

DO YOU ALSO SERVE POPCORN
OR
RUNNING OF THE I&E FILM LIBRARY

by

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Start setting up a movie projector in front of any group, and it never fails — someone will invariably ask, “Do you also serve popcorn?”

This is indicative of a popular and prevalent attitude towards films. No matter how blatantly educational, they still cannot escape their association with “the movies,” the Saturday cowboy matinee, the drive-in date, John Wayne, Mary Poppins, Linda Lovelace, and, always, popcorn.

But even aside from their associations with the Hollywood mystique, films are exciting, blending sound, color and motion in the way that our television age is coming more and more to expect. And TV cannot yet rival the size, clarity or excellence of color of a film shown on even a 40 inch screen. Educators have long recognized the value of films as instructional tools and have capitalized upon their ability to teach as well as to entertain.

As educators (which we certainly are) we should not overlook films as valuable I&E tools. While they certainly cannot replace our other means of disseminating information, they can serve as a worthwhile complement to any I&E program.

But how are films worth the time, effort, and expense involved in their production, management and upkeep? We have, after all, faster, more efficient and certainly less expensive means of distributing information, means which will reach a greater number of people at a time. What, then, are the special advantages of films, why should they have a part in our I&E endeavors?

The importance of films lies more in their educational than in their informational value. Information — about game laws, seasons, places to hunt and fish, and other similar essentially factual details — can be easily disseminated through news releases, pamphlets, etc., but education, which is a much more subtle process, a process of changing and shaping ideas and attitudes, is infinitely more difficult. Unlike educators in a formal situation, we seldom have captive audiences at our disposal, are not able to force anyone to learn what we have to teach. Those who want education must seek us out, but all too often the ones who do are the wrong people.

Those who subscribe to our magazines, tune in our radio and television shows, or seek out our news releases on the back page of the sports section of the Sunday paper, are people we've already got — people interested enough in hunting, fishing, or the out-of-doors to want to listen to what we have to say. If we address ourselves only to them, we are in danger of working within a closed system, of constantly repeating our messages to the same people time after time, of saying what we have to say to those who need it said to them least. Like the preacher who harangues the faithful every Sunday morning but ignores the sinners who never find their way into church, our pronouncements all too often fall upon the ears of those who already know what their hunting and fishing license money is spent for, who already know that legal hunting is not adding species after species to the endangered lists, who already have an appreciation of and respect for wildlife and for the out-of-doors. Those who have no interest in what we're doing merely tune us out. But we need, particularly in the face of the growing negative attitudes toward hunting, to reach a wider variety of people, to get out of the church, so to speak, and start doing some serious missionary work on the street corners. And films, at least in our experiences, are the most effective means of spreading the word outside the circle of the faithful.

In checking our list of borrowers, we found that the largest single group was the schools — elementary, high schools and colleges. But we also send films to public libraries, military institutions, police and fire departments, boys' clubs, 4-H camps, hospitals, state and national parks, large corporations, church groups, television stations, social and fraternal clubs, all kinds of meetings and conferences, and of course to sportsman's clubs. Of all the means of disseminating information at our disposal, it is the films which reach the broadest spectrum of the total population.

There are two basic reasons why films are able to reach those outside our usual hunting and fishing circles. First, people like to watch movies, would rather see a film than read or listen to a lecture. Films, even educational films, as I have said before, are fun, are entertaining. This makes them natural choices for chairmen of entertainment committees searching desperately for a program, natural choices, in fact, for anyone who needs to keep a group of people occupied for a while. Thus when an agency such as ours offers films, groups with even a marginal interest in fish and wildlife will avail themselves of our services. Just the fact that films are available is often incentive enough. We often need to seduce audiences into listening to us, and just having a film library is a good enticement.

But the content of the films themselves is also important. If we offered only films about hunting and fishing, I doubt that our audiences would be as diverse as they are. While our department does have one hunting film (in the usual sense) and two fishing films, our most widely distributed and most popular films are essentially wildlife films.

And in this respect we are fortunate in having a subject matter — wildlife — with an almost universal appeal. Films about animals are fascinating in themselves, and the chance to see a movie about wildlife is in itself enough inducement for most people. A good film, like Aristotle's prescription for a good poem, should both delight and instruct, and the lure of watching wildlife in action is a good sugar coating for our educational pill.

This wide appeal of wildlife also makes our films suitable for almost any age group. We have several teachers of retarded children who regularly use our films because their students enjoy watching the birds and animals. And on the other extreme, we also send the same films to college professors for use in their biology and wildlife classes.

But while wildlife films are delighting audiences, they should also be educating them. The film medium is a powerful and effective means of getting across a message. Several of our films are primarily "message" movies — "Living Room for Kentucky Wildlife" and "Kentucky's Vanishing Wildlife Habitat," for example, while others are designed primarily to inculcate an appreciation of the variety and unique characteristics of wildlife. "Kentucky's Feathered Rainbow" is a film about birds, not only game birds, but also songbirds and predators such as hawks and owls. "Kentucky's Littlest Wildlife" explores frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes, turtles, and insects, while "The Kentucky Whitetail and his Neighbors" traces a year in the life cycle of our native mammals — deer, squirrel, raccoon, muskrat, mink, fox, and so on.

While these films are showing the various wildlife species themselves (and for an audience of young children, just arousing curiosity about wildlife can be an important first step) they are also discussing habitat requirements, ecological interdependence, predator-prey relationships, management techniques — in other words, a wide range of topics basic to any good understanding of wildlife. These are the kinds of messages we need to get before the general public as much as possible, and our films are able to do this. Even if our film library has generated not even one new license buyer, it has still been well worth the money.

