

Earth (2007)

Rated G Our ratings: V- 2; L- 1; S/N-1 . Running time: 1 hour 30 min.

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
Psalm 24:1-2*

Although "Awesome!" has been overused by young adults, this is the appropriate term to sum up the newest Disney release. A 90 minute compilation from the BBC and Discovery Channel series "Planet Earth," it is a spectacular glimpse at some of the interesting animals with which we share our planet and their hard struggle to survive. As we see in the case of a starving polar bear, the filmmakers never romanticize Mother Nature. She is beautiful, but also unfeelingly cruel. Although narrator James Earl Jones maintains an upbeat note, not all of the stories have a happy ending—and the big story of whether we humans can stop our despoliation of the planet before it is too late remains to be resolved.

Two of the beautiful scenes from Earth. Walt Disney Films

Filming from hot air balloons, helicopters, trucks, and

underwater cameras (and yes, there are some gorgeous NASA shots from high above the planet), the intrepid filmmakers take us on a breath-taking journey around the world: a polar bear mother and two cubs in the arctic scurrying to find food before the ice sheet melts; separated from them their father also seeking food (well, the narrator says the single male is related, so it makes a good story); a mother and calf humpback whale setting out on a 3000 mile journey from the spawning area to find the immense amount of food they need in Antarctica; a flock of cranes trying to fly over the immense Himalayas to obtain food in warm India; a herd of elephants trekking across a desert in search of water and food—their environment quite a contrast to that far to the north where millions of caribou migrate across the tundra.

Some of the vignettes are amusing, such as the bird of paradise puffing itself up as part of its mating ritual, or the penguin body-surfing across the ice, and the Mandarin Duck chicks leaping from their high-up nest and landing amidst the leaves of the forest floor—though we should add that there is none of the cutesiness that marred Disney's otherwise excellent "True Life Adventures" of by-gone days. Some scenes, such as the cheetah's running down and killing an antelope, are harsh. Fortunately the editor kept children in mind by cutting away and not showing the gory details, even when a great white shark catches a seal (it swallows it whole—no blood).

The film covers a year in the life cycle of the planet, starting in January in the Arctic before the sun has even risen above the horizon, through the thaw of spring, the dry heat of summer (in the African desert), through the fall, and finally winter again. The time lapse photography showing plants emerging when the temperature rises; the incredible close-ups of animals, often from a high definition camera that was up to a mile away—these are unforgettable. To see this film is to appreciate what an incredible world our Creator has

given us. Be sure to stay for the credits, as you will see brief scenes of how the camera crews obtained many of their shots.

For Reflection/Discussion

Contains a spoiler or two.

1. What fascinated you the most? Any favorite among the animals?

2. How did you feel when an animal such as the polar bear or the cheetah struck at their prey? You want the subject to survive, and yet what about the one which is to be food? 3. 3. Obtaining food is different in the wild than we are used to with our packaged, often already cooked food that bears no resemblance to its origin, isn't it? Do you think that is why many people dislike displays of a roast pig with the head still attached?

4. How did you feel when the male polar bear gave up and lay down next to the walruses that it had just attacked? Do you think that the filmmakers should have brought food to the bear? Or do you agree with their code that says they are just to observe, and never to intervene?

5. How has our contributions to global warming added to the problem of the polar bears and other creatures? How in the past have we interpreted the "have dominion over" in the Creation Story (See Genesis 1:28)? What has this led to? How is the concept of stewardship over the earth a better way of understanding our relationship to the earth—after all, whose is the earth, anyway?