

ORCA Production presents
a Stephan Rytz film

wetlands

THE LEGACY OF LUC HOFFMANN

« Conservation of
the wetlands is essential
for human survival. »

PRESS KIT



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SYNOPSIS

Heir to the Roche pharmaceutical laboratories in Switzerland, **Luc Hoffmann** was a passionate ornithologist and scientist.

He was the first to launch studies in the 50's to demonstrate the importance of the **wetlands**. He discovered that these biotopes are the most productive reservoirs for biodiversity in the world and also vital for the **survival of Humankind** on our planet.

This film takes us on a journey to discover Luc Hoffmann, this humanistic and visionary man, who fought discreetly for the protection of the wetlands with little need for recognition or reward. We will discover his great work and understand the importance of the preservation of these wetlands and their ecosystems that are essential to combat **climate change** issues.

TECHNICAL SHEET

Language versions : French (original) and English

Genre & Duration : Documentary - 90 minutes

Format : 4K, color - stereo

Year & country of production : 2019 - Switzerland

Written & directed by

Stephan Rytz

Produced by

Stephan Rytz et Loïc Oswald

Production

ORCA Production

With the participation of

MAVA Foundation

Adaptation

Naoki Lembezat

Anne-Sophie Deville

Stephan Rytz

Production assistants

Anne-Sophie Deville

Manon Dumas

Emeline Mourocq

Iasonas Kantas



Images by

Loïc Oswald

Fabien Wohlschlag

Marc Zumbach

Audio recording

Nicolas Binggeli

Benoit Frech

Frédéric Maury

Théo Viroton

Original soundtrack composed by

Fabien Guerra

Photographs

Lucien Kolly

Fabien Wohlschlag

STORYLINE

For million of years, water flows across the surface of the Earth like blood flowing through the arteries. Without water, life wouldn't be possible on our blue planet.

Endlessly, water runs down the mountains to reach the seas and the oceans, creating huge deltas that are exceptional habitats in which prospers a remarkable biodiversity.

In 1946, **Luc Hoffmann** discovered the **Camargue** at the age of 23. Heir to the Swiss pharmaceutical laboratories Roche, he instantly fell in love with this French region and bought **la Tour du Valat**, 1,200 hectares of swamps and salt marshes at the heart of the Rhone River delta.



His project was to create a biological station to allow scientists to research these rich and fundamental ecosystems called « **wetlands** ».

Back then, these environments were considered unhealthy for the population and their destruction greatly increased all over the world since the end of the 19th century. Two thirds of all wetlands would already have disappeared in less than 50 years.

And yet, these areas are essential for the survival of humans on our planet.

Wetlands like mangroves, flood plains or swamps act as huge buffer to minimize the devastating climate change effects. They are important habitats for the development of biodiversity and source of life for all communities, providing drinking water, fishing and hunting products, as well as other important food resources.

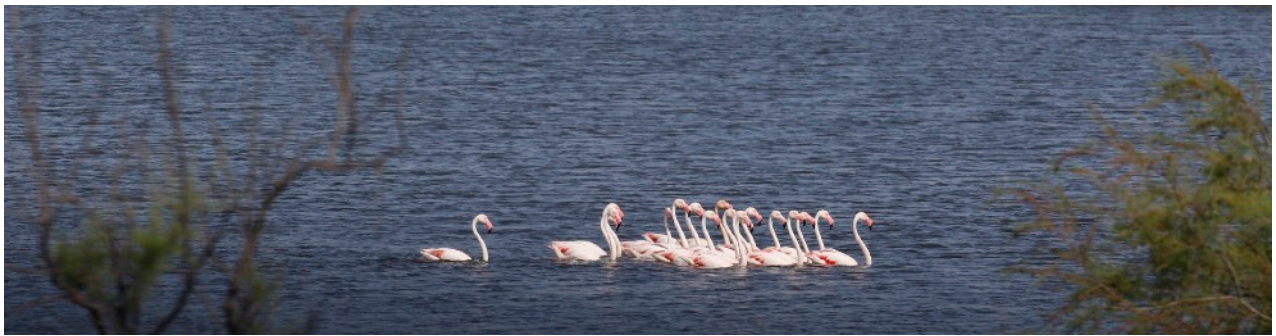
Although ecology and sustainable development had attracted little interest at the time, Luc Hoffmann became one of the first to care about the protection of nature, without excluding the development of human activities.

