



HD `Soap opera' with teeth (and claws)
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THE adrenaline running through zoologist Jonathan Scott is like nothing he has ever experienced before. As he sprints, he doesn't look behind him for fear he will be trampled by a pursuing hippopotamus.

Having a wild animal charge at you is terrifying but for Scott and his fellow Big Cat Diary presenters, Simon King and Saba Douglas-Hamilton, it's a way of life.

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"You couldn't live in Africa for 30 years and do what I have done and not have a time when you could hear a hippo chasing you down," Scott says on the phone from his home in Kenya.

"These creatures move faster than you think they would. You get lulled into a false sense of security, which could prove fatal."

It was 1974 when Scott packed his belongings and joined an **Encounter Overland** tour from London bound for Johannesburg to do the one thing that truly brought him excitement: tracking wild animals through photography. He later expanded into film.

Scott refers to the BBC-produced Big Cat Diary as a "wildlife soap opera".

Winning viewers with beauty, pathos and high-octane drama, the series follows the presenters as they discover the day-to-day lives of cheetahs, leopards and lions.

"I was always interested in big cats, I think most people are, and that's why the series has been so successful," Scott says of the program that began in 1996.

"It's like beauty and the beast. These amazing creatures are beautiful in the care they lavish on their cubs, but the next minute they will battle to pull down a buffalo.

"The contrast between mother love and predator is always intriguing."

The union of mother and cub couldn't be more evident in the first episode of Big Cat Diary screening on Tuesday night.

Scott tracks a swift cheetah and her cub, which he affectionately names Toto. Bush bashing in his trusted Land Rover, Scott spies the pair as the mother attempts to find dinner for her little one.

As well as providing some educational information, including that one in four cheetah cubs don't make it to adult life, Scott points out Toto is only five weeks old and would be no bigger than his two hands.

The zoologist says that since the program aired overseas he has had many viewers talk to him about the cute cub.

“Everyone fell in love with this little cub. You grew a real attachment to these animals,” he says. “But, as much as I love cats, I never think of them as anything more than wild creatures. I respect them for what they are.”

Big Cat Diary screens on ABC1 at 8pm on Tuesdays.

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