

Proposal: Ravens/Tortoise Documentary 12/15/09

Submitted By: Topic Productions, Inc.
1735 27th Street
San Pedro, CA 90732

Contact: Tim Branning
310-714-8962
tbranning@mac.com

Creative Summation:

When most people think of man's impact on the environment, they think of the obvious— air pollution, water pollution, and destruction of habitat. The plight of threatened or endangered species is well known by the public and the impact man is having on ecosystems worldwide is much publicized. But seldom does the average person look much beyond these obvious issues.

Because of this, the story of a species that is thriving because of human activity might seem like welcome news, at least to those unaware of the consequences.

The common raven is a perfect example of this seeming contradiction. In recent years, raven populations have exploded across the American southwest— in some areas increasing by as much as 1,000%. They are quickly becoming one of the most successful species in many areas.

This has occurred because man has subsidized ravens by providing abundant food and water. Trash, municipal waste, picnic and restaurant facilities, pet feed, irrigation, sewage, and other human-generated resources provide ravens with a ready supply of food and water. Often this happens in areas where it was once scarce. In addition, landscaping, buildings, utility poles and other man-made structures provide secure nesting sites where few existed before.

As a result, the mushrooming raven population is now disrupting the natural balance, putting pressure on endemic species including the desert tortoise.

In the Mojave Desert the desert tortoise was listed as threatened in 1990. The Mojave Desert covers more than 20,000 square miles in four states. It is home to over 2,500 species of plants and animals, more than 100 of which are in some degree of peril. The Mojave is a fragile environment that has

suffered steady abuse for years. The desert tortoise, a valuable part of the desert ecosystem, has suffered with it.

For decades desert tortoise populations have been falling. Encroachment, off-road vehicle use, grazing, mining, climate change, and other factors have all contributed to the decline of this iconic animal. The desert tortoise is so well known and loved by the public that it was named the California State Reptile. Sadly, it's own popularity has turned against it as countless animals have been collected as pets. Some of these pets, when released back into the wild, may even serve as vectors for disease.

Now ravens are actively preying on juvenile desert tortoises. In one notorious case 250 juvenile desert tortoise shells were found under a single raven nest. While raven predation on tortoises may have always existed, the vastly increased number of ravens is tipping the scales for the desert tortoise. In some areas the number of juvenile desert tortoises has declined by 75%-100%. This is devastating news for a species that can take up to 20 years to reach reproductive maturity.

The shocking decline of the desert tortoise has spawned several programs aimed at helping restore its place in the desert ecosystem. Research, inter-agency cooperation and public awareness campaigns are bringing new forces to bear. In one recent test, the simple construction of an 18-inch high fence along a stretch of highway reduced the number of tortoise fatalities from motorists by 75%.

Now, concerned agencies are turning their attention to the raven as a key player in the long-term survival of the desert tortoise. The efforts are wide ranging and include educating the public about the desert tortoise and how human activities are impacting it. Better management of large municipal waste sites is seen as one key to reducing raven food supplies. Informing local governments and businesses about trash and water, and installing raven-proof trash receptacles will help as well. And, in some cases, direct control of ravens known to actively prey on tortoises may also be necessary.

The desert has long been a symbol of the rugged American west. The desert tortoise is one of its most endearing and important creatures. Only time will tell if it has a future. Managing the raven may be one key to its survival.

Length, Format:

Documentaries often do not have a set length. The final running time is determined by the subject matter. However, since one goal of this project is to have the final program aired on public television, there are some guidelines that should be adhered to.

Television documentaries of this type are usually limited to 30 minutes or 60 minutes. At this time we do not anticipate enough material for a full 60 minute program, although this assessment may change as we further explore the issue.

This does not preclude producing a version for DMG use that is longer (or shorter if desired) than 30 minutes. It is possible to produce different versions for different uses, including short Public Service Announcements.

Distribution:

First, we anticipate that the DMG and associated agencies will find use for a video that thoroughly explores one of its core issues— maintenance and/or restoration of a desert ecosystem that will have many benefits including recovery of the desert tortoise.

This video should be included in any media kits relevant to this subject and should be used in conjunction with the Mojave Max Campaign.

In addition, there are numerous outlets for distribution including:

- Museums and Nature Centers
- Libraries
- Schools
- Local Governments
- Social and Civic Organizations
- Conservation Organizations
- Nature/Outdoor Clubs and Groups
- Off-Road Vehicle Associations
- Etc.

Public Television:

There are also opportunities to air the program on local public television stations. Thanks to cable, there are numerous local stations serving smaller communities. Often, smaller cable stations do not have the budget to produce programs on their own and welcome submissions of quality local-interest programming. Even larger stations such as KOCE, which reaches six million households across Southern California, is actively soliciting independently produced programs of local interest.

Major Target Markets:

Riverside County
San Bernardino County
Los Angeles County
Orange County
San Diego County
Las Vegas

Local Target Markets

Coachella Valley
Morongo Basin
Barstow/Lenwood
Needles/Bullhead/Laughlin
Lancaster/Palmdale
El Centro/Imperial Valley
Ridgecrest
Moreno Valley
Victorville/Hesperia
Apple Valley/Helendale

Summation:

The story of the relationship between the desert, the tortoise, and the raven is compelling and indicative of issues being faced not only locally, but worldwide. It represents an opportunity to inform the public about an important local problem and increase public awareness of the complex and sometimes unappreciated consequences of environmental struggles.

Proposed Budget:
Ravens/Tortoise Documentary
12/15/09

Submitted By: Topic Productions, Inc
1735 27th Street
San Pedro, CA 90732

The budget indicated below covers all costs related to production of a master video tape suitable for distribution/duplication.

A limited number of copies (up to 10) will be available for review and distribution at no additional charge. Larger numbers of copies or any special packaging or labeling will require an additional charge. We can offer these services or we can provide a master that can be taken to a duplicator of your choice.

Production Costs:

Script Writing	\$ 4,000
Video Taping	6,500
Editing	8,500
Travel Expenses	1,500
Tape Stock, Supplies, Misc.	1,000
Graphics	1,500
Professional Narrator	2,500
Recording Studio/Editing/Mixing	2,500
Music	2,000
TOTAL	\$ 30,000

Contact: Tim Branning, Topic Productions, Inc.
Cell: 310-714-8962
tbranning@mac.com