

# off the fence.

## Brazil: A Natural History

5 x 60'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

### 1. Fragile Forest

This enigmatic forest once stretched along the coast for thousands of kilometres. Now there is only 7% left. Yet it is still home for many remarkable animals. Muriqui are the largest monkeys in South America. These very rare, highly social creatures greet each other with hugs - the closer the friendship, the more intense the hugs. Great dusky swifts fly through the tumbling waters of the mighty Iguaçu Falls to build their nests on the slippery rock faces behind the curtains of water. Coatis are curious looking creatures with their long flexible noses and banded tails, making them quite comical. But appearances can be deceptive, and coatis are efficient hunters. They are also very social, living in all-female gangs that are composed of sisters, mothers and aunts. The females support one another in their day-to-day lives, keeping a watch out for predators. Blue manakins are also social, but in a completely different way. In the depths of the forest, the males of these startlingly colourful birds work as a team to court a female. Like miniature circus performers they jump and bounce on a branch, one after the other, to excite their audience. Only the lead artist gets to carry out the last act.

### 2. Wild Heart

The grassland that covers the central region of Brazil is the country's least known habitat, depending on dramatic summer thunderstorms and fire for its character. The maned wolf is a long-legged and strange predator – it spends half the year feeding on fruit while at other times it hunts insects and rodents. The giant anteater is the most charmingly ridiculous animal on Earth - it has no teeth but feeds on termites using a hugely long tongue. Termites build dramatic mounds that dot the landscape. They are fire and rain proof with concrete hard walls, but the giant anteater has the means to open them. However, the termites' greatest enemies are bands of aggressive ants. The burrowing owl uses the termite mounds as a look out post – to hunt crickets and grasshoppers. They nest underground in burrows made by strange armadillos. Capuchin monkeys live on the cliffs that overlook the scrub and grassland. They are remarkably smart animals, collecting palm fruits and taking them to traditional spots where they smash them open using an anvil and hammer-stone.

### 3. Labyrinth of Lakes

It switches from grassland to swamp and back each year, with the seasonal rains, in one of the most dramatic changes of any habitat on Earth. Jaguar, and giant otter have the upper hand, as the labyrinth of lakes turns dry and dusty. But during the time of annual floods, when the region becomes a vast glittering swamp, it's the many thousands of fish and the thousands of caiman

which are in their element. Floating between these two extreme worlds are huge numbers of birds - like the dazzling cobalt-blue hyacinth macaw and the huge Jabiru. Hyacinth macaws are the largest and most spectacular of all parrots. Their huge bill can open the hardest nuts in the world. The jaguar is the ruler of this beautiful and bizarre world.

#### **4. Paradise Coast**

Brazil's coast stretches 7,500 kilometres from the cool temperate waters of the south to the mouth of the Amazon, the equator and beyond, with a large number of remote islands off the coast. Undoubtedly the most formidable is Snake Island. Golden lanceheads - the most poisonous snakes on earth - populate Snake Island, as many as 5 per square metre. They are specialist killers of migrating birds. Humpback whales migrate up the coast from Antarctica to the tropical seas off Brazil where the mothers give birth and nurse their babies, whilst males, boisterous giants, compete by spectacular displays of acrobatic strength. Spinner dolphins live around the remote Fernando de Noronha Islands. These faraway islands are one of the last places on Earth where octopus and moray eels come out the sea to hunt down crabs.

#### **5. Floode Forst**

The largest rainforest in the world still holds many secrets. The harpy eagle is the world's biggest bird of prey, capable of hunting and killing monkeys. But the most important creatures in the forest are leaf-cutter ants - they can harvest the green wealth of the forest, as they have found a way of removing the protective poisons from the leaves. The forests, for miles around the rivers, become flooded every year. Pirarucu, a strange primordial monster fish, hunts amongst the trees. The water is so dangerous that one fish uniquely lays its eggs on the leaves above the flooded forest. As the water retreats smaller fish play out life and death scenes in the shrinking lakes and lagoons. They have even found ways of escaping tiny puddles and returning to the river. The Amazon still has the power to surprise.