

Field and screen

Documentary filmmaker will bring world vision to MSU class

By Tyler Sipe

His office is two worlds. One, an office adorned with various plaques showing his accomplishments in documentary film, various pictures of exotic wildlife and a room full of video production equipment. His second office is one that gives him a sense of euphoria, that of being out in nature and enjoying the life accompanying it.

"You can never explain to anyone the feeling of waking up in the morning and riding an Asian elephant," said Jim Jabara, who is owner and creator of Our Small Planet, an award-winning natural history film production company in East Lansing, Mich.

Born and raised in Northern Michigan, Jabara attributes much of his environmental passions to his early childhood development in Michigan's north country. Throughout his youth, Jabara enjoyed hiking through the woods, fishing and rafting.

"I think it's my childhood that brought me the great appreciation for nature and wildlife that has taken me down the environmental path."

And that environmental path has been an amazing and long path of visiting beautiful and exotic locales to document different wildlife.

One site in particular stays within Jabara's mind incessantly: his first documentary assignment 12 years ago.

"Nepal will always be dear to my heart," he said of his experience in the tropical low-



Photo by Tyler Sipe

Documentary filmmaker Jim Jabara has more than 20 years experience producing nature films. This fall, he teams up with Knight Chair of Environmental Journalism Jim Detjen to teach a class on environmental filmmaking. "I hope to learn what are the issues students feel are important and become a better mentor through their insight," Jabara said.

lands of the Royal Chitwan National Park in the Terai region of Nepal. "Sleeping in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains really makes an impression on you.

"Everything about that country is very beautiful and very spiritual."

Jabara has more than 20 years of professional experience and over a dozen documentaries under his belt. His experiences in those years have left him with incredible stories and memories.

One such story occurred along the Karnali River in Nepal.

Jabara and a local tour guide climbed up a tree to get a shot of a male Asian elephant. The tour guide insisted that the climb up the tree was a bad idea, after telling Jabara several stories of irate elephants killing local people.

Jabara took the guide's word, but persisted up the tree to get

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Jim Jabara,
owner and creator, Our Small Planet

the shot for his documentary on the three Asian subspecies of elephant. After filming the elephant for about 30 minutes in the tree, the two decided to get a closer look at the elephant through the tall grass surrounding him.

The elephant lay there silently, eyeing the two cautiously from 20 yards away, while throwing dirt on his large body to cool down under the hot sun.

Suddenly the batteries ran out in Jabara's camera, so the two decided to call it quits temporarily. As they walked away, something provoked the animal, perhaps a broken twig, recalled Jabara.

"In an instant, we heard the elephant get up and charge our way," Jabara said. "The two of us had about 30 to 40 yards to run down the river."

And that's what they did, running for their lives, sliding down the steep river bank and ruining Jabara's video equipment in the process.

While all this was happening, Jabara's wife, Josephine, sat in horror across the riverbank watching the action unfold through her binoculars.

"I could see the whole time that the elephant was watching Jim like a hawk," Josephine said. "Looking and listening, looking and listening."

"That's when I decided to get in the canoe, but not after taking a snap shot of the elephant on top of the riverbank."

While Jabara and the tour guide made it safely across the river, the elephant stood at the top of the riverbank cliff, stomping his feet into the ground. The elephant then proceeded to butt its head into the large tree the two had been filming from, emphasizing the enormous command of power he really had over the two relatively powerless humans.

"It's these stories that we have together and that we can tell our kids," Josephine said.

But to understand the stories, you have to understand the roots of Jabara's production life, which began at Michigan State University. In 1978, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in environmental education.

"A couple of years ago, we were at an alumni dinner (for Education alum)," Jabara said. "The crazy thing is that environmental education is extinct."

Jabara said he accumulated much of his video production knowledge from telecommunication and film classes, and his environmental education degree helped him write the script for many of his informative documentaries for TV and children's programming.

He is taking his experiences to start a new generation of wildlife documentaries and not let the knowledge he garnered become extinct like many of the animals he brought to the attention through television.

In fall 2002, Jabara will team up with MSU's Knight Chair of Environmental Journalism Jim Detjen to instruct environmental filmmaking.

The course will involve production as it applies to professional environmental motion pictures: the sound, the narration, use of interviews and how to piece the overall package together as an environmental story.

"I hope they walk away with a tape they can show some agency or potential employer," Jabara said. "I hope to learn what are the issues students feel are important and become a better mentor through their insight."

"I think the picture comes naturally. I believe it is possible to have a spiritual level with nature."



GUEST COMMENTARY • TERRY LINK

Forget Wall Street, focus on environmental stock

It is not an infrequent occurrence to hear reports of stock prices, inflation and Gross National Product (GNP) numbers with most news broadcasts these days. Most daily newspapers have a business section or at least a page devoted to business issues. There's a saying that you are what you measure, so by that standard how do we appear?

