

BAFTA ALBERT

PUTTING NATURE IN THE PICTURE

A Creative's Guide

IMPACTWILD

Guide created by ImpactWild for BAFTA Albert

THIS IS A GUIDE TO UNLOCKING THE FULL POWER OF NATURE IN YOUR STORY.

“In the last 50 years, wildlife populations have on average declined by 60%. For the first time in human history, the stability of nature can no longer be taken for granted. But the natural world is resilient. Great riches still remain. And with our help, the planet can recover. Never has it been more important to understand how the natural world works and how to help it.”

Sir David Attenborough, Our Planet, Netflix

The purpose of this guide is to spark new ideas and inspire creative choices across all screen genres and at every part of the process. It’s built for every creative voice shaping the screen industry today, creating new pathways to featuring the natural world authentically, without constraining vision or editorial freedom.



Grow

(Pumpkin Films, Sky UK)

The world as an experience waiting to happen.



Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing

(Owl Power, BBC)

A time-honoured ritual to deepen connection.



SHARK! Celebrity Infested Waters

(Plimsoll Productions/ITV Studios, ITV)

From outdated fear to a new fascination.

NATURE IS MORE THAN A BACKDROP



Nature is wild and untamed - at once beautiful and dangerous, predictable and startlingly unpredictable.

It can be fierce and unforgiving, yet also deeply comforting, offering safety, joy, and a sense of belonging. By putting nature in the picture, it does more than provide awesome backdrops. It provides the creative building blocks to craft unforgettable characters, drive compelling stories, and immerse audiences in worlds that feel alive.







Human Relationship

Human's place in nature, agriculture and farming, land use, survival and scarcity, nature exploitation...



Time and Scale

Geological time, ancient vs modern landscapes, the cosmos, micro and macro worlds...



Forces and Elements

Light, magnetism, wind, gravity, water, earth, fire, air, lightning, volcanoes, earthquakes, storms...



Environments, Plants and Animals

Forests, mountains, rivers, polar regions, skies, coral reefs...



Sensorial Engagement

Sounds and silence, textures, smells, light and shadow...



Cycles and Processes

Seasons, tides growth, decay, erosion, migration, food chains, evolution, natural selection, balance and disruption...



Ecosystems & Interdependence

Biodiversity, symbiosis, keystone species, habitat creation and loss...



Spiritual, Mythological & Cultural

Sacred landscapes, creation myths, totem animals, nature gods & spirits...



Symbolic & Emotional

Peace and freedom, danger, chaos, growth as hope, decay as loss, transformation...



“STRONG STORIES TEST CHARACTERS WITH FORCES BEYOND THEIR CONTROL, AND NATURE PROVIDES THOSE FORCES WITH POWER, CLARITY, AND SCALE.”

Robert McKee, Screenwriting Theorist.

STORIES GROW STRONGER IN NATURE

In a saturated market, nature is a universal language to connect with audiences. Weaving in the living world makes for content that is visually fresh, thematically deep, and globally accessible. Nature doesn't just elevate the craft, it increases reach and longevity.

THE RESIDENCE

(Netflix Studios, Netflix)

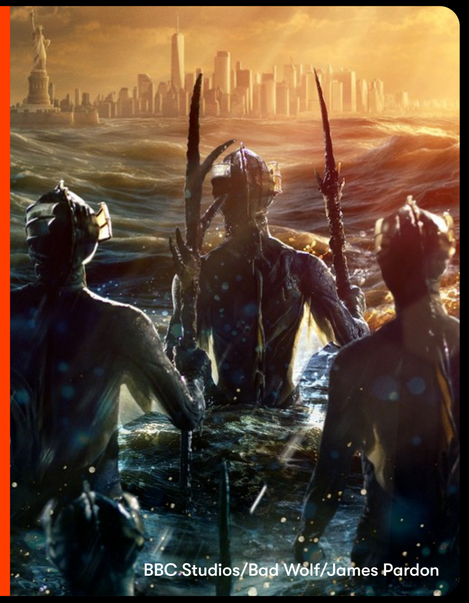
Cupp's unconventional crime-solving style grows from her passion for birding - making her observant, detail-focused, and remarkably patient. For authenticity, the showrunner consulted birding expert Kenn Kaufman on accurate details and sound.



