

Nature Film-Maker Off the Air

**Joachim Ruhstein stops –
after being numerous
awarded**

By our colleague
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Utting

A royal elephant bull “with tusks that must be worth a fortune,” a small bluethroat or a weasel, all have already been captured by Joachim Ruhstein – with his camera.

About twenty years ago the by now 53-year-old began to film animals in the wild. To date there are “five or six films,” he remembers. “Not all of them are finished, some are only short.” But among them are also two 45-minute ‘feature films.’ With his “On the Tracks of Peer Gynt,” shot in Norway, two months ago the native of Utting has won a bronze medal at the 8th international *Nature*, a nature film festival for professionals and amateurs. For the lay filmmaker this has not been the first time he was recognized. In 1987 and 88 his films “Secret Robbers – The Life of the Ermine” and “A Bird’s Year at the Ammersee” each achieved first place. “The Awards are for me a comparison as to where I stand internationally.” Ruhstein still derives pleasure from the recognition today.

From Fishing to Film

At filming arrived Ruhstein via his hobby: sports fishing. “When fishing you get to see many animals and at one point I started to bring the camera.” His knowledge about filming and wildlife he learnt through practical experience or acquired from books. So one may find a complete collection of



Grzimek’s works on his living room shelf. According to Ruhstein, the family has always “patiently” accepted his passion, even when they could not join him on his many journeys hunting for good pictures.

But “this is the end of it,” Ruhstein sighs. Not only are 16mm films being replaced by videos, but money also plays a not so insignificant role in his decision to break off filming in the future. “To produce a film is a great effort and very costly.” For 30 years a self-employed consulting structural engineer, he has always paid for his hobby out of his own pocket. The income from his films is in comparison rather modest. “Sometimes professionals from television come and ask if they can use a passage from my films. That’s how some of the costs are recovered.” Now and then he also gives away a clip for free.

The filmmaker never wanted to join the business professionally. “But it would be great if I could

sell one or the other of my films,” he hopes. “Then it would really be fun.” However, filming is not mere fun. “What follows the fun is hard work.” A professional cutter usually did the editing, but Ruhstein never let himself be relieved of the whole thing. He himself committed to paper the ideas for the text that was later to accompany the finished films. In most films it is the voice of popular Bavarian actor Fritz Strassner, which leads the audience through hot desert steppes or cold mountain terrains. “Africa was definitely the biggest adventure for me. If one is filming only 8m away from a female lion without noticing her, that is pretty exciting.” But the expanse of Norway made the biggest impression on him. “The country is almost deserted and has a relatively rich wildlife. It’s no comparison to our densely populated landscapes with the forests almost vacant from hunting.” Today, his films represent a “nice memory” of past adventures and struggles.