

# BEHIND THE LENS

*Martin Hayward Smith travels the world as a wildlife film-maker, photographer and author. Sarah Whittley catches up with him at his home and mini nature reserve, in North Norfolk*

ONE of my first meetings with Martin was on a bumpy hare safari in deepest, dustiest North Norfolk. As I chat to him now, several years and wildlife films later, he's just back from a dawn shoot at Sculthorpe Moor Community Reserve.

When I ask what he was doing there, Martin replies "Payback time. In the past I've used this wonderful reserve for some of my filming and photography work, so when they asked if I could help out with a film showing the reserve through the seasons, it was a pleasure to be able to offer my services."

I had a sneak preview of some of the footage - it's breathtakingly beautiful with some lovely atmospheric photography, and Martin hopes the film will be out in December. It will be on show in the reserve's visitor centre and available as on DVD.

Born in Fakenham to a military family, it was a given that Martin would follow suit and carry on the tradition, everyone was happy about this except him. After a miserable stint in the Royal Navy (only chosen as he liked sailing - he had his first lesson when he was four from his dad at Brancaster Staithe).

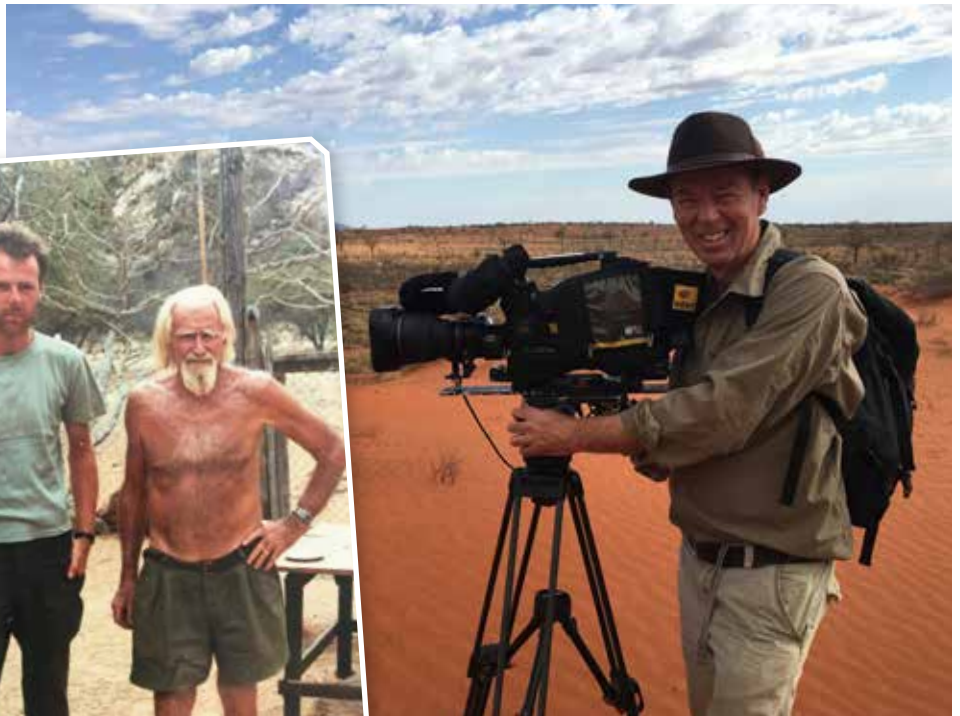
Martin finally escaped and bravely followed his passion for photography and film-making, setting himself up with a studio in Fakenham to pay the bills, whilst trying to break into the world of wildlife film-making.

The first thing I notice in Martin's house - once I've recovered from the shock of a stoat running over my foot - is a photo of a 22-year-old Martin in Africa with the legend George Adamson.

When he was nine, Martin's parents took him to see *Born Free* at Fakenham cinema. The film made such an impact, he knew from then on he wanted wildlife to play a major part in his life. He wrote to everyone he could think of to try and visit George Adamson. Finally, at the age of 22, he was on a plane heading to Kenya to fulfil his dream.

It took a letter to The Royal Geographical Society who told him it was possible to get there if he took victuals and a crate of whisky. He spent two months on camp with George getting close to nature (too close to a leopard cub due for release who gave him a decent sized cut on his nose).

Desperate to learn more, Martin became camera assistant to farmer and wildlife photographer Chris Knights. His first paid job was for Norwich-based Survival TV, with a film about the River Wensum. Since then, his career has taken him all over the world. I loved hearing about the commission from Channel 4 for *Wings*, a program about birds - they bought him



Above: Martin filming in Australia with Ray Mears  
Left: Martin and George Adamson



a VW camper van and waved him off with a list for a year's worth of filming.

Listening to him talk about the places he's visited and the films he's made, you can tell Martin still has the passion. There are tales from Madagascar, the Arctic, Great Barrier Reef and Peru for a film about clay-licking Macaws and twilight tapirs, where the pilot dropped him on a small jungle airstrip telling him he'd come back for him in six weeks. His only company was a cook and a local guide, both of which spoke no English.

Martin has made 47 programs with Ray Mears with more planned. He's also worked

closely with producer Charlie Clay, whose programmes include *Jimmy's Farm* and *Trawlermen*.

Closer to home, after filming *Hares* in North Norfolk for a year, he went on to write and publish a book about the experience. He's now done the same thing with stoats... watch this space!

**If you'd like to find out more about the Hare Safaris and other North Norfolk wildlife trips, visit [www.martinhaywardsmith.com](http://www.martinhaywardsmith.com)**

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