THE WAR BETWEEN THE LAND AND THE SEA

(Bad Wolf with BBC Studios for the BBC, UK and Disney+, ROTW)

"The story has been stewing for a long time. I'm very lucky to live by the sea, it's a short walk from my house to a bench that overlooks the view all the way to Cornwall. As a Doctor Who fan, you automatically start to imagine the sea is alive, so it kind of grew from thoughts like that. It's also the state of the environment and the awful things we're doing to the sea." Russell T Davies (Showrunner, Writer, and Executive Producer)



“PEOPLE’S CONNECTION TO NATURE HAS DECLINED BY MORE THAN 60% SINCE 1800… NATURE CONNECTEDNESS IS NOW ACCEPTED AS A KEY ROOT CAUSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS.”

Prof Miles Richardson, University of Derby.

NATURE GROWS STRONGER IN STORIES.

As humans, we are instinctively driven to protect what we love. Our bond with nature is vital - not only for the health of the planet, but for our own well-being. As that connection continues to fade in the modern world, the screen industry has a powerful and unique opportunity to help restore it.

When we weave the living world back into our stories, we can rekindle a sense of connection - sparking meaningful, real-world change and renewing our shared cultural heritage as a global community.

HAMZA'S WILD ISLES

(Silverback Films, BBC)

The 4-part series uses seasonal storytelling to show how climate change and habitat pressures affect UK wildlife - connecting biodiversity loss and climate change in a way that informs and inspires without alarm. The series formed part of BBC's Wild About Nature Week, a cross-platform celebration showing how audiences can reconnect with the natural world.



EMMERDALE

(ITV Studios, ITV)

ITV has been continuously embedding climate stories across its entire Soaps and Daytime output. With a regular viewing and loyal audiences, they offer a unique opportunity to build an ongoing learning journey with viewers. ITV actively uses its always-on content to normalise sustainable behaviours and climate solutions.



NATURE-CHARGE YOUR STORY

A 6-point creative review process to inspire you to harness the power of nature from development to final edit.

Use this at any stage of your creative process and draw on what's relevant to what you're creating - there's no prescribed order.



NATURE-CHARGE YOUR STORY

1. WE ARE NATURE: MAKE IT PERSONAL

Draw from your own life: childhood memories, simple walks, or even dreams. Look to the films that stayed with you or projects that moved you. Or simply step outside and let the environment spark something new.

2. UNLOCK NATURE'S POWER

Identify the nature-related topics and themes in your story and enrich them with further research.

3. NATURE-CHARGE YOUR CHARACTERS

Use nature to drive motivations, deepen traits, and create more layered interactions in your characters.

4. BUILD BEYOND THE BACKDROP

Think of how nature can help create narrative depth, shape emotion and build worlds.

5. IMMERSE ALL YOUR SENSES

Ask yourself: How can you and your creative team come together to enhance immersion in nature through your creative choices?

6. CONSIDER HOW YOU AFFECT NATURE

Would you be happy for negative impacts on nature to be a consequence of your work? If not, how could you mitigate against that?

1. WE ARE NATURE: MAKE IT PERSONAL

Nature shapes who you are and how you experience the world - it's far more than a backdrop - it's part of your story.

Practice:

Draw from your own life: childhood memories, simple walks, or even dreams. Look to the films that stayed with you or projects that moved you. Or simply step outside and let the environment spark something new.

Pay attention to:

- How the environment makes you feel.
- The movement and behaviour of plants and animals.
- Changes in light, weather, colour and sound.
- How much nature you see in programmes and films – it most likely plays more of a role than you think.
- How did nature influence the mood, characters, or story in a programme you watched?

Take note of these effects and use them to inspire your own creative ideas, adapting what resonates to your story and vision.

ROBSON GREEN: WORLD'S MOST AMAZING WALKS

(BBC Studios Prods, Rivers Meet Productions, UKTV)

For Robson, who was born and raised in the North East, it's a deeply personal and emotional journey across a landscape he's loved since childhood. Starting at Heddon-on-the-Wall, Robson retraces familiar footsteps through rugged moorland, sweeping countryside, and historical ruins over a journey spanning 84 miles.



BBC Studios / UKTV / Zoila Brozas

UNDER SALT MARSH

(Little Door Productions, Sky)

Creator, lead writer & director Claire Oakley describes: "As I started to imagine the show off the page, the natural environment felt like it was of the utmost importance. It wasn't just a backdrop but an integral part of the story. I've spent a lot of time in North Wales over the last ten years and it's very close to my heart."



© Sky UK Limited

2. UNLOCK NATURE'S POWER

Nature offers building blocks that bring stories to life.

Practice:

Identify the nature-related topics and themes in your story and enrich them with further research.

