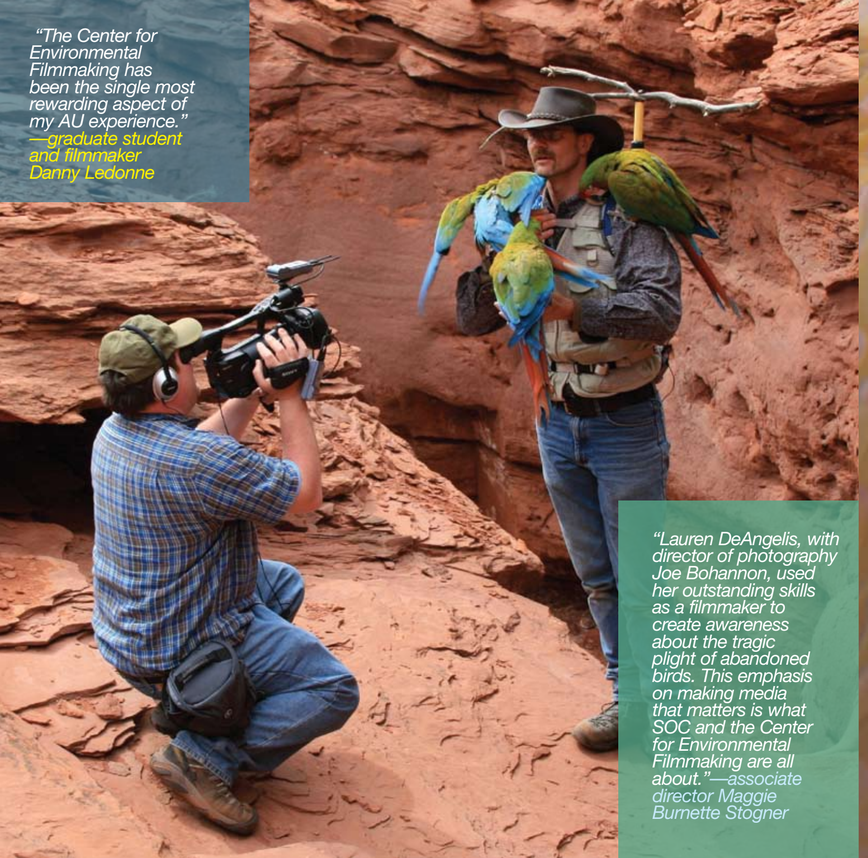

"The Center for Environmental Filmmaking has been the single most rewarding aspect of my AU experience."
—graduate student and filmmaker Danny Ledonne

"Lauren DeAngelis, with director of photography Joe Bohannon, used her outstanding skills as a filmmaker to create awareness about the tragic plight of abandoned birds. This emphasis on making media that matters is what SOC and the Center for Environmental Filmmaking are all about."—associate director Maggie Burnette Stogner

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL FILMMAKING
School of Communication • American University

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Director: Chris Palmer
Associate Directors: Sandy Cannon-Brown, Larry Engel, Sarah Menke-Fish, and Maggie Burnette Stogner

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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL FILMMAKING

Training filmmakers to strengthen the global constituency for conservation

About the Center

The Center for Environmental Filmmaking was founded on the conviction that films and new media are essential educational and policy tools in the struggle to protect the environment. The center's mission is to train students to produce films and new media that focus attention on the need to conserve the environment in a way that is effective as well as ethically sound, educationally powerful, and entertaining.

Courtesy of MacGillivray Freeman Films

The world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, from climate change to species extinction. But powerful images and films, such as *An Inconvenient Truth,* can capture our attention and alert millions to the value of protecting the natural world. With the right combination of creative thinking, enthusiasm, practical knowledge, altruism, and a commitment to the natural world, today's students will become tomorrow's environmental stewards.

The Center for Environmental Filmmaking has four signature initiatives:

- creating partnerships with well-established organizations—such as Maryland Public Television, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the American Film Institute—that give students the opportunity to produce professional films
- bringing world-class filmmakers to the American University campus to teach and mentor
- developing innovative, enriching classes and programs, such as Classroom in the Wild
- advocating the ethical treatment of wildlife and the environment worldwide

What unites the center's many programs—besides a commitment to the environment and conservation—is the desire to transform students' lives. We show students that through hard work, perseverance, critical thinking, and creativity, they can bring focus, passion, and meaning to their films and their lives. We value the exuberance that is born of the creative process, the courage to stand up for one's beliefs, and the compassion to care for those who can't speak for themselves—all fundamentally important values that will benefit students throughout their lives.

As an integral part of AU's School of Communication, the Center for Environmental Filmmaking draws on and contributes to the content-rich programs in SOC's three divisions—Journalism, Public Communication, and Film and Media Arts. The center builds on the tremendous expertise of the dozen accomplished documentary filmmakers on SOC's faculty, including the center's four associate directors: Sandy Cannon-Brown, Larry Engel, Sarah Menke-Fish, and Maggie Burnette Stogner.

Located in our nation's capital, the center collaborates with the world's major funding and advocacy institutions for environmental and wildlife conservation, including National Geographic, Discovery, Animal Planet, and the Jane Goodall Institute. And it participates actively in the RealScreen conference, SILVERDOCS, and the Environmental Film Festival, which are all held annually in the Washington, D.C., area.

The center's activities and programs are made possible by the Wallace Genetic Foundation, Sally Brown, Gil Ordway, Chris Palmer, Roger and Vicki Sant, the Sony Corporation, REI, and other generous donors.

