



Gannets dive into a sardine-rich sea to catch a meal in "Wild Ocean 3D."

On a mission to save the seas around us

'Wild Ocean 3D' focuses on a message of environmental responsibility

BY BRYANT MANNING

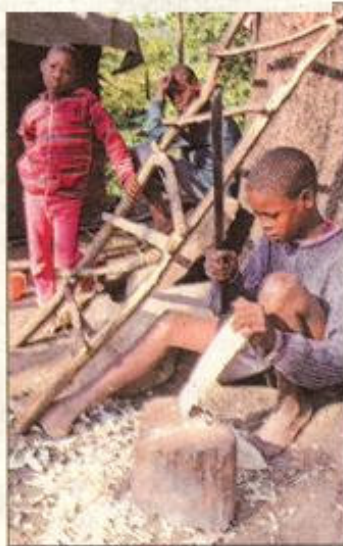
Swirling swarms of sardines. Ravenous water-bound birds. Bobbing humpback whales. Over the years, these many marine-life maneuvers have been brilliantly documented on TV shows like "Planet Earth" and "Nature," but rarely have they been captured as spellbindingly vivid as in the documentary "Wild Ocean 3D." The movie's stunning and pristine photographic displays show off the lively aquatic worlds off the coast of South Africa. Yet trouble lurks below the glittering surface; the world's ocean ecosystem faces serious man-made threats.

"Wild Ocean" co-directors and writers Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas, best known as the creators of percussive dance revue "Stomp," trumpet their message without resorting to unsettling images of devastation or heavily polluted waters. Instead they show you what the beautiful alternative can look like. Imagine what the sea might have looked like in the days of Melville's *Pequod*, a far cry from our modern era of the Exxon Valdez. Industrialized fishing practices dominated the 20th century, and many species on the great food chain have collapsed because of it.

'WILD OCEAN 3D'

★★★★

Giant Screen Films presents a documentary written and directed by Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas. Running time: 40 minutes. Rated G. Opening today at the Navy Pier IMAX Theatre.



A young boy carves a fish out of wood to sell at the local market in Port St. Johns.

Not on the southeastern tip of South Africa, though. The movie was shot on the KwaZulu-Natal shoreline, whose fertile waters narrator John Kani describes as some of the richest and vital in the world. The locals here, unlike those in a lot of other areas around the globe, take immense pride in their resources, capping the number of fish they catch to leave for other species on the food chain. This pocket of water where "Africa meets the sea" is home to one of the highest densities of sharks, and snapshot-worthy waterfalls are everywhere.

The use of 3-D glasses and IMAX technology turn ordinary scenes into a spectacle. Native women carrying bundles of sticks come straight at your head. Water droplets bubble right into your lap.

In one scene, a million sardines form a chaotic ball to confuse oncoming predatory dolphins. Yet there are never any graphic attacks, making the movie all the more kid-friendly. Set to a bongo-rich soundtrack, the rhythms richly bring the KwaZulu-Natal province to life.

Global warming also effects the natural feeding process. The slow heating of the Earth has forced fish fleets to migrate to cooler waters, leaving hungry predators without lunch. Alas, many people still refuse to accept that climate change is real. Weather Channel founder John Coleman recently called global warming the "greatest scam in history," and even went so far to say he was "highly offended by it." This movie, for better or worse, assumes we'll join together and acknowledge this threat to our planet. Will you?

Bryant Manning is a contributing editor for TimeOut Chicago.