And so his passion for the wetlands drew him outside the borders of the Rhone delta.

He thus became co-founder of **WWF**, along with Max Nicholson and Peter Scott, who were committed to save the **Coto Doñana** in Andalusia from destruction and which became the largest natural park in Europe in the 70's.

In **Prespa**, he helped to protect two large transboundary lakes shared by Greece, Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. This region of the Balkans is not only home to an exceptional fauna, like the fascinating Dalmatian pelican, it is also an important place for its cultural heritage dating from the Byzantine period.

In the **Banc d'Aguin**, he supported the Mauritanian authorities and the local fishermen to stop the plundering of coastal waters. By setting the example of the sustainable management of fish stocks, he prevented the destruction of the largest site in West Africa for wintering and nesting waterbirds.



He extended the scope of his action to the marine sanctuaries of neighboring countries, including the **Bijagos** archipelagos in Guinea-Bissau. These islands are home to unique species like hippopotamus and the green turtles, who come every year to lay their eggs on the desert beach of the most remote islands. A rich biodiversity that lives along local communities who built their culture and traditions in respect with their environment.

As a pioneer of the **sustainable development**, Luc Hoffmann was not only a philanthropist. He was above all a very involved scientist who managed to federate thousands of men and women around his numerous projects, including the local people of threatened areas, scientists, field managers and even politicians.

He was one of the first to raise the awareness of the world's governments about the importance of wetlands. Thanks to Luc Hoffmann, the **Ramsar Convention** was signed in 1971, a unique treaty that today protects over 2000 sites around the planet.

This film takes us on a journey into the heart of the 5 iconic sites supported by Luc Hoffmann. It will help us understand the importance of these wetlands and the invaluable services they provided to human beings.

Despite all the actions taken by Luc Hoffmann, wetlands remain the most threatened environments due to human activities.

More than ever, the protection of these ecosystems is a great challenge to take up today.



THE 5 ICONIC SITES OF LUC HOFFMANN

CAMARGUE - FRANCE

Born from the association of the Rhone River and the Mediterranean Sea, the Camargue is the largest wetland in metropolitan France.

Second largest delta in the Mediterranean after the Nile Delta, this vast area of 150,000 hectares is an amazing collection of ponds, reedbeds and rivers. There are nearly 540 species of vertebrates living in the Camargue, including 412 species of birds, such as the emblematic Pink Flamingo.

But the multitude of canals that dot the Camargue remind us of the presence of humans and their various activities. In order to develop the production of rice, salt and livestock the delta has been greatly transformed. This transformation has accelerated since the second half of the nineteenth century with the industrialisation and urbanisation of the region, endangering rare natural habitats.

Luc Hoffmann discovered the Camargue in 1946. With his family's fortune, he acquired the Tour du Valat in 1948, an area right in the heart of the wetland. Convinced of the importance of these wetlands for the protection of bird populations, he then went on to try and stop the destruction of natural areas of the Camargue while also being mindful of the economic needs of the people of the region.

The Camargue was the historical starting point for the study and understanding of wetlands. This is also where the ideas of Luc Hoffmann emerged and whose influence inspired the creation of the Ramsar Convention to protect these fragile habitats.



DOÑANA - SPAIN

Located in the south of Spain, not far from Seville, lies the Doñana National Park.

Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and the estuary of the Guadalquivir River, this vast wetland is a unique mosaic of Mediterranean ecosystems made up of marshes, lagoons, scrubland, pine forests, dunes and beaches.

It is a refuge for more than 4,000 different species, including the iconic Iberian Eagle and the Iberian Lynx which are among the most endangered animals in Spain. Doñana is also a crucial region of Europe for migratory birds. Up to six million individuals transit here each year before returning to Africa for the winter.

But at the end of the 1950s, this exceptional natural habitat was threatened by massive urbanization and drainage projects.

In the early 1960s, when he was involved in the creation of the WWF, Luc Hoffmann suggested making Coto Doñana the first fight for the new NGO.