Look at what the media tell us:

"The Dow Jones tumbled 170 points on heavy trading of more than one billion shares."

"Consumer confidence is lagging, dropping 0.2 percent from last month's figure."

"Wholesale prices rose 2.3 percent for the month, hinting that demand for products may once again signal a rebound in the economy."

Given this standard then, that we are what we measure, it should be no surprise that we have become "homo economus." By constantly trying to measure wealth by GNP and stock prices, we tend to idolize consumption, while we devalue much of what gives life its true meaning—namely our connections to each other and with the marvelous and mysterious spinning sphere that provides us with life.

Why, for instance, do we hear no reports of the Earth Charter in our daily news? A search of the Lexis-Nexis General News database finds only seven articles related to the charter in the past six months. This despite the fact that it was discussed at the United Nations Rio+ 10 Summit in Johannesburg and before the UN General Assembly. Given the U.S. government's recent go-it-alone practice, perhaps it's not surprising that a document that picks up where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights leaves off is not discussed on Capitol Hill let alone in the press.

The Earth Charter is the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation about common goals and shared values. Its 16 principles address not only ecological integrity, but also social and economic justice, democracy, nonviolence and peace, and care and respect for the community of life. The U.S. Conference of Mayors has endorsed it as have hundreds of organizations and communities from around the world. Why is the charter so invisible in this country?

I believe it's past time for our daily press to give citizens equivalent daily reports on the health of our biosphere. Why not report on the spread or decline of disease in humans, animals and plants? Or give regular updates on receding glaciers, severity of storms or increased rider-

ship on mass transit and its effect on reducing pollution? A daily report might sound like this:

"Energy consumption was up briskly in June. But on a bright note the percentage of power generated from renewable resources climbed 25 percent faster than the overall increase. This has resulted in an overall drop in greenhouse gas emissions despite the rise in overall consumption."

How about we start reporting not only raw agricultural statistics production but also the implications of those numbers, such as, "Michigan saw its consumption of lettuce produced locally climb 19 percent from last year, perhaps because local growers were more effective in marketing locally grown food. This boost in the state economy is welcomed. The diminished transportation need of locally produced food has other advantages for state residents. The reduction of air pollution, traffic congestion and noise with a simultaneous increase in the freshness of produce is a bigger benefit for consumers."

We must understand that the condition of our air, land and water is more important than fluctuations in our stock portfolios. Making environmental information more prominent and regularly available as we do with stock prices and business reports would be a step toward crucial mindfulness.

We might even copy a Wall Street/business reporting model and highlight a socially or environmentally responsible firm or organization that is developing products, services or processes that help build more sustainable communities. We need all the hope we can find.

We need to nourish the entrepreneurial spirit towards community solutions. And we need the mass media to give more of its news hole to report daily on the indicators of total community health, not simply the sterile financial numbers. If we were to give at least equal play to the natural world, we might just create a future where all will flourish. We ignore our environment at the peril of our children and grandchildren. By offering regular daily doses of the health of our planet, the media will be a more responsible partner in its recovery. By making visible more measures of what we value, we just may nurture a transformation to a more sustainable society.

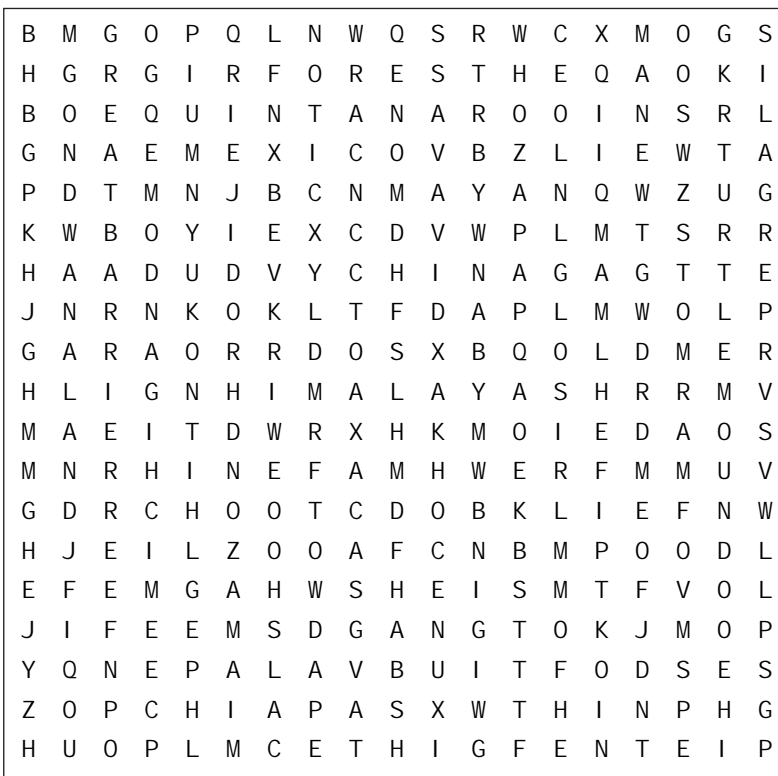
Terry Link is director of the Office of Campus Sustainability, adjunct faculty member with the Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars program and a librarian at Michigan State University.

