

K2 Communications  
Serengeti Transcript

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**(2160p)**

01:00:00 [music]

01:00:53 There is a place on earth that has remained unchanged  
since the dawn of man.

01:01:09 A sanctuary to animals both strange... and familiar.  
It's a remnant of a forgotten age. A rare wilderness  
where nature is still as it once was... wild and free.

01:01:53 A vast protected area spanning some 5,700 square  
miles right in the heart of Africa. It is one of the  
planet's greatest natural wonders.

01:02:15 Home to a staggering diversity of life.

01:02:48 Located in East Africa, the Serengeti extends from  
north Tanzania, across the border to Kenya. It's a  
landscape as varied as the creatures who live there.  
Filled with monstrous volcanoes, hidden valleys with  
lush tropical rainforests, rocky savannah woodland,  
iconic grassy plains, and waterways filled with  
creatures that have remained virtually unchanged  
since the age of the dinosaurs.

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01:03:38      Without the Serengeti, many of our most beloved species would be at risk. To protect them, it helps to understand how the entire system works.

01:03:57      And where better to begin than at the top with the king. Well, the king to be. The locals call him Kijana, a Swahili word for of little one.

01:04:26      And although he's only a few weeks old, he's already acting like he owns the place.

01:04:45      Along with his brothers and sisters, he's an apex predator with no one to worry about but other lions.

01:05:01      And for the moment, that's probably enough.

01:05:11      With their high status and royal title, you'd think it's lions that rule the Serengeti, but they don't.

01:05:28      Surprisingly, it's one of the Serengeti humbler residents that rule here.

01:05:41      A herd of wildebeest, also called New [?]. They're what's known as a keystone species. Meaning they are

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central players in the web of life here. And it's their migration through these plains every year that drives this entire ecosystem.

01:06:10 And that migration is driven in turn by a force that rules us all... hunger.

01:06:24 It's October. Food is scarce, and the herd is getting restless.

01:06:38 Wildebeest can actually smell rain beyond the horizon, an amazing sense that will guide them on an incredible journey.

01:06:51 As well when the short rains, called Vuli [phonetic], begin further south, it's a signal for the start of one of the greatest migrations on earth.

01:07:23 As if orchestrated by an invisible hand, a million and a half animals are on the move. It's an epic odyssey of over 1,000 miles. But the wildebeest aren't the only ones travelling the Great Plains. Soon, they're joined by more than 700,000 zebras and gazelles, as the migration swells to over 2 million creatures.

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01:08:07      Elephants are on the move too. Led by a matriarch,  
they're in search of seasonal water hole.

01:08:25      Male elephants have a reputation as loners. They have  
to find their own and stay solitary for most of their  
adult life.

01:08:43      Female elephants, like this little girl, stay with  
their moms their entire lives. Mom will teach her  
everything she needs to know. Special elephant  
knowledge that has been passed down for generations.

01:09:04      And who knows? If she follows in her mom's footsteps,  
maybe one day she'll grow up to be the matriarch.

01:09:25      As these gentle giants move through the woodlands,  
they help clear paths for the migrating wildebeest  
and other animals.

01:09:39      But not all animals in the Serengeti have to migrate  
to survive. For many, the Savannah Woodlands are the  
perfect place to call home.

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01:09:55 Giraffes or twiga [phonetic] feed on food that is too high for others to reach. Available year round, there's no need for them to move on. But for the wildebeests, there is simply not enough food here.

01:10:26 Distant rains remind the hungry herd that it's time to head further south.

01:10:43 Their stay in the woodlands has come to an end.

01:10:51 [music]

01:11:13 It is now January. And after months on the hoof, the herd has finally arrived at its destination, the vast grass plains of the southern Serengeti in Tanzania.

01:11:36 Here there is plenty of food for the herd to graze on, making it the perfect place with the wildebeest to give birth.

01:11:54 Over the coming weeks, some 400,000 new calves will be born here.

01:12:10 Only moments old and this calf is already on its feet.

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01:12:30      Using their unique sense of smell and sound, mother and calf create an unbreakable bond in the first few minutes.