WWF, assisted by Luc Hoffmann, purchased nearly 6,800 ha of land for the creation of the Doñana National Park, a fully protected reserve, closed to the general public.

The park opened in 1969 and was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994.



PRESPA - GREECE, ALBANIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Nestled at an altitude of 850m and bordered by Greece, Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, the region is formed by the 3 lakes of Prespa and is one of the most stunning landscapes of the Balkans.

On the shores of the lakes, the historical remains dating from the Byzantine period and the rock chapels built by the monks in the fifteenth century, testify the cultural richness of the region.

Formed before the last ice age, the Prespa lakes are among the oldest lakes in Europe and their large surface, as well as their isolation at the head of the watershed, make them a unique ecosystem. This has resulted in a very rich fauna and flora, marked by a high rate of endemism. With more than 200 species found nowhere else.

In addition, this region is at the crossroads of migration routes between Asia, Europe and Africa which makes it a perfect stopover for migratory birds. In total 267 species of birds pass through or permanently reside there. This is the case of the Dalmatian pelican, which has established its largest colony in the world at this location!

All of these species have shared the waters of the lake with humans for millennia.

But in the 1970s, the Greek government planned major road construction and drainages that jeopardized the region's ecosystems and cultural heritage.

Due to its ornithological wealth and its beautiful landscape, Luc Hoffmann quickly perceived the urgent need to protect this site and suggested the idea of creating a national park to the Greek government.

To maintain the preservation of the ecosystem of the Prespa lakes as a whole, Luc Hoffmann used a more regional approach. He participated in the creation of WWF Greece and brought together several Greek and international organizations to found in 1991 the Society for the Protection of Prespa.

In the year 2000, the Prespa Transboundary Park was created, endorsed by the three countries who were once enemies.



BANC D'ARGUIN - MAURITANIA

The Banc d'Arguin National Park is a vast protected region, located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Sahara Desert, that stretches over 12,000 km² along the Mauritanian coast.

The Banc d'Arguin is home to the largest concentration of West African birds. The abundance of food and shelter supports a considerable amount of life, sheltering over two million wintering shorebirds.

The vast majority of species feed on the numerous invertebrates that are easily accessible at low tide on the sandbanks and mudflats.

Others benefit from the opulence of fish. The pristine seabed of the Banc d'Arguin acts as an ideal nursery for marine life.

But animals are not the only ones to occupy this natural sanctuary.

This strip of land, with a hostile appearance, has been inhabited for centuries by the Imraguen who form a unique socio-cultural entity. While this arid country is essentially made up of nomadic pastoralists, the Imraguen live from fishing. On board traditional boats with sails called lanches, they are the only fishermen allowed to fish within the Park.

This exclusivity was granted by the Mauritanian government, thanks to the dedication of Luc Hoffmann. Seeing the increasing pressure exerted by the outside fishermen on the halieutic reserves, Luc Hoffmann founded in 1986 the International Foundation of the Banc d'Arguin.

The Banc d'Arguin is, therefore, the largest marine area on the planet where motorboat fishing is prohibited.

The actions taken by Luc Hoffmann have made it possible to preserve the biodiversity of the largest and most diverse coastal wetland between Europe and tropical Africa, while also ensuring the future of the local populations whose fishing activities have a negligible impact on the environment.



BIJAGOS - GUINEA-BISSAU

Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Guinea-Bissau is a small country in West Africa with an outstanding natural wealth.

It has a multitude of ecological sanctuaries. The Bijagos Archipelago, with its 88 islands, is probably the richest in terms of biodiversity.

This sanctuary is home to emblematic species such as the West African crocodile and manatee. The archipelago is one of the few regions in the world where hippopotamuses have adapted to live in salt and brackish water.

Bijagos has also the largest population of wintering migratory shorebirds in West Africa after Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania.

This archipelago has become an important refuge for many other emblematic animals. This is the case of the green turtle, as the islands of Bijagos are the main nesting site for this species in all of West Africa.

About twenty of these islands are occupied by the Bijagos, animist people still very dependent from the natural resources of the archipelago and directly contributing to its preservation.

