

PERSMAP

DE FILM GEBASEERD OP DE BESTSELLER
"HET VERBORGEN LEVEN VAN BOMEN"

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES

MET PETER WOHLLEBEN

CONSTANTIN FILM AND GLOBAL SCREEN PRESENTS A CONSTANTIN FILM PRODUCTION "THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES" PETER WOHLLEBEN
MUSIC FRANZISKA HENKE EDITOR ANJA FOHL DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL SCHONAUER HEAD OF CINEMATOGRAPHY JAN HAF PRODUCTION ARTIST FRIEDRICH VAN SCHOOB TAREK MAWAD SOUND DESIGN JÖRG ELSNER
RECORDING MIXER MICHAEL KRANZ LINE PRODUCER SUSANN FUNK PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE CHRISTINE ROTHE EXECUTIVE PRODUCED MARTIN MOSKOWICZ PRODUCED BY FRIEDRICH DETZER DIRECTOR AND SCENARIST JÖRG ADLOPH
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ONELINER

Les arbres peuvent-ils communiquer entre eux ? Ont-ils une mémoire et une vie sociale ? Le forestier et best-seller Peter Wohlleben explore ces questions et donne un aperçu du monde caché des forêts.

SYNOPSIS NL

Ce documentaire décrit comment les arbres peuvent communiquer, se soutenir, apprendre de l'expérience et former des alliances avec d'autres habitants de la forêt. Il y a tellement plus dans la vie de la forêt que ce que l'œil humain voit...

ENGLISH LOGLINE

Are trees able to talk? Do they have a memory and a social life? The forester and bestselling author Peter Wohlleben gets to the bottom of these questions and opens our eyes to the hidden world of the woods.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When Peter Wohlleben published his book “The Hidden Life of Trees” in 2015, he stormed all the bestseller charts overnight: no- one had ever written about the German woods like the forester from the parish of Wershofen before. Wohlleben tells us in an entertaining and enlightening fashion about the solidarity and cohesion of the trees and strikes a chord with his ever-growing community of readers: he brings us closer to these astounding living entities in guided tours of the woods and readings. Wohlleben travels to Sweden to see the oldest tree in the world; he visits businesses in Vancouver that are looking for a new approach to how to treat the woods; he sides with the demonstrators in the Hambacher Forst. Because he knows that we humans can only survive if the woods are healthy – and that the eleventh hour is already upon us...



CREW (EXCERPT)

SCREENPLAY & DIRECTION	Jörg Adolph
NATURE FOOTAGE	Jan Haft
PRODUCER	Friedrich Oetker
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Martin Moszkowicz
PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE	Christine Rothe
LINE PRODUCER	Susann Funke
CINEMATOGRAPHY	Daniel Schönauer
EDITING	Anja Pohl
LIGHT ARTISTS	Friedrich von Schoor Tarek Mawad
SOUND MIX	Michael Kranz
FILM SCORE	Franziska Henke

MISCELLANEOUS

SHOOTING PERIOD	2018 - 2019
SHOOTING LOCATIONS	Canada, Poland, France, Sweden, Germany

The documentary THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES is a Constantin Film production and was backed by FFF Bayern, FFA and DFFF.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION NOTES

Adaptations of bestsellers are part of Constantin Film's DNA: the Munich-based film company's adaptations - from CHRISTIANE F. to THE NAME OF THE ROSE, THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS and PERFUME – STORY OF A MURDERER to LOOK WHO'S BACK - have regularly become blockbuster hits at the German box office. But Constantin Film had never before adapted a non-fiction book as a documentary.

Like many millions of other people, producer Friederich Oetker was given Peter Wohlleben's book THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES as a present.

"To be honest, I only read it after I had been given it as a present for the second time," he says. "But then in one go. I was incredibly impressed by the way Peter Wohlleben took the reader by the hand and guided them through the forest. It was like a guided tour, a walk in the forest.