01:12:43      So there's no mistaking who mom is. Yep, that's not her.

01:12:56      [music]

01:13:07      For a species that is always on the moon, it's important for the calf to be able to keep up from the get go because not everyone on the plains is a friend.

01:13:25      [music]

01:13:28      Ancient foes are lurking everywhere.

01:13:49      Luckily for our new calf, wildebeest moms give birth in the late morning after the predators have already fed. But the wildebeest calves aren't the only new kids on the block.

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01:14:21 Under their mom's watchful eye, these cheetah cubs need to learn how to hunt as soon as possible. The game of predator versus prey is as old as the Savannah itself.

01:14:44 But the wildebeest have a strong defense.

01:14:58 Young males will form a wall between the cheetahs and the herd, blocking any play the cubs might try.

01:15:17 Pretending to play amongst themselves, you won't fake out the opposition. The calves are always kept safe in the middle of the huddle.

01:15:39 So this time it's a draw.

01:15:59 As night falls, a drop in temperature encourages the bigger cats to come out to play.

01:16:11 This is prime time for lions.

01:16:31 Each pride has its own territory that needs protecting.

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01:16:44      The male lions will spend the night on patrol. Their growl is a warning to other prides not to trespass.

01:17:16      Predators like lions play a vital role in maintaining balance in the Serengeti.

01:17:26      They help limit the number of grazers on the plains. So grasses aren't overeaten and the ecosystem remains sustainable for all.

01:17:45      As the heat of the day returns, the lions retreat to the cool of the shade, leaving the plains to the wildebeest herds.

01:18:00      As is the case in most of nature's systems, each part relies on another. The wildebeest rely on the grass for food, but the grasses too rely on the wildebeest.

01:18:17      Their grazing encourages new growth. And as they pass, they leave behind some homemade fertilizer or dung.

01:18:33      And where there's dung, you'll find these guys: the dung beetle. They're another key species in the Serengeti and dung is there only food source. They



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also lay their eggs in it, making it prized possession for these little guys.

01:19:01      Some prefer to roll it into balls, while others dig through it and create tunnels, and some prefer to just steal it.

01:19:16      As they repeatedly roll and dig through the dung, they are breaking down the waste and unwittingly killing the soil, making the lush plains even more fertile.

01:19:35      It's a perfect, sustainable cycle, a vital part in nature's grand symphony. The dung beetles may be small, but on these plains, they're big players.

01:19:58      [music]

01:20:11      But just how the Serengeti came to host such a rich diversity of life is another story in itself.

01:20:33      And like all good stories, it starts a long time ago, around 3,000,000 years to be exact.

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01:20:49      It was a time of giant tectonic movement that gave birth to a series of volcanoes, some of which are still active today. Over the ages, they've laid down a carpet of volcanic ash some 100 feet deep.

01:21:14      The ash is rich in minerals and nutrients creating the perfect base for the growth of more grass. It's a super soil born of fire.

01:21:33      But the volcanoes also help create another element vital for life.

01:21:48      Water captured by the volcanic mountains runs down into vast lakes, rich in minerals and algae, attracting birds from far and wide.

01:22:09      The Serengeti is home to some 400 species of birds, many found nowhere else on Earth. The volcanic waters here offer perfect protection for the nesting birds.

01:22:30      And one is more famous than all the rest combined, it's spectacular pink flamingo.

01:22:48      Each year they amass here, not in their 10s of thousands, but in their millions.

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01:23:07      It is the Serengeti's other great migration.

01:23:20      Just how long they've been coming here is still a mystery to science, but it's suspected their annual arrival is as old as the Serengeti itself.

01:23:40      The water that helps feed the lakes also feeds life on the plains.

01:24:01      It is now March. And the long monsoon rain known as Misaka [phonetic] have flown in from the Indian Ocean, bringing much needed water to the plains and triggering a burst of new growth.

01:24:28      The rains also create rivers and seasonal watering holes.

01:24:41      The perfect place for our elephant buddies to have a bath.

01:25:04      It's a welcome relief under the hot African sun. For some creatures, these water holes aren't just a playground, they're essential.