In 1996, the UNESCO recognized the archipelago as a Biosphere Reserve. This recognition encouraged the state of Guinea-Bissau to create the Orango National Park and the Joaõ Vieira-Poilaõ Islands Marine National Park.

It was at this time that Luc Hoffmann discovered the Bijagos archipelago and the ecological importance it plays in West Africa. This resulted in his help and support in the creation of several protected areas within this region and assisting local communities through various projects highlighting the coexistence between men and nature.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The GPS of my car indicated to stop at the end of a muddy road, in the middle of the Camargue. I had just driven many kilometers across fields, rice lands and reedbeds.

Luc Hoffmann had invited me to come and visit the scientific laboratory of the Tour du Valat in the objective of creating a film revealing its history and its actions taken over the past 60 years.

That same evening, I was comfortably seated at the table having dinner with him when he suddenly asked to open the window that was overlooking the garden.

On that evening of May 2014, for a long moment we listened the nightingale singing. This was for him the best moment of the day.

Luc Hoffmann was like this. A passionate and humble man. An exceptional ornithologist, scientist and humanist who dedicated his entire life to the study and the protection of our environment.

Upon my return to Switzerland, I buried myself in the history of the Tour du Valat, where Luc Hoffmann had created an independent biological station dedicated to the studies of the ecosystems of the Camargue.

Back then, scientists were more interested in understanding the functions of the forests, thinking they were the most important biotopes on the planet. But Luc Hoffmann was guided by his love for waterbirds and became the first to concentrate and conduct studies on *wetlands*. He wanted to demonstrate that their protection was vital for humans.

What? The bog in front of my home is vital?

I then discovered that the wetlands meant much more than simple stretches of stagnante swampy and sometimes foul-smelling water.

Lagoons, peatlands, lakes, rivers, flood plains, mangroves, costal and marine areas are also wetlands. They cover only 6% of the total land surface of the planet and yet are home to more than a third of the world's biodiversity!

Digging a bit deeper, I learned that the wetlands provide important services to humans. First, they are the main source of drinkable water, naturally filtering organic wastes. Secondly, they protect food production, like rice which is the staple diet of 3 billion people. Wetlands are nature's shock absorbers, acting as natural sponges, absorbing floods and reducing the speed and height of storm surges, hurricanes and tsunamis. Mangroves alone store 50 times more carbon than tropical forest. Finally, wetlands support over 1 billion livelihoods, one-third of the global workforce. Recent studies have shown that the economical value of wetlands was 5 times higher than the tropical forests and that 1/7 of the world population directly depend on them.

All this information makes me dizzy. While the world is facing one of the greatest ecological crisis, how is it possible that we rarely talk about the importance of the wetlands?

Luc Hoffmann had long understood the dangers rising from the destruction of these unique environments.

This is how the idea of telling his story came out.

I first sought to understand how Luc had discovered what others were ignoring. The answer was above my head: the birds!

During their migration, birds follow the waterways and gather on ponds, lagoons or coastal sandbanks in search for food. In his quest, Luc Hoffmann followed the migratory routes taken by birds that drew him beyond the borders of the Camargue.

After the Rhone delta, I left on a trip to discover the four other sites with which Luc Hoffmann was particularly involved : Coto Doñana in Spain, the Prespa lakes in northern Greece, the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania and the Bijagos archipelago in Guinea-Bissau.

These sites helped me to understand the entire scope of the ecological importance of the wetlands and the many ecosystem services they provide to humans. These services are different according to each region I visited.

I was struck by the stunning beauty of the landscapes and discovered wild areas that I never imagined. I understood that the vision I had about the wetlands was totally wrong.

All the images of this film were shot with the utmost respect of nature, the environment and the surrounding wildlife. No impregnated or captive animals were used during the shooting. We discreetly approached wild animals with the help of scientists and set up hides to avoid disturbance. My objective was to show nature as everyone can see it and specifically how Luc liked to observe it.

But the preservation of natural heritage was not the only motivation of Luc Hoffmann. The human aspect was an essential part that brought him to conduct studies on wetlands.

From the beginning, Luc's vision was seeing the protection of the environment as part of a global dynamic that includes and interacts with human activity. This was the first step towards the concept of "sustainable development".