Word Search: Places in EJ Magazine

created by Kristen Tuinstra

Find the following places mentioned elsewhere in this issue of *EJ*. Words can be found horizontally, vertically, diagonally and backwards. The solution can be found on page 33.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Amazon | Marmots |
| Chiapas | Mayan |
| China | Mexico |
| Ejido | Michigan |
| Gangtok | Monsoon |
| Gir Forest | Nepal |
| Gondwanaland | Oaxaca |
| Great Barrier Reef | Quintana Roo |
| Himalayas | Turtle Mound |
| India | Yukon |



NAMES IN THE NEWS

LAUREN BURDICK, a graduate of South Lyon High School in Salem Township, Mich., and winner of the high school environmental journalism \$1,000 scholarship, served two years on her school newspaper as a columnist, reporter and news editor. She is now a freshman at MSU's School of Journalism. In high school, Lauren ran cross-country, was secretary for the National Honor Society and tutored a fourth-grader. She enjoys travelling and has visited Australia, New Zealand and Central America. She visited two rainforests and snorkeled along the Great Barrier Reef. Someday she hopes to write for a newspaper or magazine.

JIM DETJEN spent five months in China on a Fulbright fellowship, teaching the first environmental journalism course in China at Nankai University in Tianjin. He gave more than 30 lectures throughout China on environmental journalism, freedom of information and news media ethics.

ARVIND DIDDI recently traveled to Australia to serve as the teacher's assistant for Professor Folu Ogundimu for the study abroad course Australia's Media and Environment. While in Australia, he went bungee jumping and parasailing.

ERIC FREEDMAN, assistant journalism professor, taught at the International Journalism Faculty of Uzbek State World Languages University in Tashkent as a Spring 2002 Fulbright senior scholar. His classes for undergraduates included Modern International Reporting, Feature Writing, the Art of Reporting and the country's first course on environmental and science journalism. Journalism students in Uzbekistan lack textbooks, a comprehensive library and easy Internet access, and their classes are traditionally more theoretical than practical, a legacy of seven decades as part of the Soviet Union before independence in 1991.

SUSANA GUZMAN is working on her master's thesis, which is a sur-

vey of Mexican Environmental Journalists. She is also putting together a Latin American Conference for Environmental Journalists in Mexico, which is scheduled for January 2004. She enjoyed a brief trip back to Mexico, her home country, to visit her friends and family before heading back to MSU.

JEREMY HERLICZEK is a master's student studying visual journalism at MSU, and a photography instructor at MSU and Lansing Community College. When not freelancing as a photojournalist, he conducts documentary photography workshops aimed at helping communities learn more about themselves. He is also a partner with The Global Workshop, LLC, a cross-cultural communication company.

STEPHEN MEADOR has a master's in environmental engineering and worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for 10 years as a commissioned officer. He served on three research ships that traveled all over the world, including Antarctica. He also was involved in hazmat response in New York

Harbor. After graduation, he hopes to work for public radio or television, or be a freelance science and environmental magazine writer.

ALEX NIXON is a first year master's student in the environmental journalism program. He received a B.S. in biology from St. Lawrence University and has spent the past two years working for two scientists studying the biogeochemistry of the Hudson River. His other interests include skiing, rock climbing, photography and hiking with his dog Chopper. Upon completion of his degree, he hopes to start a career as an environmental journalist at a major newspaper or magazine.

TYLER SIPE is a photojournalism junior emphasizing in environmental studies. This fall, he will be photo editor for MSU's *The State News*, the largest collegiate newspaper in the nation. His ultimate goal is to be a photographer for a newspaper or *National Geographic*.

CORBIN SULLIVAN is a first year master's student in the environmental journalism program. Corbin received a B.S. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was

a regular contributor to the science section of the *Daily Cardinal* school newspaper. He is continuing a research internship with Marshfield Clinic and hopes to work for *National Geographic* or a similar magazine upon completion of his degree.

KRISTEN TUINSTRA is working on her master's project, which is a five-year business plan for *EJ*. She received the 2002 Rachel Carson Award for Environmental Journalism last spring.

RANDY YEIP completed his master's in journalism at MSU in May and was named the School's Outstanding Graduate Student. He runs a design consulting business, Raydar Media, and recently finished a redesign of the *Hillsdale* (Mich.) *Daily News*. He also redesigned the Web site for the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism (environmental.jrn.msu.edu). He continues to serve as art director for *EJ*. In conjunction with the Michigan Press Association and the MSU School of Journalism, Randy is planning a newspaper design seminar for the spring.