

Nature's Greatest Moments - South American Shorts (Series 1)

11 x 5 MINUTES

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Caiman

During the dry season even South America's vast inland sea, the Pantanal basin, begins to evaporate. For some it is a time of plenty. The caiman, a South American crocodile, makes the most of the season by gorging on fish trapped by receding waterways, or congregating below a waterfall and waiting lazily with mouths a-gape, for their meal to swim in.

2. Capybara

With its broad head and barrel-shaped body the capybara bears a close resemblance to a pig. In fact, it is the world's largest rodent. A docile herbivore, the Capybara lives in constant danger from the many predators that share its territory but it has evolved certain talents to help it avoid danger.

3. Guanaco

Guanaco, the South American camel, are hard and efficient foragers. The tough, sparse vegetation of the Andes foothills provide little nourishment, but the guanaco's evolved digestive system draws the last drop of goodness from each dry piece of matter. And this nutrition is vital, especially for guanaco females as they labour and give birth.

4. Humboldt Penguin

While most of its relatives are adapted to extreme cold, the Humbolt penguin is at home in one of the world's hottest locations. South America's Atacama desert is hot, dry and unforgiving. But at the western edge of the Atacama is the Pacific Ocean, and the rugged coastline is the unlikely home to the Humbolt penguin.

5. Rhea

It is late spring and expectant rhea mothers gather around a communal nest waiting for their turn to lay. At the end of a week the nest bulges with over twenty eggs. But, in an unusual twist the females abandon the site. In the world of the rhea it is the role of the male to care for the eggs.

6. Marine Iguana

Marine iguanas of the Galápagos Islands represent evolution in transition. These cold-blooded creatures start their day basking in the revitalising sun: a motionless mass, the only movement being the occasional bob of the head as males signal to females. When they are sufficiently warmed, the iguanas take to the water, grazing like underwater sheep at algae and seaweed.

7. Garuma Gull

The garuma gull is a survivor in this land of extremes. With eggs adapted to withstand the baking hot days and freezing nights, the infants have some protection from the elements. But it's after hatching, when the young demand constant feeding the parents must make the daily 200km commute to the Pacific Ocean in search of food.

8. Vampire Bat

Of the nearly one thousand species of bats in the world most feed on fruit or insects, but three species feed on blood – the vampire bats. At a cattle ranch in rural Venezuela the herd are housed for the night. Here they may be safer from larger predators, but for the vampire bats the cattle in the barn are easy targets.

9. Seabird/Anchovy

The intense equatorial sun beating down on the nutrient-rich Pacific Ocean creates ideal conditions for plankton; this in turn attracts shoals of anchovy. The Inca tern dives with pinpoint accuracy into the swirling mass to catch a single fish, while the pelican takes a 'grab bag' approach: filling its massive bill with the catch.

10. Hummingbird

The Juan Fernandez Archipelago lies 600km off the coast of Chile. A nectar-rich plant covers these tiny islands and darting amongst the plant's flowers are tiny Juan Fernandez hummingbirds. The only way the plants could have established here is by being carried from the mainland by strong winds. Is this also how the hummingbirds arrived on these remote islands?

11. Howler Monkeys

Peering from a vantage point high in the rainforest canopy, an adolescent howler monkey surveys his environment, his burgeoning independence making the world an exciting place.

They make the loudest sound of any land mammal, but their distinctive howl is something that must be practised...