Center Director Chris Palmer

Chris Palmer is an environmental and wildlife film producer who has swum with dolphins and whales, confronted sharks, come face-to-face with Kodiak bears, camped with wolf packs, and waded hip-deep through an Everglades swamp. He has spent 25 years

producing hundreds of hours of original programming for prime-time television and the giant screen film industry. His films have been broadcast on the Disney Channel, TBS Superstation, Animal Planet, Home and Garden Television, the Travel Channel, the Outdoor Life Network, and the Public Broadcasting System, and they have been shown in the global system of IMAX theatres. He founded the Center for Environmental Filmmaking in 2005.

Palmer is also president of the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation—MacGillivray Freeman Films is the world's largest and most successful producer and distributor of IMAX films—and serves as chief executive officer of VideoTakes, a production company that specializes in environmental films, videos, DVDs, and new media. He and his colleagues have won numerous awards, including two Emmys, an Oscar nomination, and the 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award for Media at the International Wildlife Film Festival. Palmer's book on wildlife filmmaking will be published by Sierra Club Books in 2010.

Film Production and Funding

Every year, the center produces numerous films for partners, such as PBS and NOAA, in which students and faculty play important roles. Center-produced films have explored the effects of private development in our forests, debris in our oceans, and pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. Many of them have received honors, including a 2009 Student Academy Award for best documentary, which was awarded to Lauren DeAngelis and Joe Bohannon for *A Place to Land*, a film that exposes the plight of captive parrots around the nation.

As part of its advocacy program for the ethical treatment of animals, the center gives grants, awards, and sponsorships to students whose wildlife films address humane standards. The center also participates in and hosts educational events that focus on ethics in wildlife filmmaking. The center's Film Fund enables students to present films and papers at conferences and festivals. Awards

include a cash prize to the winner of the environmental film category at SOC's Visions Festival and to winners of other annual events the center sponsors.

In 2009 the center launched the Eco-Comedy Video Competition in cooperation with Friends of the Earth and the Environmental Protection Agency. Friends of the Earth and the center offer a $1,000 cash prize annually to encourage the use of humor in environmental video advocacy.

Events and Programs

Working with Filmmakers for Conservation, the center showcases important new films and celebrated filmmakers every Tuesday evening at 7 p.m. in AU's Wechsler Theater. Topics have included *Whale Wars,* the role of humor in environmental activism, the Chesapeake Bay, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the crisis facing our oceans. Speakers include top executives and filmmakers from organizations such as National Geographic, Discovery, Animal Planet, Friends of the Earth, and the Earth Conservation Corps.

The center also creates dozens of events and programs for festivals and conferences, including the Environmental Film Festival, Wildscreen, the International Wildlife Film Festival, the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival, and the Giant Screen Cinema Association (IMAX) conferences. Director Chris Palmer and the center's associate directors regularly speak at film festivals and conferences around the world.

Each summer, the center partners with NOAA on a major initiative called Ocean for Life, designed to encourage cultural understanding between students from the Middle East and Western nations through an exploration of how the oceans connect all life on earth. Five of the center's graduate students participate as paid film mentors, assisting high school students with the creation of youth media projects during the program.

During D.C.'s annual Environmental Film Festival, associate director Sarah Menke-Fish and graduate students work with the American Film Institute and Montgomery Country Public Schools to conduct hands-on workshops for high school students. The center also partners with AU's Discover the World of Communication summer program to teach high school students how to produce environmental mini-documentaries, public service announcements, and media campaigns.

Classes

The center offers the distinctive Classroom in the Wild, an intensive outdoor workshop in beautiful environments around the world, including Florida, the Chesapeake Bay, Alaska, and Costa Rica. Students camp out and learn how to meet the sometimes extreme challenges of natural history field production, including how to prepare and organize a shoot, use filmmaking equipment, record sound, and shoot footage to make a compelling and engaging story—all with minimal environmental impact.

Find out more about the center at ***www.environmentalfilm.org.***

GREEN FILMMAKING *The Center for Social Media, the Center for Environmental Filmmaking, and Filmmakers for Conservation jointly published the* **Code of Best Practices in Sustainable Filmmaking.** *Co-authored by associate director Larry Engel and British producer Andrew Buchanan, it has been endorsed by the International Documentary Association and by the University Film and Video Association, two of the most prestigious organizations in their fields. SOC's film program is on track to become the first in the world to be carbon neutral. The code is available at www.sustainableflimmaking.org.*

The center also offers two on-campus classes: Producing Environmental and Wildlife Films, which teaches students about the business of filmmaking and the art of being a successful film producer, and Environmental and Wildlife Production, which gives students the opportunity to engage in the hands-on production of films for networks like PBS. One such documentary, *EcoViews,* won a regional Student Emmy in 2008. Another, *The Anacostia River Project,* was selected as an outstanding example of meaningful and influential filmmaking by The New Media Literacy Project, and funded by the Ford and MacArthur foundations.

In the spring semester 2009, associate director Larry Engel launched a collaboration with professors from the College of Arts and Sciences and School of International Service to teach the innovative course Practicing Environmentalism: Galapagos Islands. The semester-long course was followed by a site visit to the Galapagos where students teamed up to produce four films.

Student Short Film Festival

The center created the annual Student Short Film Festival, held every March as part of the Environmental Film Festival. This event showcases the talents of emerging "green communicators" to promote environmental causes and empower individuals to make a difference.

Courtesy of MacGillivray Freeman Films