Explore for example:

- Observing animal behaviour and researching ecosystems.
- Myths, folklore and cultural perspectives on nature.
- Topics around climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.
- Consult experts or advisors to add depth, authenticity, and unexpected inspiration.

Consider how these insights can shape your story's conflict, characters, relationships and power dynamics.

ROB & ROMESH VS THE JUNGLE

(CPL Productions, Sky UK)

The episode began as a team brainstorm challenge: how to weave authentic environmental messages into the show while still making people laugh.



SHAUN THE SHEEP

(Aardman Animations Ltd)

Aardman creates the miniature world of Shaun the Sheep by drawing inspiration from real-life rural environments, carefully recreating the charm, textures, and everyday details of the countryside in tiny, handcrafted sets. Even using real materials like soil, grass and dirty wash paint to create authentic mud and weathered textures so the farm looks truly lived in.



3. NATURE-CHARGE YOUR CHARACTERS

Characters come alive when nature helps shape who they are. Tying them to the natural world taps into something audiences instinctively understand, making their motivations feel real – leading to richer, unforgettable characters.

Practice:

Use nature to drive motivations, deepen traits, and create more layered interactions in your characters.

Consider drawing from:

- Instincts and behaviours that make characters believable.
- Qualities from animals or ecosystems that add depth and relatability.
- How these traits can make characters memorable and universally resonant.

Incorporate findings into your character development.

AFTER THE FLOOD

(Quay Street Productions/ITV Studios, ITV)

In the series, nature drives both story and character. The rising waters, wildfires and water pollution across the two seasons shape Joanna Marshall's investigation, decisions and relationships, placing moral and practical pressure on her and making the environment a central narrative force.



LET'S GO, BANANAS!

(9story/Brown Bag, Sky)

Three silly and diverse families share lives, loves, triumphs and tantrums in relatable tales told by their fabulous kids. Aimed at a preschool and bridge audience (3-7), the show uses the foundation of personality, humour, and story to draw on nature and showcase positive environmental behaviour.



4. BUILD BEYOND THE BACKDROP

The strongest stories blend imagination with truth - and nature is full of both. Shaped by cycles, conflict, and cause-and-effect, the natural world offers ready-made narrative threads packed with texture and emotional weight. Draw from it, and your storyworld will feel not just believable, but lasting.

Practice:

Think of how nature can help create narrative depth, shape emotion and build worlds.

Think about:

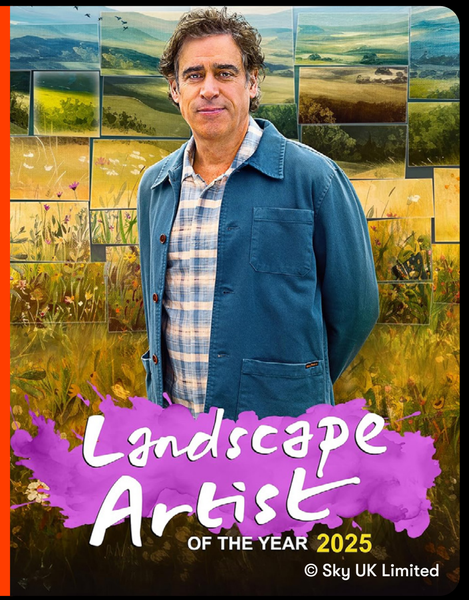
- Nature creating obstacles for your characters.
- The influence of nature in driving decision-making.
- Adding elements that make the story world feel alive and active.
- How does a storm or calm river influence tension or peace?
- How do seasonal changes affect the story's rhythm or emotion?

Add these layers and test combinations to see how this affects your story.

LANDSCAPE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

(Storyvault Films, Sky Arts)

One of Sky's longest running series embeds nature through the painting of landscapes within the format, which is then backed up by location-relevant, conservation-based VTs.



HIS DARK MATERIALS

(Bad Wolf in association with New Line Cinema for BBC and HBO)

How people interact with the environment is key to how the author, Philip Pullman, developed his multi-universe narrative. In Lyra's world, animals as Daemons reflect characters' most intimate and honest feelings. In Will's world quantum technology reveals life in all things. In every world we visit, landscapes and natural elements - forests, rivers, storms, and – ultimately, Dust – tell the story about the balance between mankind, or the dominant species, and their impact on the world.



5. IMMERSE ALL YOUR SENSES

Screen stories shine when they fully engage the senses, and nature is a master of immersion. Through texture, colour, light, and sound, it shapes how we experience a story.