Although it covers such large areas of Germany, the forest is a bit like terra incognita. Very few people have a real relationship and access to it. Wohlleben wrote a forest guide like Jacques Cousteau once did for the ocean."

Published in 2015, the non-fiction book was Wohlleben's 16th book publication - and the first to really touch a nerve with his readership. In addition, Wohlleben found advocates in the media industry and did some excellent self-advertising by appearing on chat shows. He doesn't correspond with the cliché of the forest ranger, but has something worldly about him, he is eloquent and seems approachable. Or as Friederich Oetker remarks with a smile: "The Jürgen Klopp of the forest! Of course, he has taken on large parts of forestry industry - but there's one thing that can't be denied or attributed to him: he has himself been part of the conventional, conservative forestry industry for the past 25 years and knows it inside out." From the outset, Wohlleben had a passion for forestry and nature. At some point, he realized that these two tracks were diverging. "That is the story here," says Oetker.

But for Oetker it was initially his reaction to the book itself that gave him the idea of making a film based on THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES: "the initial suspicion existed with the communication between the trees. The nutrient exchange, that a tree on its own is not a forest, that there are mother and child trees supporting one another, that the crown spreads over the children, that the little ones are nurtured, so to speak, and sometimes even bridled. The subject matter gave me a feeling that there was a film here."

But Oetker didn't have the usual kind of nature documentary in mind, the kind one knows all too familiar by now. "We're breaking new ground because we're combining the documentary format with nature footage," the producer says. "We really wanted to get into the trees, into the bark, into the forest floor where thousands of organisms live, to the treetops, and see them from above."

However, the film causes some ripples concerning the forestry industry. Peter Wohlleben's succinct sentence in the film is: "I'm not worried about nature. It will always regenerate itself. It would just be nice if we were still there when it does that." Environmental protection = protection of people. "He is a man who follows a passion, a mission", Friederich Oetker says putting it in a nutshell.

But, first of all, they had to get to know Peter Wohlleben and convince him of the plans to make a film version of his book with Constantin Film. "I drove there, got out of the car in the Eifel, and realised at that moment that everything I was wearing was in green," Friederich Oetker recalls. "Subconsciously, I had probably prepared myself for a meeting with a forest ranger. When we greeted each other, we looked at each other and I asked him whether it was usual for people who met him to unconsciously dress in green. And he laughed and said: "It happens." And so the ice was broken. The two men got on from the very beginning. "I have to say that I wasn't the only one bidding for the book," says Oetker. "I'm glad that I was able to convince Peter Wohlleben of my vision. I also listened to a lecture by Peter. He can speak in front of

people and he wants to speak in front of people, precisely because he can. He is definitely in his comfort zone in front of an audience. I wanted to show a man who's burning to make a difference. That's why we also had Peter in front of the camera."

The people at Constantin Film were meanwhile thinking about how to proceed when making a rather different kind of documentary. "On the one hand, you have to think about how you are going to recoup the costs and generate the revenues," Friederich Oetker notes. "Thankfully, the book has sold well all over the world. I was banking on the film funders in Germany and was not disappointed." Both the FFF Bayern and the FFA supported the project. "The whole preparation is now already two years ago," he says. "But I had the feeling that the green issue wouldn't be disappearing from our society." Of course, he couldn't foresee that it would become such a big issue as it is now: "I just had a feeling that we should make a film that was looking into the future. The macro issue of THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES is also not the forest, or Peter Wohlleben, but it's about environmental protection and the ecosphere. That's how I was able to approach the subject matter."

Friederich Oetker turned to two renowned filmmakers from the world of documentary to realise the project. Jörg Adolph was most recently nominated for the German Film Award for PARENTS SCHOOL and also immediately hooked after having read the book.

Jan Haft, whose credits include THE GREEN PLANET, found the project extremely interesting straightaway. "He knew the natural phenomena inside out," says Friederich Oetker, "but wanted to develop a new visual language for the film, and we wanted to create a new look for it."

