







PICTURES: MARTIN HAYWARD SMITH

**ABOVE:** Wildlife cameraman Martin Hayward Smith filming ring-tailed lemurs at dawn in Madagascar. "I can truly say I wouldn't change a day of my life," he says from his home in Norfolk.

# Martin Hayward Smith and the call of the wild

From an early age, all he wanted to do was get as close as possible to the natural world. **Clare Bee** talks to wildlife cameraman Martin Hayward Smith about his globetrotting career

**I**magine sitting for hours in a cold, damp hide in the middle of nowhere with only yourself for company. It's not a prospect most of us would relish, but for Martin Hayward Smith it's all in a day's work, and it's his chance to capture the fleeting moment of a barn owl hunting at dusk or the early morning foray of hares in a frosty field.

"Most of the time I'm out there on my own," says Martin. "I'm in a world of stealth and silence and I let the world of nature come to me."

Born and brought up in Norfolk, Martin's had the rare privilege of travelling all over the globe as a wildlife cameraman, filming with some of the world's most recognised wildlife

presenters, including Ray Mears and David Attenborough.

Martin's love of nature began at an early age at a time when children were able to roam freely and safely. He learned his fieldcraft and outdoor skills by simply being around nature and observing it. His constant companion was the Observer's Book of Birds, where he ticked off birds and birds' eggs as he saw them.

His father, a local press photographer, bought him his first camera (which he proudly still possesses) and so began the life which has led him to all corners of the globe.

Going out on photo shoots with his father, and then seeing the magic appear as he developed the images had

a major impact on him, as did seeing the film *Born Free* at the local cinema.

"The story of the orphaned lion cub Elsa and her eventual release into the wild left a huge imprint in my head," says Martin, "and I knew that one day I would go out there and do a safari."

Indeed, Martin eventually worked alongside conservationist George Adamson, whose work with Elsa was the basis for the film.

As well as photography, Martin was also a keen artist, and applied to Great Yarmouth Art School – but although he was offered a place, his father persuaded him he should follow in the family tradition of joining the Royal Navy. Somewhat ironically, Martin found himself working on HMS





**ABOVE:** Martin with the *Wild France* crew filming with Ray Mears in French alps, and (right) with the pioneering conservationist George Adamson in 1982

Yarmouth and taking part in the 'Cod Wars' of the 1970s.

During his time in the navy, Martin travelled the world, from Oman and Karachi and around Africa – and soon became a ship's diver, developing a love of underwater life.

When he left after five years, he went on to work on oil rig supply ships, where his working schedule of six weeks on and six weeks off gave him the flexibility to travel the world.

"I'd pack a bag, buy an airline ticket and go wherever I liked, camera in hand," he says.

On one of these trips he tried to contact George Adamson, eventually obtaining his address from National Geographic. He received a reply to his letter asking if he could work with George, saying that while there was no work he was more than welcome to come and spend some time with him.

So Martin spent the spring of 1982 photographing and experiencing animals up close in their natural habitat. He continued to apply to television companies for work as a wildlife cameraman, but was still regretting turning down that college art course. So in 1983 he applied for a photography course at Southport College of Art.

Having completed the course, he was still itching to film wildlife and spotted an article in the local press about Anglia Television's *Survival* series on housemartins being filmed at Gooderstone in Norfolk.

He couldn't believe it was so close, and contacted the local cameraman Chris Knights, offering his services.

Chris took him on as his assistant, and consequently Martin's work as a wildlife cameraman really started to take off.

"Chris is still my friend and mentor," says Martin. "From then on doors began to open at *Survival*, and I'd finally got where I wanted to be."

More work swiftly followed, from filming the eight-part series *Wings* for Channel 4 to *A Wensum Year* for *Survival* TV.

One of Martin's biggest breaks came when he was invited to work at the National Wildlife Unit based in Bristol. Through colleague Peter Crawford (with whom he was working on *Living Britain*) he was introduced to Mike Salisbury, who was then producing *The Life of Birds* with David Attenborough.

This led to other assignments, sometimes working with smaller units, but always knowing that for him, he had the best job in the world.

"I still have to pinch myself and remind myself that here I am filming such amazing creatures," he says. "One minute I can be filming the most bizarre tree kangaroos in Australia, thinking it can't get any better and then I'm back in Europe working on *Wild France* with Ray Mears. It gives me an incredible buzz!"

One of Martin's proudest accomplishments has been his recent book *My Year With Hares*, photographed in and around Norfolk. With unlimited access to various private locations in North Norfolk, Martin was able to film never-seen-before behaviour in these "iconic, spiritual and magical" creatures.

With the book taking the form of

diary entries, it shows the changes in the hares' behaviour amid the stunning and sometimes stark Norfolk landscape.

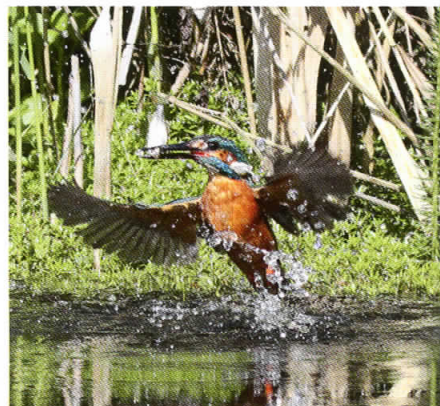
After so much globetrotting, Martin has decided to try to stay a bit nearer home for a while. He's currently filming *The Enchanted Forest* at a local venue for a Japanese television company and also an eight-part series for Channel 5 on puppies.

"It's very different and it's a lot of fun," he says, "and it's also off the wall, as we're filming at puppy height!"

He's also planning another book in the not too distant future.

"I can truly say I wouldn't change a day of my life," says Martin, as he looks out from his home in the Norfolk countryside. With buzzards wheeling overhead, barn owls perching on nearby posts and daily sightings of kingfishers flashing along the river at the end of his garden, you can certainly understand why.

**For details and information on the work of Martin, please see his website at [www.martinhaywardsmith.com](http://www.martinhaywardsmith.com)**



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