While having a film library, then, can be a definite advantage, establishing and maintaining one is a slow and expensive process. Kentucky has been building its

library for about 12 years, and we currently have 11 films in active circulation with the twelfth now being shot. Since the average budget can stand only one film a year, anyone just embarking on a film program can anticipate a period of several years before an adequate library is established.

While an I&E division can get started faster and cheaper by buying films from other sources, we feel that the advantages of having your own films is worth the wait and expense. For one thing, you have control over the content of the films, can make them to suit your particular situation or to say what you want to say. In our case, too, having our name on films about non-game species is good public relations, showing our concern for all wildlife, not just those which produce revenue for us.

Making our films has also allowed us to deal with topics relating directly to Kentucky's wildlife (although what is presented in our films could apply equally as well to other states in the same geographical area). Most of our films have the word "Kentucky" somewhere in the title, and the name of the state occurs with a high degree of regularity throughout the narration. This has not been done basically as a means of "plugging" Kentucky, although it may serve this purpose. The importance of this technique is that it adds a sense of immediacy to the films, a feeling that what the audience is seeing is happening here and now. For an in-state audience, the impact of saying that "Kentucky's streams are being destroyed by channelization" is greater than saying merely "Streams are being destroyed..." Having the films specifically about Kentucky also makes them more appealing to other state agencies, such as the Kentucky Parks system, which uses our films extensively.

Another basic decision facing anyone wanting to start a film library is whether the department should make the films itself, using its own personnel and equipment, or should have the films made for them by an "outsider." The answer here depends upon the individual department's equipment, facilities and photographer. However, there are several other factors which should be considered in making this decision.

First, the department should be sure of its ability to a first-class, professional job. Whatever is produced will be compared, if only subconsciously, to other film and television productions which the viewers have seen, and today even the youngest audiences are rather severe and sophisticated critics, having logged many hours in front of TV sets. Any faults in the film, whether technical or artistic, can be immediately and distractingly obvious.

Second, making a good wildlife film, even a half-hour one, is just about a full time job, and it would be hard to expect one man to both make films and also perform the many other duties expected of a departmental photographer.

Third, wildlife filming is a highly specialized activity, and if the photographer is not himself well-versed in the ways of his subjects, he will need the assistance of someone who is — a wildlife biologist, for example. This would tie up at least two men for the job, not to mention the need for script writers, narrators, and so on. So in the long run, it is usually less expensive, and certainly easier, to turn the film-making over to a qualified professional photographer.

All of Kentucky's films have been produced by Karl Maslowski, of Cincinnati, and we are indeed fortunate to have had his services available. Karl is not only an excellent craftsman, but equally important, is a knowledgeable outdoorsman and an accomplished wildlife photographer. It is his combination of talents which have contributed immeasurably to the success of our films, seven of which have won awards from the AACI or OWAA. We are able to turn Karl loose with any wildlife subject, confident both that his biology will be correct and his photography beautiful. Any department who can find a man like Karl should certainly use him.

Subjects for your films are of course completely up to you, but, as I've mentioned before, you should try for a variety of topics, topics which have appeal to a large segment of the total population. Also, films are a long-range investment, and nothing dates a film quicker than changes in hair and clothing styles and automobile designs. So if you can avoid people and cars, by all means do so. We didn't in our first film, and it is the only one which is now seriously dated.

Once a film library is established, its operation is fairly simple. We have an average of 15 prints for each film, six in our Frankfort offices and one with each of our nine district supervisors. Having ten separate libraries spreads the work around, in addition to making the films more easily available to groups in all sections of the state. We have never really publicized the availability of our films, and are, in fact, somewhat afraid to do so, since our library is now being used at just about its full capacity.

We spend only about an average of an hour a day on scheduling, shipping and checking in the films which we sent out from our main office. This time also includes making routine minor repairs as necessary. The equipment for this repair work is minimal — about all that's needed is a splicer and a film editor. Films do break, and of course they will eventually wear out, but we have encountered very few cases of actual abuse. About the most damaging case we have had was when a film came back that must have been run in a 8 mm projector — there was a new row of sprocket holes down the center. The most troublesome recurring problem is the projectionist who repairs a break with a piece of scotch tape. If we don't find the break, the film can be damaged seriously when it is shown again. Routine maintenance also includes periodically replacing the first 100 feet. This is the part that receives the most damage, usually through improper threading of the projector. Replacing the "head" section will usually restore a film to good shape although after heavy use, it is often necessary to replace the entire film.

But what about the cost of a film library? The major expense is acquiring the films themselves, and this can run into a considerable sum. But mailing and maintenance costs, on the other hand, are low, and once a film is made, it can be used for many years. Even replacement prints, made from a master print or internegative, are also not unreasonable and can greatly extend the life of a film production. While it is difficult to come up with any kind of cost-benefit analysis for a film library, we believe that the cost per viewer over a period of, say, five years would be low indeed. In addition to their other uses, our films are shown twice on our statewide television show, and other TV stations, including the Kentucky Education Television Network, use them quite often. This television exposure is, in itself, worth the cost of the films, as anyone familiar with broadcasting expenses knows — a half-hour TV production for one-time use, with the same subject matter and of comparable quality, would cost almost as much. So although our determination of the value of our films can only be subjective, we do feel certain that they have been well worth the money.

Since I've already argued that audiences would rather see a film than hear a lecture, I'm going to stop talking now and show a movie. This film, "The Hunter's Point of View," is by far our boldest film so far, one that really tells it like it is. But since one picture is worth a thousand words, and you're about to see 33,000 pictures, I'll let the film speak for itself. And one more thing, before anyone asks — no, we don't serve popcorn.