane's history. We forged a major partnership with *Natura*, a big Brazilian cosmetics company with a very ecological approach. They work with raw materials from the Amazon, in collaboration with communities attached to sustainable development. *Natura* realized right away that this film was in line with its aims, its image and its advertising, and they decided to back us. We also concluded a major partnership with *Tetrapak*, a company that is globally recognized in the field of sustainable development and the preservation of the environment. We received backing from the *Bank of Amazonia*, which is focused on projects involving the Amazon region. Not to forget the significant participation of *GDF Suez*, a French company which operates in Brazil. Among our Brazilian partners, we brought on board *TV Globo/Globo Filmes*, the biggest media group in Brazil, which believed in the film's potential ; *Telecine*, a cable channel group ; *Riofilme* ; *O Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual* (The Sectorial Audiovisual Fund) ; and lastly, our biggest partner, *Imovision*, who own rights to the film in Brazil and who are helping us sell it internationally.

What do you think of the end result ?

The film is everything we dreamed it would be. A true story that we managed to put together with the fauna and flora of the rainforest. A story with a beginning, a middle and an end, in which we follow the trajectory of a character. We identify with the hero, the capuchin monkey; we're afraid for him, and we share in his joy. The film has a great quality – that of telling a story in an original way, with solely the animals of the rainforest and natural elements. The audience will experience something completely new, from the point of the little monkey, and will be immersed in the universe of the Amazon. We follow the seasons of the rainforest with this monkey, being chased, meeting his mate, being afraid, finding food, and learning how to behave. He's a monkey who doesn't belong to this environment, yet who ends up finding his own place there: the film tells the story of this little creature who has to learn to become a wild monkey in the Amazonian forest.

Laurent Baujard - executive producer

When I discovered the project in 2008, the idea was to make a major documentary on the Amazon, while at the same time using an “emotional base”, which was the story of our little capuchin monkey. This dovetailing between fiction and documentary looked simple enough on paper, and turned out to be the real lynchpin of the film’s narrative. To sum up, our aim was to shoot with untrained “actors” who would play themselves in a set that is their actual home.

We then had to work out how to shoot this reverse wild-child narrative with the additional difficulty of having animals instead of actors. Of course, the script had been written with the help of scientists and primate specialists and had to be shot with a naturalistic approach that required no constraints in terms of the animals. But we weren’t sure how it could be done, what animals we might be able to find and where, and we had no idea of what kinds of behavioral or environmental challenges we might be confronted with.

To answer these questions, we called on our wrangler Pascal Tréguy. He and his team joined us in the Amazon to check out the presence and the behavior of our future protagonists. As they found out more about what we’d be faced with there, we were able to develop the script and specify the essentials of how the film would be put together, otherwise known as the shooting plan. We then embarked upon a long learning process about the habits of the various cast members, from capuchin monkeys to jaguars, harpy eagles to Amazonian river dolphins and anteaters to boot. Each brought their own constraints, but also fresh opportunities.

- The capuchins move from tree to tree, covering an average of 2 km per day in a area of around 30 km², in groups of between five and 40 members. Individuals aged between 18-24 months are the easiest to approach before sexual maturity makes them wilder.
- The anaconda mainly lives in the water, its head emerging above the surface as it awaits its prey. It can go without food for weeks at a time. When sated, it stays still and is vulnerable.
- The jaguar is a solitary animal capable of picking up the scent of a human being from several kilometers. In general, a jaguar’s territory is no more than 150 km².
- The coati is a very curious creature which willingly allows itself to be filmed as it hunts for food or new encounters.
- The harpy eagle is non-nomadic and monogamous. The female can capture prey weighing up to 9 kg, and is a solitary creature which doesn’t like the presence of other creatures.

It was through compiling this type of information relating to some 70 animal species featured in the film that we constructed the shooting plan for AMAZONIA. The work done by the directing team lead by Vincent Steiger and Martin Blum was Herculean!

We had to create a giant zone in the middle of the forest. It was a sort of bio-park that would become the film set. In this set, we had to bring together all the animals that would participate in the narrative of the movie. Pascal Tréguy and the ten or so other animal specialists started out by getting the animals accustomed to human presence by using fake wooden cameras arranged here and there in the enclosure. This is known as the “impregnation” period. They were also charged with organizing the shooting of each sequence along with the director, Thierry Ragobert. We also organized some expeditions in the Amazon rainforest for head cameraman Jérôme Bouvier’s teams. Their aim was to record the missing footage of various animal behaviors and the background scenes that we were unable to record as part of the main shooting plan. It was during this time that we obtained the aerial shots, wide shots and all the shots used to show the diversity of the Amazon landscape in relation to the action in the film.