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01:25:19 Hippos may look tough, but they're a sensitive bunch. Their skin is quick to dry out, so they spend up to 16 hours a day lounging in the pools or having a snooze to conserve energy.

01:25:47 [music]

01:25:56 But the wet season does not last forever. By June, the monsoonal winds have changed direction, taking the rains with them.

01:26:28 The change is as fast as it is dramatic.

01:26:54 Within two weeks, the birthing grounds are completely dry.

01:27:10 Ancient instincts urge the herd to once more be on the move.

01:27:27 It's a desperate exodus. A race against time to get back to the northern plains before the food runs out.

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01:27:43 For the new mothers and calves, it's an anxious 300 mile journey home. Hard times too for the Predators left behind.

01:28:19 Still, the herd is not safe from its ancient foes. All along their journey, they'll face new prides in waiting though tired, weak and weary, they'll be hunted all the way home.

01:28:41

01:29:04 Life may be abundant here, but it is not free from the specter of death.

01:29:17 Each plays its part in the grand circle of life, and some creatures serve both masters.

01:29:30 High on the cliffs of the Gall Mountains, vultures leave their nesting grounds.

01:29:42 As the heat of the day increases, they catch rising thermals.

01:29:53 With a wingspan of over two meters, they can climb as high as a jumbo jet.

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01:30:08      Staying airborne for hours, they can travel hundreds of miles in search of food far below.

01:30:31      And once they spot a carcass, their spiraling descent acts as a beacon for scavengers far and wide. A signal that lunch has been served.

01:30:48      By quickly consuming rotting carcasses, vultures prevent the spread of disease amongst other animals, making them a vital cleanup crew that helps protect the health of countless creatures across the plains.

01:31:10

01:31:18      By August, the wildebeests are almost home.

01:31:31      In the herd's absence, the grasses here have grown long and dry, making it the ideal spot for predators to hide and the perfect tinder for seasonal lightning storms.

01:31:51      [thunder]

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01:32:06      Fire has always played an important role in the Serengeti. When herds are small, grasses are left to grow and large parts of the Serengeti burn, but when the herds swell in number, they keep the grasses short, decreasing the risk of fire starting.

01:32:35      Fire isn't always bad though, as it allows new grass shoots to grow, offering the herd a fresh treat before they face their final obstacle, the infamous Mara River.

01:33:06      Every aspect of their crossing poses a danger to the wildebeest.

01:33:18      The banks are steep and the river has fast, treacherous currents.

01:33:31      And with no herd leader, deciding where to cross is a real challenge.

01:33:57      For many of the calves, this is the first time they've seen a river, let alone the Mara's greatest threat.

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01:34:17 Nile crocodile have been waiting six months for this feast to arrive.

01:34:27 It's worth the wait. A single feed can sustain a crocodile for months.

01:34:47 At the Mara, a simple drink can have deadly consequences.

01:34:56 Today, luck has favored the zebra. But for the crocodiles, predation is a numbers game and the numbers are building.

01:35:18 With a single landing, the dam finally breaks unleashing a torrent of wildebeest.

01:35:50 In moments like this, up to 50,000 wildebeests might cross in one go.

01:36:05 But with millions of wildebeests trying to cross the river, it can take weeks for the entire herd to get to the other side.

01:36:20 Crossing in many different places.



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01:36:52 For the wildebeest, there is safety in numbers, but many won't make it, taken by the strong currents or the jaws of hungry crocodiles.

01:37:12 But the vast majority will make it. Home at last on the northern plains where the grass is plentiful.

01:37:27 [music]

01:37:32 It's a time to rest and refuel.

01:37:38 Before rains of Wooly [?] return calling them south to their birthing grounds once again.

01:37:57 The migration is an epic odyssey that not only ensures the herd's own survival, but helps maintain the entire Serengeti ecosystem.

01:38:14 [music]

01:38:41 It is an ecosystem in which every animal is connected, from the largest to the smallest.

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01:38:58      Each plays an important role, including us, as we act  
as guardians and protectors of these wild places for  
the generations to come.

01:39:19      [music]

01:39:33      [credits]

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