



Sales Contact (US & Canada)

Submarine Entertainment

Josh Braun
Dan Braun
Amada Lebow

josh@submarine.com
dan@submarine.com
amanda@submarine.com

Sales Contact (International)

Films Transit

Diana Holtzberg
diana@filmstransit.com
917-757-1444

Press Contact

Other Noises

info@othernoises.com
212-501-9507

www.centralparkbirdfilm.com



LOG LINE

A diverse group of full-of-attitude New Yorkers reveals how a hidden world of beautiful wild birds in the middle of Manhattan has upended and magically transformed their lives.

SYNOPSIS

The Central Park Effect reveals the extraordinary array of wild birds who grace Manhattan's celebrated patch of green and the equally colorful, full-of-attitude New Yorkers who schedule their lives around the rhythms of migration.

The film focuses on seven main characters who regularly visit the Park and have found a profound connection with this hidden natural world.

Movie-star handsome Chris Cooper dodges the morning rush hour traffic on bustling Central Park West, his binoculars knocking against his leather bomber jacket as he ducks into the Park. *"My friends mock me for what I do in the spring because – they know from experience. From April 15 until Memorial Day, they won't see me. Because I'm birding!"*

Anya Auerbach, a radiant fashion-averse teenager, admits that *"I take my binoculars pretty much everywhere – except school."*

Acclaimed author Jonathan Franzen recalls that he walked through Central Park almost daily for seven years, noticing only the pigeons and sparrows. Then one day, friends invited him to come along with them on a tour of the Park's famous Ramble section and handed him a pair of binoculars. *"It was like the trees were hung with ornaments. It was one of those rare times in an adult's life where the world suddenly seems more magical rather than less."*

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SYNOPSIS cont'd

One poignant narrative revolves around Central Park doyenne Starr Saphir, the bird walk leader who's recorded every sighting she's made since the 1940s. After discovering several years ago that she has terminal breast cancer, she says that time has a different meaning for her now. *"I have a great deal more enjoyment. I always loved what I did, but it's heightened even more, because I know not only is it not going to last forever– it's not going to last all that much longer."*

Featuring spectacular wildlife footage capturing the changing seasons, the film reveals that Central Park acts as a magnet for the millions and millions of birds migrating along the Eastern Seaboard twice every year. Desperate for a rest-stop, the tiny birds funnel in to this oasis of nature amid a sea of steel and concrete – a phenomenon known as the "Central Park Effect."

Tiny hummingbirds, tall herons and egrets, majestic owls, hawks, orioles, kingfishers, flycatchers and a vast array of wood warblers - the "jewels of the Eastern forests" - all have starring roles in the documentary.

Filmmaker Jeffrey Kimball's lyrical film transports the viewer to a dazzling world that goes all but unnoticed by most of the 38 million who people America's most famous park each year.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Upon seeing my nearly completed film, my sixteen year-old son turned to me and said that he finally "got it," he understood why I spent so much time wandering around outside with binoculars looking at birds.

When I was growing up in Northern California, the highlights of our family camping trips in the Sierra Nevada or the high desert were always the wild animals we would happen upon: waking up to see a kangaroo rat hopping around our campsite, a bald eagle perched majestically over our river raft or a bobcat disappearing into the fog. The magic I felt in those encounters was unlike anything I'd ever known.

When I moved to New York City in my twenties to work in the film business, I buried my binoculars deep in the closet. They'd only come out for vacations - hiking in the Rockies or camping in the Arizona desert.

Then I heard that the American Museum of Natural History ran a series of weekly bird walks in Central Park. On an impulse, I went along on one during the fall migration, and was mesmerized by the variety of birds passing through. A few months later one of the birders I'd met called me in snowy January asking if I wanted to go birding in the Park. I thought he was nuts. Surely all the birds were gone. He simply said, "oh, they're there!" And they were, probably thirty or more species, in the dead of winter: woodpeckers, sparrows, owls, hawks, and at least a half dozen different ducks.

That was the turning point for me.

Soon, I was a year-round regular in the Park, birding side by side at dawn with a varied cast of characters, almost as diverse as the city itself. It was clear that our extraordinary world was a secret to most New Yorkers, as it had been to me. Jaws would drop open when I told people that on a good day I could see sixty or more different species of birds, and still be at work by mid-morning.

I became profoundly intrigued by the paradox of nature in an urbanized world. The more I explored this phenomenon, the more aware I became that the scattered patches of green which checkerboard our cities and suburbs are essential to the healthy survival of so many species.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT cont'd

It's really not so surprising that a wonderful wild world exists in the middle of New York City -- indeed it exists precisely because the Park is a critical oasis of nature in a vast sea of steel and concrete.