Very soon – for financial reasons and also because the film could only be made in the Amazon rainforest – we had to find a Brazilian coproducer. The production company Gullane, an independent like us, came on board. Their experience in the realm of fiction and their knowledge of Brazil were a perfect complement to the skills provided by Biloba Films in terms of wildlife filming and 3D. The great adventure could begin.

The next stage was to bring all this together, for better or for worse – fiction crews alongside documentary crews. The complex and fragile 3D technology, dropped into some of the most far-flung, isolated filming locations in the world. The rigors and the technical complexity of a 3D shoot, and the total unpredictability of the location and its inhabitants. Lastly, Brazilians and French, each with their differences. I'd say that nature took care of the rest. Weather, fauna and flora took a devious pleasure in continually upsetting our plans, both in front of and behind the camera. Faced with this daily lesson in humility, the certainties and usual working habits of those involved broke down.

This is one of the keys for the success of the film. Despite the material difficulties, the cultural differences, the approaches that could at times be in opposition – despite all that, every day of the film's production, everyone, from the production crew through logistics to editing, strived to bring their contribution to the edifice.

- The film crew, stuck in the mud with its state-of-the-art equipment on the first day of the shoot.
- The editing team, weighed down under hundreds of hours of rushes in the middle of the forest, suffering from a somewhat erratic electricity supply.
- The animal experts chasing after mischievous monkeys refusing to allow themselves to be filmed, or the whole crew, dead beat after several months living in the forest.
- And we, the producers, faced with this operation that was so complex to put together and handle, as much from a financial and legal as from an artistic point of view, and which meant we had to continually adapt.

I remain transfixed by these images, and each of them reminds me how much everyone gave above and beyond to arrive at this astonishing balance that Thierry Ragobert managed to capture in AMAZONIA. Beyond the film, there was a long and dangerous road made up of doubts and audacity. A path of tolerance and openness to others. I'd like to thank here, one by one, the so many who contributed to this.



Gustavo Hadba - director of photography

The Amazon is a very tough place to shoot. You can't see anything because the light struggles to penetrate the forest, and when it does, it's blinding. There are either these dazzling contrasts in the image, or there's this nasty green light that makes everything look awful! But you can't fight the light so you just have to make it work for you. And that's not to mention the mosquitoes that just love film crew blood, the heat, the rain, the humidity and the sweat that burns your eyes. If you have the slightest technical problem, you have to wait for days and days to get a replacement. As for the animals, you can hear them but you never see them. And when you finally get yourself behind a lens, you never know what they are going to do or what is going to happen. You can't control anything. So the only thing you can do to stop yourself dying of frustration is do be patient and put yourself in the hands of the wranglers, the specialist fixers for a particular beast, without whom you could do nothing. You have to remain calm, because if the crew is stressed, the animals can feel it instantly. Sometimes a miracle happens, one scene that you manage to shoot exactly how you planned. Or something unexpected might happen – a movement, a glance, a ray of light. Then the beauty floods into the viewfinder and it's magical. A moment of grace. And the whole crew shouts with joy.

Jérôme Bouvier - Chief Camera Operator

How did you get involved in the AMAZONIA project ?

I knew about the project long before Thierry Ragobert told me about it because from the start, I was in contact with the producer Jean-Pierre Saire, and then with Luc Marescot, one of the writers. Thierry knew of my work and had used some of my polar bear footage for THE WHITE PLANET. He knew I'd worked on this kind of film combining fiction and documentary.

So this kind of cross-genre project isn't new to you ?

I believe in it strongly, even though it's a difficult balance to achieve. Certain shots and certain behaviors just cannot be obtained in "controlled conditions" with tame or trained animals. You have to go after them with wild animals and that's my field of expertise. That combination makes the fiction credible and brings a certain "wildness" to the movie which, to me, is an extremely positive element that you don't get from pure fiction.

Had you worked in the Amazon rainforest before ?

I'd been to the tropical dry forests in Nicaragua and the cloud forests in Costa Rica but this project marked the first time I'd set foot in the Amazon rainforest. Initially, it was just a quick, fairly superficial reccy over a few days with the main crew. Then completely by chance, just before the AMAZONIA shoot got underway, I'd started another big film which was shot in Peru and the Amazon basin. So I'd already spent seven weeks in the jungle when I actually got started on AMAZONIA.