Practice:

Ask yourself: How can you and your creative team come together to enhance immersion in nature through your creative choices? Bring this question to your team of sound designers, cinematographers, composers, VFX artists, colourists and others.

- How can you use light - and shadow - to convey mood, reveal character, or hint at hidden truths in your story?
- Can sound design amplify natural atmospheres or animal behaviour?
- Can music or scoring reflect the rhythms of ecosystems?
- Can visual effects or colour grading deepen the sense of place and season?

Add these sensory layers to your story.

GAME OF THRONES

(HBO Entertainment/Warner Bros. Discovery, HBO)

Sound designer Paula Fairfield built creature and environmental sounds from layered animal recordings - dragon roars included - grounding fantasy in natural acoustics. In White Walker scenes, sound is sometimes deliberately stripped back to create a cold, eerie isolation.



UNCOOL

(Little Stitch Productions, BFI Network)

Set in rural Lancashire in 1909, the film uses the vivid green countryside and a rich soundscape of birdsong, wind, and water to mirror Martha's inner world. Through lighting and a nature-filled set design, it amplifies the quirky character's love for the outdoors and its creatures.



6. CONSIDER HOW YOU AFFECT NATURE

The screen industry has a responsibility to represent nature responsibly and ethically. A conscious lens strengthens your narrative and builds a lasting, positive connection with audiences and nature.

Practice:

Would you be happy for negative impacts on nature to be a consequence of your work? If not, how could you mitigate against that?

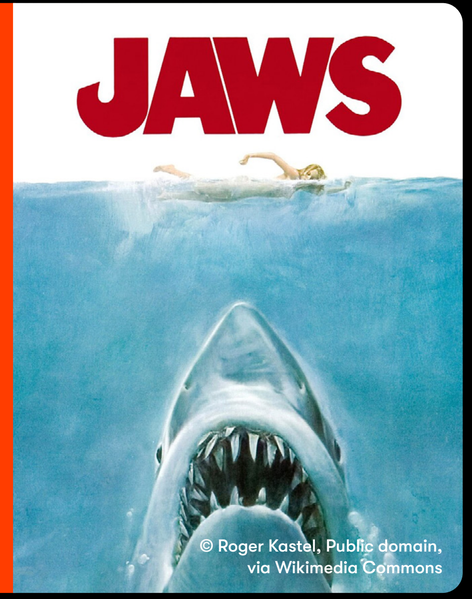
Take these steps:

- If something doesn't feel right, dig deeper.
- Consider portraying pro-environmental habits in characters and storylines when this can be done authentically.
- Collaborate with experts - academics, charities, consultant and communicators who can ensure that information is accurate and portrayals aren't harmful.
- Working with an impact producer can help to develop and execute strategies that create positive social, cultural, or environmental influence alongside your film.

JAWS

(Zanuck/Brown Productions, Universal Pictures)

Steven Spielberg has said he regrets the impact of Jaws, after its portrayal of a great white shark attacking a seaside town was linked to a surge in shark fishing. Research suggests large shark populations along North America's east coast fell by around 50% in the years following its release.

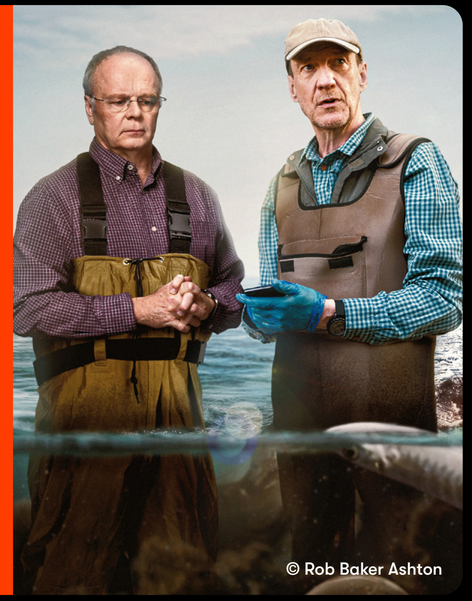


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DIRTY BUSINESS

(Halcyon Heart Films, Channel 4)

The filmmakers intended the series to have a positive real-world impact, using it to raise awareness of the sewage scandal, and encourage people to demand change. Aware of their responsibility in shaping public understanding, they worked meticulously with real life campaigners, victims and whistleblowers to ensure accuracy and to communicate their message responsibly.



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Credits

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References

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Additional Resources

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