Annual nationwide surveys suggest that nearly a quarter of the species of birds have declined more than 50% in the last 40 years. Over the past few years as I've wandered the Park with my camera I have personally witnessed noticeable decreases in bird numbers. As one of the experts in the film points out, unless we reverse this trend, we're going to lose many precious bird species during our lifetimes.

I hope that this film conveys how a vital piece of nature can exist in the most unlikely of places, and that now, more than ever, we need to make every effort to preserve nature, wherever we find it.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

PRODUCER / DIRECTOR / NATURE CINEMATOGRAPHER



JEFFREY KIMBALL has made a number of award-winning short dramas, non-fiction and experimental films, and worked as a cameraman, soundman and editor for documentaries, music videos and independent films. His career took a turn when he landed a job as Associate Producer and Music Supervisor on the breakout Sundance Grand Prize winner, *True Love*. His soundtrack album for that film spawned two hit singles, one of them Top Ten. He went on to serve as Music Supervisor and Consultant for a number of studio and independent films for such directors as Steven Soderbergh, John Sayles, Nancy Savoca and Robert De Niro.

In 1994, Jeff joined Miramax Films as a Vice President to found their Music Department, where he oversaw music on over a hundred features, three of which won Oscars for Best Original Score. He has worked closely with such directors as Robert Altman, David O. Russell and Julian Schnabel.

After his tenure at Miramax he was Music Supervisor for *Good Will Hunting*, nominated for two musical Oscars: Best Song and Best Score. Jeff has also produced the feature film, *On The Borderline*, and served as Executive Producer of the documentary *Looks Like Laury, Sounds Like Laury*.

The Central Park Effect is Jeff's feature directorial debut. Over a span of four years, he wandered the Park with his camera filming birds and birders in action, interspersed with crew shoots for the sit-down interviews. In March 2012, the film will have its world premiere in the documentary competition section of the South By Southwest Film Festival.

Born in San Francisco and raised in nearby Marin County, Jeff holds a bachelor's from Stanford University and an MFA in Film Studies from New York University. He currently lives in New York City, one block away from Central Park, with his filmmaker wife and two sons.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS



PAMELA HOGAN is Co-Creator and Executive Producer of the five-part PBS series *Women, War & Peace*, winner of the 2012 Gracie Award for Outstanding Series. She directed episode 1, *I Came to Testify* and co-wrote episode 4, *The War We Are Living*.

Previously she was at the forefront of PBS's award-winning, international documentary series *WIDE ANGLE*, first as Series Producer, then Executive Producer. She oversaw 70 hours of documentaries, and originated Emmy winner *Ladies First*, about women's leadership in post-genocide Rwanda, and the highly acclaimed multi-year series *Time For School*, profiling seven children in seven countries struggling to get a basic education.

Hogan was formerly Director of National Geographic Television's international co-productions, garnering numerous Emmys; Senior Producer of Bill Moyers' *Earth on Edge*, a two-part environmental special; and Field Producer of NBC's Peabody award-winning *To Be An American*. Hogan has directed independent films including *Ultimate Weapon*, with Harvard historian Peter Galison, about the 1950s secret H-bomb debate. Her speaking engagements include Harvard's Askwith Forum, the Asia Society, the U.N., Brown's Watson Institute, and the Council on Foreign Relations.



TOM CASCIATO is an award-winning filmmaker and television executive, and co-owner of Okapi Productions, LLC. A producer, director and writer, he has created critically acclaimed nonfiction television programs that have appeared on PBS, ABC, NBC, TBS and Showtime.

His film and video pieces have received numerous awards including two national Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Gold Baton, the Peabody Award, the Dateline Club's Society of Professional Journalists' First Amendment Award, the Harry Chapin Media Award, the Christopher Award, the Overseas Press Club Award, and honorable mention for the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award.

His work has appeared on programs ranging from PBS's *Frontline*, to ABC News' *Turning Point* to National Geographic *Explorer*. He has also produced many stand-alone PBS documentary specials with Bill Moyers. He has been the Executive Producer of two PBS series, *Wide Angle* and *Exposé: America's Investigative Reports*. He was also the Executive Producer and writer of both the New York Emmy-winning documentary "Fun City Revisited: The Lindsay Years" and the Emmy-nominated film "In The Footsteps of Marco Polo." He has also served as Director of News & Current Affairs at New York's PBS affiliate WNET.

CHARACTERS

CHRIS COOPER is often seen with a small crowd following him through Central Park. A sort of “pied-piper” of the birding community, he is known for his extraordinary ability to hear and find singing warblers. Cajoled by his friends to balance his passion for birding with his “normal life,” he restricts his birding to the six peak weeks of spring migration, during which he comes into the Park at dawn each day before work.