The two filmmakers complemented one another in a wonderful way, Oetker recalls: "We sat down together and discussed everything. Jörg Adolph was to accompany Peter Wohlleben on his travels and in his day-to-day work. We went through chapter by chapter and imagined what would be the interesting things to put up on the screen. Jan Haft then disappeared to various corners of Germany and the world and found the complementary images of nature! A lot of footage was shot during the filming. "An enormous amount of footage," the producer says. "The brief for the documentary part was decided upon relatively early on. On the one hand, this was Peter's journey to himself, to his conviction, against the resistance, based on the chapters in the book. But Jan Haft's nature footage was, of course, extremely opulent - he offered us loads of material. Really sensational shots where it was only later on that he had to explain to me how he'd filmed them."

Nothing was staged, filmed a second time, or removed from the scenes that Jörg Adolph shot with Peter Wohlleben. "We finally showed the film to Peter Wohlleben, and he just said: 'Great, that's how we'll do it!'. We didn't need to do any fiddling around," Oetker says.

And the producer ends by saying: "The film has become more political than I would have first thought because the German forest has become a political issue.

Apart from that, THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES has turned out just I had imagined it would be. I was like a child in a corner store, I just said: who is my favourite portraitist; and then who is my favourite nature documentary filmmaker? Then the three of us locked ourselves in a room and put our heads together. And then we made this become reality. And that's what we'll be presenting to the public in the cinemas.

RETURN TO NORMALITY - A CONVERSATION WITH PETER WOHLLEBEN

Can you first tell us again what made you decide to write *The Hidden Life of Trees* - and why this book, of all books, has become so enormously successful?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: "First of all, I have to say that I have never seen myself as a writer or an author. I am a forest ranger. That was always my dream job and it still is today, it is my whole passion.

It was my wife who urged me to start writing: she was the one who suggested that I write down what I have been telling people during my forest guided tours over the past 30 years. My wife had the idea that I should do it because they really wanted to read what they'd heard, but there wasn't any corresponding literature. Just write it down! I let myself be persuaded: that's how I came to start writing. I had already written 15 books before *THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES*, speaking rather pessimistically about the state of forestry and the forests in Germany, an issue I naturally continue to address on a political level.

Of course, that's not so nice to read. But you can also approach a subject in a different way. You can begin by saying what wonderful beings trees are in general, something that many are completely unaware of in this way. There were rejections from many sides, especially from the press, ahead of the book's publication: they thought that will be deadly boring - a book about trees, well, what's so great about that then... The important thing, I think, is to have a positive attitude. One can be critical, although that isn't the main focus of this book, but it would be good if there was a happy ending. The good thing is that this isn't impossible even when you look at climate change and all these things."

Are you really optimistic?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: "We like to tell ourselves that the perfect world no longer exists, whoever dreams of the supposedly perfect world is engaging in escapism. I don't believe that's true.

Our problem is that, for centuries, we have seen nature in much too technical terms, as a big machine, as machinery, as if the trees were inanimate organic automatons working around us. We now know that the sharp distinction between animals and plants doesn't exist. Conservative science is currently overtaking esoterism. For example, researchers have found out in recent years that plants can really feel pain. Science is substantiating what esoterics have long suspected. This has now reached the point where we know that trees can count, have a memory, can remember and pass on knowledge. That's something one would have suspected at most, if at all, in the animal kingdom. Indeed, we are not engaging in any escapism with our desire for the perfect world. It's more a case of us human beings having become alienated from nature. We are slowly returning to the normal situation: trees are sentient beings - and why shouldn't they be? That also feels much better. We'd always known that intuitively."

