

Wild Canada

4 x 60'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. The External Frontier

Each year, the Atlantic Coast off Newfoundland sees one of Canada's greatest natural spectacles: humpback whales arrive here in spring, to feed on huge swarms of capelin.

But the lushness of nature reaches way beyond the shores: the Iroquoian and Algonquian people created a rich and fertile homeland of oak forests and grasslands where wildlife thrived.

The first humans shaped the land on a huge scale: they burned millions of hectares each year, thus clearing the way for larger trees – protected by their thick bark - to grow even bigger, and produce more nuts and fruit to eat.

At the edge of Canada's vast boreal forest, we meet polar bear cubs. They will stay with their mother for up to two years - to learn how to survive. As spring approaches, the polar bear family will follow the retreating ice north.

In Canada's west coast province of British Columbia, we explore the world's largest intact temperate rainforest. This is home to the rare 'white' black bear. This is not an albino, but a rare phase of the North American black bear - it's so rare and special that the First Nations people called it 'Spirit Bear' all along.

2. The Wild West

This episode features the region between the Western Canadian Pacific coast line and the Rocky Mountains - and it reveals the secrets of this lush land.

The salmon run is one of our planet's greatest migrations. Every summer, hundreds of millions of salmon make their way from the Pacific Ocean through the rivers upstream to spawn in the very spot where they themselves once hatched.

This sudden abundance of food attracts thousands of black bears. But usually, the bears eat only the fatty parts of a salmon. The rest rots away, thus nourishing the plants and trees around. Therefore, spruce trees in these areas grow much larger than in other regions.

The mountain ranges further inland are the home of the Golden eagle. This bird can pick up double its bodyweight: in a dramatic sequence, a golden eagle grabs a dall sheep lamb and carries its prey away - for the benefit of its own chicks.

3. The Heartland

The heartland of Canada presents different landscapes and distinctive habitats: vast forests, countless lakes, rolling grasslands.

The prairie First Nations were great hunters, and they had been changing this landscape for thousands of years: from time to time, these people set fire to the prairie to clear the landscape and keep it open. The wide grass plains offered the perfect habitat for what is probably the most iconic animal of North America - the bison.

Once, immense herds of bison roamed the prairie, numbering up to millions of animals. They were vital for humans - the bison offered meat, fur and leather, as well as bones for tools and decoration.

The Canadian heartland is also studded with countless lakes. These became a crucial resource for water birds, returning from nesting grounds in the Arctic, on their long migration south. Snow geese are drawn there in large numbers, as well as sandhill cranes and huge flocks of ducks.

4. Ice Edge

Ice defines the Canadian Arctic, and it suits one creature more than any other - the polar bear. We follow a family as they travel to the ice edge - the hunting ground of these top predators of the Arctic.

At a certain place in Québec, the sea ice cover seems to breathe - here, the largest tides in the world make a difference of 16 meters between ebb and flow. With all other food sources hard to find in February, Inuit hunters head out to this place. At the lowest tides, the sea under the ice retreats back, so that hollow spaces under the ice become accessible. There, they collect nutritious mussels - but they must work fast, because in less than an hour, the tide will return.

Once the temperatures begin to rise again, life starts to flourish. The Arctic summer is short, but intense - during these months, more than half of the sea ice melts away. This largest annual transformation on our planet has fundamental effects on nature and wildlife.

Yet, meanwhile scientists see a dramatic change: rising temperatures cause a larger sea ice melt. In summer, the Arctic sea ice cover has already reached a record low - wide areas of the Polar Sea are now ice-free for the first time.