JONATHAN FRANZEN is a celebrated novelist whose most recent book, *Freedom*, featured the endangered Cerulean Warbler, a rare and treasured Central Park visitor, as the backdrop to one the novel’s main plot lines. His articles about the plight of songbirds have appeared in the New Yorker, where he is a frequent contributor. He discovered the nearly hidden world of birds when he politely accompanied birding houseguests on a walk in Central Park, and describes that day as “one of those rare times in an adult’s life when the world seems more magical rather than less.”

ANYA AUERBACH attends high school, which is about the only place she doesn’t bring her binoculars. The daughter of two doctors, Anya says her passion for birding has deepened her interest in science and the environment.

CHUCK McALEXANDER is a brass-instrument technician and fabricator of objects from metals and other materials. In Central Park birding circles, he is especially appreciated for creating the many squirrel-proof bird feeders in the Ramble, which lure birds within easy viewing during the winter months .

STARR SAPHIR is a living legend in the Central Park birding community. She has been leading bird walks several times a week during spring and fall migration seasons for almost 30 years. With her keen eye and her ears always open for the birds’ subtle songs, she is the consummate teacher as she chaperones groups of beginners and experts and alike through the early morning hours of the Park to witness its avian wonders. Her role as the Park’s birding doyenne is memorialized in a hilarious Conan O’Brien piece. (Look it up - we couldn’t afford to license it for the film.)

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CHARACTERS cont'd

JONATHAN ROSEN is the author of *The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature*, a philosophical treatise on the deeply human activity of birding and our inherent place in nature. Having also written extensively about the similarities between the Talmud and the Internet, he sees our stewardship of the environment as an essentially spiritual concern.

CATHERINE HAMILTON enjoyed birding with her father as a child, but put away her binoculars after being teased at school. Now a professional artist, she has returned to birding and uses birds and nature as subjects in her work.

THE EXPERTS

DR. JOHN FITZPATRICK is the Director of the renowned Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the foremost American academic institution for avian studies.

MARIE WINN is the author of the bestseller *Red-Tails in Love* about the famed Central Park hawk, Pale Male, and his struggles to raise his brood in the big city. She has also written *Central Park in the Dark*, about the nocturnal mysteries of nature inside the Park.

JOE DiCOSTANZO is a life-long birder and New Yorker who works at the American Museum of Natural History as a research associate studying migration patterns of Roseate and Common Terns.

DAVID BURG is the President and founder of WildMetro, a New York-based organization devoted to studying and preserving wildlife and natural areas within and around New York City.

REGINA ALVAREZ was, at the time of filming, the Director of Horticulture for the Central Park Conservancy. She has since gone back to school to finish her PhD. and is now teaching in New York City.

JOHN FLICKER was, at the time of filming, the President and CEO of The National Audubon Society. He recently stepped down from that position after 15 years, but remains active with Audubon and in other conservation efforts.

SOME FACTS ABOUT BIRDS, BIRDING and CENTRAL PARK

A HUMAN-MADE NATURE

Contrary to popular belief, the “nature” in Central Park is an entirely created by humans. In 1858, when the city began constructing the Park, it was not a natural area but a part of the community, with approximately 1,600 people living in small villages. The lakes and waterways, meadows, and woodlands* were all landscaped by the Park’s designers, Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux. Only the boulders, deposited by glaciers during the Ice Age, got there on their own. The streams are fed by pipes connected to the NYC water system, turned on and off with a spigot, and the entire eco-system is sustained by hundreds of Park workers.

Today, Central Park contains 843 acres: 250 acres of lawn, 150 acres of water bodies, 130 acres of woodlands. There are 24,000 trees, and 38 million annual human visitors.

THE BIRDS OF CENTRAL PARK

At least 275 bird species have been seen in Central Park, out of the approximately 800 species of birds which regularly appear in the continental United States and Canada. Over 30 species have been known to nest in the Park.

OTHER WILDLIFE IN CENTRAL PARK

There are several hundred raccoons living in the Park, as well as the ubiquitous Eastern Gray Squirrel and the occasional Eastern Chipmunk and Virginia Opossum, in addition to rats and mice. Every once in a while, a coyote manages to enter the Park, but is quickly rounded up and relocated to a more rural location.

There are also three turtle species, the vast majority of which are Red-eared Sliders, former pets that have been released in the Park. A 2003 “bio-blitz” study catalogued well over 100 different insects and other invertebrates. In 2002, a new genus and species of centipede (*Nannarrup hoffmani*) was first discovered in Central Park.