And this is what your book is conveying?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: "The book's appeal is a mixture of astonishing facts that are prepared in such a way that even laymen can find them easy to read, as well as a positive basic attitude: We can change something. That's encouraging. Man is a social being, but, outside our community, everything is a struggle in nature. This is a widespread view that many of us grew up with. However, it is based on a misinterpretation of the concept of evolution. Darwin speaks in his theory of the "survival of the fittest". But that's wrong: "survival of the fittest" means "the most adapted survives" - that's what Darwin meant. Whoever fits into a system doesn't force himself upon it, but interacts with it: cooperation. It can now be scientifically proven that trees which cooperate well reach a particularly old age, that there are particularly stable ecosystems. This is what we are seeing right now, after these hot, dry summers: the forest has not sustained any damage in the old reserves where the system is intact. The trees cool down together, supporting weak specimens so that they don't perish. The community is much more capable of survival than its individual members. In times like ours, this is a highly political insight."

How did the film adaptation of *The Hidden Life of Trees* come about?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: “I could never have imagined that one day this might become a film when I was writing the book. How could it? That is very far away from my reality. But I was then really excited by the idea when Constantin Film asked my agent about the film rights. I am quite curious. How do you make a film out of a non-fiction book, especially one like mine? When Hape Kerkeling talks about his childhood, you have film images before your mind's eye, even when it's a non-fiction book. That's something everyone can understand. But *THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES* as a film? How is that possible unless it's not simply going to be a nature documentary like so many before it?”

You didn't realise that you would be directly involved?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: “I thought they would all go off and then show me the film at some point. And I wasn't just involved, but also part of the shooting for over one-and-a-half years. That was a crazy experience.”

What was your role in this?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: “One part of the book is presented in the film through Jan Haft's nature footage, and the other part is as a documentary, with director Jörg Adolph. He follows me, watches what I am doing in the forest and with other people. We show things that give cause for concern, like the cry for help from the small Indian tribe on Vancouver Island where the forest was going to be cut down, or what is happening in the Hambach Forest. But also the other side of the coin which gives reason for hope because you see that things can be done differently and that this is already happening in many cases. There has been a shift in people's thinking, on a large scale. The secret is in having the right mix: on the one hand, you shouldn't see things through rose- coloured glasses and neglect the problems. On the other hand, I think it's important to convey fascination and give a positive outlook. That's already documented in the book, but I think that's reflected even more intensively in the film.”

What makes the film so different?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: “It was important for us that things are not explained by an omniscient narrator voiceover, but that the insights should come instead from the film itself, that knowledge is conveyed through the images. That makes the film really alive. At first glance, the scenes are set in a variety of different areas, but, edited together, they complement one another to present fantastic statements that sometimes make you smile, but also address serious topics without having any underlying educational agenda. That would be nonsense.”

How did you do that?

PETER WOHLLEBEN: “We were filming for ages, as I said before, the camera was always there with me for a year and a half. I've no idea how many hundreds of hours of footage was shot for them to select from. But the filmmakers found exactly the right scenes to support the various theories from the book cinematically. This can go from the forest to a seminar, to the book fair, a television studio and then back to the forest, all the while addressing that one particular aspect which was at the centre of attention at that very moment. And so it's also very entertaining and diverse to watch – and, simultaneously, there's an added value compared with the book because you are taken on a cinematic journey that transports you to other places and continually amazes.”

BIOGRAPHIES

PETER WOHLLEBEN

Born in 1964, Peter Wohlleben had already decided as a small child that he wanted to become a nature conservationist. He studied Forestry and was a civil servant at the State Forestry Administration for over twenty years. He now runs a forest academy in the Eifel region and works worldwide for the return of the primeval forests. He is a guest on numerous TV programmes, gives lectures and seminars and is the author of books about the forest and nature conservation issues. He has inspired people all over the world with his bestsellers THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES, THE INNER LIFE OF ANIMALS, THE SECRET WISDOM OF NATURE and THE SECRET VOND BETWEEN HUMANKIND AND NATURE.