During his very last interview in octobre 2014 for the Tour du Valat's film, Luc Hoffmann was telling me: "It's unthinkable that people will protect nature if we don't make them understand that they can benefit from it!"

Increase understanding. This was one of his greatest strengths. The different people that I met during the shootings were unanimous. Luc was never imposing his ideas, he was suggesting them. He had that gift of highlighting important issues in a way that others would then make the right decisions to solve them. This great man always acted with modesty and humility, with no need for recognition or reward. He preferred to work in the shadows, leaving others under the spotlight.

It is with this same spirit that we are presenting the little known work of Luc Hoffmann in this film. The objective is to invite the audience to discover this personality through testimonials from those who have known him well and have worked with him closely.

Thus, *Wetlands, the Legacy of Luc Hoffmann* is a journey into the fascinating world of the wetlands and a sincere homage to the actions taken by Luc Hoffmann.

This film invites us to recognize and respond to the importance of these fragile areas. By acting on the need to safeguard the wetlands, Luc Hoffmann also left humanity with the responsibility to protect this natural heritage, crucial for our own survival.

As the director of the Tour du Valat Jean Jalbert says: "The protection of wetlands is more than a hobby of some naturalists. It's now clearly a social issue".

Stephan Rytz



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

I have always loved nature and had a passion for wildlife documentary films since childhood. I founded ORCA Production in 1998, right after my studies in film direction and editing at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

From the beginning, I oriented my work towards the production of films on nature, environment and sustainable development.

My strong commitment to raise public awareness on the importance of protecting our planet led me to collaborate for several years with the TV Center of WWF International on the editing of over 50 news reports.

Today, I continue on this same path by producing films that have the mission to sensibilise and involve the viewers in stories highlighting the relationship between man and nature.

In 2016, we joined forces with my business partner Loïc Oswald who shares the same values. Together, we produce authentic films in full respect with the environment and the species we approach, without creating any disturbance. We are constantly searching for stunning images that keep us diving into the magical universe of documentary, film of the real.

FILMOGRAPHY OF ORCA PRODUCTION

- 2020** "The return of the Osprey" documentary under production - 4K. 52 minutes FR/EN
- 2019** "Wetlands, the Legacy of Luc Hoffmann" documentary - 4K. 90 minutes FR/EN
- 2017** "The Great Cormorant" - 4K. 7 minutes FR
- 2016** "Biosphère", series of short films on local biodiversity - 4K. 6 minutes FR
- 2015** "Tour du Valat, where research meets nature" documentary - 4K. 33 minutes FR/EN
Selected at FIFO in Ménégoût, France in 2016 (2nd place of the categories « Price for the protection of Nature" and "Price Wetlands")
- 2012** "La vidange du barrage de Verbois", short film of 6 minutes
- 2008** "Quel Rhône pour demain ?" documentary - XDCAM documentaire 26 minutes, FR
Film selected as the honorary guest at fifel (festival du film sur les énergies in Lausanne)
- 2007** "L'hydroélectricité à Genève" - XDCAM 16 minutes, FR
- 2005** "SIG Solar III, la méga centrale" - XDCAM 7 minutes, FR
- 2004** Fondation Martin Bodmer - "Un édifice spirituel", documentary - XDCAM 26 minutes, FR/EN
- 2002** "Breast cancer, a family affaire" documentary - Betacam SP 35 minutes, FR/AL/IT/EN
- 2003** "Les sternes du Rhône genevois", Betacam SP 20 minutes, FR
Film selected at the Ménégoût ornithological film festival in 2004

AWARDS

« Wetlands, the Legacy of Luc Hoffmann » has been submitted in different film festivals in Switzerland, France, Spain, Greece, Italy, UK, USA, Africa and Asia for the 2020 selections.

We are proud to announce that we already received the Golden Leaf Award at **Lazio Green Film Festival** in Rome as the best documentary film. We also won the 5th season of the **Druk International Film Festival (DIFF)** as « best film on Nature, Environment and Wildlife » and are **nominated** for the prestigious **GOLDEN DRAGON AWARDS®** and the final result will be published in March 2020.