* Except the North Woods section which was added later intact as a natural woodland.

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SOME FACTS ABOUT BIRDS, BIRDING and CENTRAL PARK cont'd

BIRDING IN CENTRAL PARK

Central Park is regularly cited as one of the best places to see birds in the United States. For example, the Park has its own chapter in the recent book *Fifty Places To Go Birding Before You Die*," in which it is heralded as one of the "world's greatest birding destinations." The chapter was written by Lloyd Spitalnik, one of the characters in *The Central Park Effect*. (He's one of the four gentlemen who are interviewed as a group while sitting outdoors around a table full of photo gear.)

BIRDING IN AMERICA

There are various estimates as to the number of birders (birdwatchers) in the United States. National Geographic calls birding "the fastest growing wild-life related outdoor activity in the U.S." with at least a million new birders joining "an already robust group some 80 million strong."

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, in a 2009 study, found that there were "48 million birdwatchers or birders, 16 years of age and older, in the United States—about 21 percent of the population," and that was using a self-declared "conservative definition" of a birder as someone who actively sought out birds to observe.

As another measure of interest in birding, National Audubon has 600,000 members. In addition, there are close to 500 local chapters around the United States.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Produced & Directed by **Jeffrey Kimball**

Edited by **Daniel Baer**

Co-Produced & Co-Edited by **Nick August-Perna**

Executive Producers **Pamela Hogan & Tom Casciato**

Cinematography **Tony Pagano, Nick August-Perna, Chris Dapkins**

Bird and Nature Cinematography **Jeffrey Kimball**

Music by **Paul Damian Hogan**

Segment Producer **Tamara Rosenberg**

Narration by **Jeffrey Kimball**

Sound Re-recording Mixer **Tom Paul**

Sound Editors **Andrea Bella & Michael Feuser**

Bird Sound Recordings **Lang Elliott**

Featuring (in order of appearance)

**Jonathan Rosen
Dick Gershon
Harry Maas
David Speiser
Lloyd Spitalnik
Chris Cooper
Jonathan Franzen
Catherine Hamilton
Starr Saphir
Anya Auerbach**

**John Fitzpatrick
Marie Winn
Joe DiCostanzo
David Burg
Regina Alvarez
Irving Cantor
Chuck McAlexander
John Flicker
Glenn Phillips
Mike Bryant**

BIRDS FEATURED IN THE FILM

(in order of appearance)

*All nature footage was shot in Central Park.
Some of the bird calls were recorded in quieter environments.*

Double-crested Cormorant
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
House Wren
Cedar Waxwing
Great Egret
Gray Catbird
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Connecticut Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Northern Parula
Common Yellowthroat
Prothonotary Warbler
White-throated Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Brown Thrasher
Solitary Sandpiper
Canada Warbler
Carolina Wren
Blue-headed Vireo
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Canada Goose
Northern Cardinal
Mallard
American Robin
Blue Jay
Common Grackle
Wood Duck
Baltimore Oriole
Blackburnian Warbler
Song Sparrow
Palm Warbler
Marsh Wren
Red-eyed Vireo
Veery
Scarlet Tanager
Indigo Bunting
Wood Thrush

Yellow Warbler
Swamp Sparrow
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-tailed Hawk
Pine Warbler
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Hooded Merganser
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Chipping Sparrow
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Canvasback
Common Loon
Black-capped Chickadee
Savannah Sparrow
Belted Kingfisher
Kentucky Warbler
Bufflehead
Gadwall
Eastern Phoebe
Chuck-will's-widow
Mourning Dove
Horned Grebe
Eastern Kingbird
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Red-breasted Nuthatch
American Redstart
Ring-necked Pheasant
Green Heron
Lesser Yellowlegs
American Bittern
Downy Woodpecker
Ruby-throat. Hummingbird
Eastern Towhee
Northern Flicker
Barn Swallow
Rock Pigeon
Brown Creeper

Least Sandpiper
Spotted Sandpiper
Northern Waterthrush
Louisiana Waterthrush
Black-throated Green Warbler
Red-winged Blackbird
House Sparrow
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Ring-billed Gull
American Black Duck
Purple Finch
American Coot
Hermit Thrush
American Crow
Snowy Egret
American Tree Sparrow
Northern Pintail
White-crowned Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe
Ring-necked Duck
Dark-eyed Junco
Great Horned Owl
Eastern Screech-Owl
House Finch
Tufted Titmouse
American Goldfinch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Pine Siskin
Cooper's Hawk
Ruddy Duck
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Northern Shoveler
Wild Turkey
Mute Swan
Ovenbird
Hooded Warbler