

# NATURE'S FEAR FACTOR



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*“It’s like a wave of teeth that are sweeping through the landscape. There is running, there is escape, there is fear.”*

– PAOLA BOULEY

**TITLE** NATURE’S FEAR FACTOR

**DURATION** 1X53

**PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY** DAVID MURDOCK

**PRODUCTION** HHMI TANGLED BANK STUDIOS AND NOVA

**YEAR** 2020



From award-winning HHMI Tangled Bank Studios comes a savage tale of science on the edge. Gorongosa National Park in the wilds of Mozambique was once home to tens of thousands of Africa’s great animals. But after decades of civil war, the park was in tatters and few large animals remained. Huge herbivore populations had been decimated, and a once-powerful predator guild of lions, leopards, hyenas and wild dogs had been reduced to just a handful of resilient lions.

Now, in one of the most ambitious conservation experiments ever undertaken, a maverick team of scientists and conservationists is trying to rebuild the entire ecosystem. Over the past 10 years, they’ve had great success bringing back the herbivore populations by clearing the park of poachers and letting the remaining animals and new introductions return to their wild ways. But the recovery effort is at a crucial crossroads. There are clear signs that something is missing from Gorongosa. Elephants are raiding nearby farms; some large antelope numbers are rocketing out of control; and normally skittish small grazers are wandering out in the open without a care in the world—all warning signs of an ecosystem out of whack.

To restore balance before it’s too late, the team has embarked upon a bold plan to pump a much-needed element back into the park: Fear. They’re reestablishing the lion population to ambush unsuspecting prey. And they’re airlifting in packs of rare wild dogs—social predators that course through the landscape like “waves of teeth.” The team expects these fierce hunters to do more than just eat. They hope the wild dogs and lions will scare the prey back into their lanes, changing their behavior and reestablishing a much-needed “landscape of fear.”

With exclusive access to the wild dogs’ reintroduction, the film features never-before-seen footage of these rare predators arriving at the park; bonding into a cohesive pack; and, led by their pregnant alpha female, trying to establish their dominance in the wild. Have the scientists timed their reintroduction correctly? Are the wild dogs up to the task of creating a “landscape of fear?” Will Gorongosa be a new foothold for the survival of their species? Or, despite all best efforts, will they succumb to the many dangers lurking in their midst? Gorongosa’s future may hang in the balance.



**NOVA**

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