Most recently, the magazine WOHLLEBENS WELT was published.

He was awarded the Bavarian Nature Conservation Medal in 2019 for his emotional and unconventional way of imparting knowledge.

JÖRG ADOLPH (SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTION)

Jörg Adolph was born in Herford in 1967. He is considered to be one of the leading directors of documentaries in Germany. Last year saw him being nominated for the German Film Award for his latest work, PARENTS' SCHOOL. The film itself developed into a political issue and was the subject of much public controversy.

From 1988 to 1994, Adolph studied Contemporary German Literature and Media Studies in Marburg and then moved to the HFF in Munich where he studied Television Journalism and Documentary Film. His graduation film KLEIN, SCHNELL UND AUSSER KONTROLLE won the German Television Award in 2001. Since then, Adolph has been working as a freelance documentary filmmaker. Several of his works see him focusing on the artistic creative process: in ON/OFF THE RECORD, he followed the internationally acclaimed Weilheim pop band The Notwist over one year during their work on their momentous album NEON GOLDEN. He accompanied the writer John von Düffel for 15 months to document the conception, creation and marketing of a new novel and published the result under the title HOUWELANDT – EIN ROMAN ENTSTEHT. He also made a film with Gereon Wetzel about the publisher Gerhard Steidl, HOW TO MAKE A BOOK WITH STEIDL. In 2011, he directed the documentary feature THE GREAT PASSION about the preparations and performances of the Oberammergau Passion Play.

JAN HAFT (NATURE FOOTAGE)

JAN HAFT was born in Munich in 1967. He is one of Germany's outstanding nature documentary filmmakers. His film THE MEADOW – ONCE UPON A PARADISE could be seen in the cinemas at the beginning of this year.

Haft has been fascinated by animals and nature since his childhood. He completed his civilian service at the Regional Society for the Protection of Birds, following this by studying Geology, Palaeontology and Biology at the TU in Munich. At the beginning of the 90s, he started working as a first assistant on wildlife films. In 1996, he founded NautilusTV which became nautilusfilm GmbH in 2001 and is now one of the most successful companies in Germany's sector for nature documentaries.

To date, Haft has worked for public television on over 70 nature documentaries that have taken him around the world. He specialises in exotic regions as well as native habitats (WILD DOSSERS – STORIES OF ANIMALS IN MUNICH, FAIRY TALE FOREST ON THE INN, WILD ALLGÄU).

His productions with Nautilusfilm can look back on many years of success at numerous festivals and awards ceremonies around the world. His most well-known productions include his feature films THE GREEN UNIVERSE and MAGICAL MOORS as well as the TV productions POPPY'S PROMISE – SECRET LIFE IN A CORNFIELD, NORWAYS MAGICAL FJORDS and ALPS OF BERCHTESGADEN.

To date, Jan Haft and his films have received over 220 awards at international festivals as well as several hundred nominations. His most important awards include the Environmental Medal of the State of Bavaria, the German "Biodiversity Award" of the Heinz Sielmann Foundation, the "Görlitz Meridian" as well as five "nature film Oscars" that are awarded at the world's largest nature film festivals in Bristol, England, and Jackson Hole, USA. Jan Haft has also won the "German Nature Film Award" on five occasions for Germany's best nature film.

FRIEDERICH OETKER (PRODUCTION)

Friederich Oetker studied Production and Media Economy at the HFF Munich. From 2011 to 2015, he worked as assistant to the CEO of Constantin Film, Martin Moszkowicz, and was in charge of the low-budget label "Alpenrot". He has been a producer since 2015 and was jointly responsible for such films as DER BERND (2012), BRUDER VOR LUDER (2015), GUT ZO VÖGELN (2016), AXOLOTL OVERKILL (2017), which had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, and TIGER GIRL (2017), which opened the Berlinale's Panorama Special. Oetker produced the movie SONG FÜR MIA by Mira Thiel for television.