What was your mission on the film ?

To fill in the holes that were left. Thierry had done a first rough cut to get an idea of what might be missing. Then we did an initial shoot that lasted three weeks. A few months later, we did another shoot for four weeks with a very precise list of shots that needed to be inserted in the final edit. Everything had to be done with the lightest possible kit and a very small but experienced team who were capable of capturing natural behaviors and phenomena that would be impossible to obtain for a traditional film crew.

What were your priorities and your preferences amongst the different animal species and natural locations ?

The shoot at Rio Cristalino in the southern Amazon was extraordinary for the huge variety of ecosystems there, the beauty of the place and for the skills and availability of our local guides. In terms of species, we were truly spoiled, with microfauna, insects, butterflies, amphibians, etc. As it happens, it is the diversity of shapes, colors and textures that is so amazing. Personally, I have a soft spot for spider monkeys and the flooded forest areas that are what makes the Amazon rainforest so special.

Did you have any moments of pure panic ?

Never. I always feel at home in these forests. And the mosquitos and other horror-story creatures like snakes, jaguars and poisonous insects don't change a thing. One needs to learn to understand the forest, to get to grips with the dangers and to know how to minimize them. As soon as you forget the fears one might have about this foreign place, you start seeing it in a different way and that changes everything.

What was the hardest thing to shoot ?

Some very specific behavior involving the Harpy Eagle. We spent six days hiding in a tree only to return empty-handed and without the precise footage that we wanted of an adult returning with a monkey hide. But it was worth it, just for the experience. Not everyone gets to spend six days in a Brazil nut tree above that amazing canopy.

How did your kit differ to that of the main crew ?

It was completely different. We had a much lighter camera and very different kit to be able to spend time in the trees with a slimmed-down six-person crew who were extremely reactive, and most of whom had a great deal of experience in working in tropical rainforests.

Jeanne Guillot - stereography

How did you get involved in the AMAZONIA project ?

Shortly before AMAZONIA, I worked on MAKAY, a documentary by Pierre Stine that was produced by Gédéon and shot in 3D in the middle of nowhere in Madagascar. We had to be able to shoot in 3D in some very difficult conditions, but we managed it. AMAZONIA involved a much more in-depth shoot but we had a lot more equipment available, so the production team put my name forward.

What was your approach to 3D in terms of this film ?

My style is to not take a too-spectacular approach full of special effects with things jumping out at you, because I believe that soon becomes mannered and risks being facile. For a film like AMAZONIA, it's more about using the immersive capabilities of 3D to tell a story that takes place in a wonderful environment that is exotic and far away, enabling the audience to empathize with the "characters".

Were there any specific technical constraints ?

The basic principle is that one can see in 3D because we have two eyes that allow us to believe in a reality of space. As such, to shoot in 3D, you reproduce this effect by shooting with two cameras. You have to know how to position those cameras to obtain the desired effect and make the space coherent in terms of the object you are shooting. However, shooting with two cameras isn't that easy in the middle of the Amazon rainforest. To simplify things, rather than placing the two cameras side by side, we set them at an angle on a rig with mirrors, in order to work with fairly small distances.

What was your role on the shoot ?

The job of a stereographer is essentially to manage the technical set-up, the spacing of the cameras, and to make sure this fairly complex equipment works correctly. The most important thing, and that which ensures the quality of the 3D image, is that you soon realize that recounting a narrative in 3D is very different to doing it in 2D. Filming volumes requires a different approach. So you have to think very carefully about the composition of each shot. For example, when you shoot from far away with a telephoto lens, shooting in 3D can sometimes flatten the shot. So my role is to advise the director to work with shorter focal lengths and to get as close as possible to the subject, even when you're filming a dangerous animal. That's why, in the sequence with the jaguar, which had to be able to run freely through the forest, we set up a crew in a cage to protect them. That allowed us to get the camera as close as possible to the cat. That was quite ironic for a nature film – having the animal free and the crew in a cage!

How did the crew familiarize themselves with 3D ?

It is crucial that the different team leaders in the shoot can get to grips with a new medium. And it was amazing that with this film, even though there were several different shoots with different camera operators, they all gradually understood the specifics of shooting in 3D. Even if it was more of a constraint, most of the crew got into it and started thinking about how they could adapt their individual expertise. So my work allowed each of them to understand the medium. Because it is a nature film, everyone is used to keeping a good distance from the animals in order not to scare them, but here it was the opposite and we tried to get as close as possible in order to better use the immersive space.

