

Thuraya technology helps film maker capture the inside story of a pride of lions in Zambia.

Case Study:

Pride of Lions 360 video shoot - Zambia

Products:

Thuraya IP+ and Thuraya XT-PRO

Martin Edström:

A freelance journalist working closely with National Geographic magazine.



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Martin Edström is on a mission to reinvent the way animals are filmed in the wild. While conventional film makers merely aim to get in close, his pioneering technique puts viewers at the heart of the action.

The results are thrilling. His latest video – Lions 360 – presents a cat’s-eye view of life in a Zambian pride. It attracted a remarkable 3 million hits within three weeks of going live on Facebook.

But this kind of immersive storytelling is not easily achieved. It results from meticulous planning and expert use of technology in extremely challenging conditions – which have to be overcome before filming can even begin.

This is where Thuraya comes into the picture. As a freelance journalist working closely with National Geographic magazine during the video shoot in Zambia in November 2016, Martin needed a broadband data device that would enable him to send photos and post to social media every day while deep in the bush.

He chose a Thuraya IP+ as the best-in-class satellite data terminal. "In the type of work I do, it is essential to have top-quality equipment, whether it be cameras, vehicles or communications", he says. "I knew we could rely on Thuraya to guarantee internet connectivity from any location at any time."

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ZCP researches the big beasts of the Zambian bush

Martin's work in Zambia would not have been possible without the generous support and advice of his hosts, the Zambian Carnivore Programme (ZCP), which is a non-profit-making trust. Martin shot hundreds of photos and hours of video of ZCP's research and conservation work, which focuses on lions, wild dogs and other large carnivores and the ecosystems they inhabit.

www.zambiacarnivores.org

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Internet connectivity in the bush

Most days, Martin and his team set out before dawn to look for lions in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. They stopped to rest in the shade during the hottest hours from 11am to 3pm, and set up the Thuraya IP+ on the roof of the vehicle, using it to upload images and video captured in the morning.

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Perhaps surprisingly, many people in remote parts of Zambia use the internet for everyday communications. Telephone, GSM and radio are unreliable, so they have become used to making voice calls over apps such as WhatsApp and using social media to

exchange photos and information. "We used the IP+ to coordinate our daily activities with our hosts, the Zambian Carnivore Programme, and to stay in touch with our colleagues and families in Sweden," says Martin.

Finding lions to film was only the first step. The next challenge was to get close to some of the most lethal predators known to humankind without endangering either people or equipment. The secret was a video camera mounted on a miniature remote-controlled car.

It took the team about one week to acclimatise the lions to the car and camera, which were armoured to protect them from the animals' powerful claws. After that it was a matter of keeping out of the way and remaining patient as the stunning footage rolled in.



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Satphone provides safety back-up

Martin and his team also carried a Thuraya XT-PRO for voice calls and messaging. The world's most advanced satellite phone, this rugged and versatile device is essential safety equipment in dangerous environments such as the African bush.

This was proved on the day that, according to Martin, "everything went wrong" and the XT-PRO came to the rescue.

First the team forgot to take enough food and water. Then their Land Rover became stuck in a dried-up river bed and an axle broke as they tried to drive out. Finally, as they laboured in 45-degree heat and blazing sunshine to patch it up, they spotted a pride of lions taking an interest in what they were doing.

It could have been a nasty moment, but Martin and his companions were on top of the situation. "We were relieved to have the Thuraya XT-PRO with us, because you cannot rely on radio in the bush," he says. "We had already used it to tell our colleagues at the Zambian Carnivore Programme what had happened and to get advice. They helped us plan a route home that our damaged vehicle could handle."

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As for the lions, they were no threat as long as they kept their distance. "They were feeling the heat too and weren't in the mood to bother us," says Martin. "We were actually very pleased to see them because one was a large male we had been trying to locate for a long time." The male, Pala, went on to become one of the stars of Martin's video.

On another occasion, the vehicle broke down in the bush late in the day. The team couldn't get the radio to work, so they used the XT-PRO to call base and get advice from a mechanic, who got them home before dark. "The XT-PRO has great battery life, so it was always charged and available if we needed it," says Martin.

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Thuraya innovation

The Thuraya service worked brilliantly for Martin in Zambia, providing essential communications when he was out of range of mobile networks and fixed-line internet. Going forward, Thuraya is committed to evolving its data offering for people like Martin who continually operate on the fringes of reliable coverage.

The newly launched Thuraya WE service allows users to switch automatically between satellite and GSM networks with a click of a button using the Thuraya WE mobile app and web interface. It also allows them to connect up to 10 smart devices wirelessly and share internet within a range of about 100 feet.

As pioneers such as Martin push for ever more exciting results in their chosen fields, Thuraya will continue to help them work smarter and more productively with innovative and flexible satellite solutions.

Thuraya phones:
www.thuraya.com

Martin Edström:
www.martinedstrom.com

Lions 360 video:
<http://ow.ly/GrLB30dDwSG>