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Autor: Eckert, Heinz
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A biologist becomes a TV star

"Netz Natur" (Nature Network) is one of the most popular shows on Swiss TV. Biologist Andreas Moser manages to attract around 400,000 viewers eight times a year and has been doing so for almost 20 years. But he doesn't feel like a star - he's too shrewd and dedicated for that.

By Heinz Eckert

Andreas Moser's interest in animals stems from his background and family. Having grown up near to Basel Zoo, or "Zolli" as the locals call it, Moser spent a lot of time with his grandfather in the zoological garden, came into contact with animals and keepers, sometimes helping them with their work, and learned a great deal about animals in the process. These experiences influenced his choice of career and the course of his life. He actually wanted to become a zookeeper, but his parents persuaded him to finish his school education first and go on to university as well. He chose biology, majoring in zoology. He carried out field studies on indigenous reptiles during his degree course at the University of Basel and soon became an expert on snakes.

After graduating, Andreas Moser ran the poisonous animals laboratory at the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basel as an academic assistant and laboratory chief. There he was responsible for keeping poisonous snakes, spiders and scorpions.

Successor to a legend

Instead of taking up the opportunity available to him to travel to Africa to carry out further research into poisonous snakes, Moser joined the Swiss state television company in 1987. He worked on the "Karussell" programme and began producing TV programmes on natural history. When the highly successful "Karussell" came to an end, he joined the "Menschen-Technik-Wissenschaft" editorial team. The concept of "Netz-Reportage aus der Natur" was developed here as a successor to the well-known productions of Hans A. Traber. Moser has been the programme's presenter since 1989 and its head of editorial content since 1993. Last year, the programme featured the following topics: "All about the cow", "Switzerland - a cow nation?", "Who stinks here?", "Wild nature - money or life", "Mangroves - apes, crabs and crocodiles", "Horned animals" and "Animals - creatures of honour".

Moser is highly committed to and a strong advocate of the interests of animals and nature, but he is certainly no missionary. A natural scientist to the core, he analyses situations, makes deductions and draws conclusions. He presents these to viewers in an easy-to-understand way, but without dramatic or pedagogic undertones.

The wolf and the sheep

He adopted the same approach when the Swiss Parliament expressed concern about wolves migrating back to Switzerland. Moser said that the killing of sheep and goats by wolves was a problem of man's own making. "Wolves treat unattended pets as part of nature", he explained to Parliament. The 10 or so wolves living in Switzerland kill around 350 sheep and goats a year. That is a small number in relation to the 4,000 to 10,000 sheep "which die each year, sometimes in excruciating pain, due to accidents and diseases because shepherds leave them to graze in the mountains for weeks or months on end without supervision or protection".

Moser pointed out that sheep on the Alps need constant shepherding and occasional treatment from a vet in the same way as pets. They require protection at night, ideally through electric fencing, and shepherds and sheepdogs are also needed to look after the flock. "Sheep looked after in this way are rarely in danger from wolves", said Moser, emphasising that federal government pays farmers 43 million Swiss francs a year in subsidies for keeping sheep. He said this funding should also be used to keep animals in accordance with the provisions of animal protection legislation.

He was fairly astonished that Parliament would not take this on board in the debate on wolves. Wolves are the natural adversaries of roe, chamois and deer and are biologically programmed to live here. It is simply that they have been unable to establish themselves in the past because they have often been killed by poachers. They are also

an ideal target for misuse by politicians in election campaigns for propaganda purposes.

Honorary doctorate

Moser views himself primarily as a conveyer of information because he sees how much nature is being destroyed by a lack of awareness. He explains: "'Netz Natur' is an ideal platform for showing people how nature is interconnected and explaining to them through images, the senses and sometimes also through emotion that other perspectives exist besides the human one." In an age when nature is increasingly sacrificed for industry, for the construction of housing and roads, but also for leisure activities, he has the task, within the scope of Swiss television's public



service mandate, of reporting on the opportunities and risks for the natural environment in a scientifically accurate but entertaining way and in line with journalistic criteria.

Just how skilfully he does this is highlighted not only by his huge fan base but also by the fact that his rather unspectacular pro-

Andreas Moser
filming one of
his programmes
(right)

Images of silkworms
and butterflies from
the programme "Wie
ein Schmetterling
die Welt verändert"
(How a butterfly
changes the world) –
below left



gramme has neither fallen victim to cost-cutting measures nor had to follow the widespread trend towards sensationalism and populism in Swiss television.

Andreas Moser has received many awards for his work, but he was particularly pleased with the University of Zurich's reasons for awarding him an honorary doctorate: "The University of Zurich awards an honorary doctorate to Dr. Andreas Moser in recognition of his services to the portrayal of animals and their relationship with their natural habitat. Through his television programmes, Andreas Moser has made a major contribution to improving people's understanding of animals in the places where they live and of other important issues concerning the natural environment and, in so doing, has played an important role in the protection of animals and nature." This was recognition of Moser's efforts from the highest echelons.

New awareness among youngsters

Moser will, unfortunately, never run out of issues for "Netz Natur". He believes biodiversity will be extremely important for the future. The highly diverse relationships between

different species are vital to the existence of living organisms, including humans. Moser explains: "Just take milk and meat for example – without the vast number of soil-dwelling organisms, no grass or cultivated plants would grow. And cattle and sheep need grass to produce milk and meat. Everything is interrelated." He points to further correlations: without bees there would be no pollination of fruit trees, without earthworms there would be no humus on the fields or on the forest floor which provides food for plants, holds back water and prevents erosion and flooding.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN, has published some alarming figures – of the 47,677 endangered animal and plant species on the red list, 17,291 are at acute risk of extinction. "Nature is fundamental to our existence. By destroying it, we are destroying ourselves", says Moser. "Despite this, we continue to chop down the tropical rain forests – the most abundant eco-systems in existence – and release vast quantities of fertilisers from intensive agriculture into rivers and seas where they destroy coral reefs and make fish infertile owing to the hormones in the water."

But are there encouraging signs too? Andreas Moser believes there are. The "Netz Natur" team works a lot with young people and is forever noticing that awareness about interrelationships and attitudes towards nature are better among younger people than with older generations. Youngsters are also willing to make their own contribution. "Politicians cannot afford to make any more decisions concerning nature and the environment that are irreversible. Anything short of this would be unethical. We owe that to future generations", says Moser.

"Netz Natur" is scheduled to be broadcast on the following dates in 2012: 15 March, 26 April, 24 May, 21 June, 20 September, 18 October, 15 November, 20 December

The programme can also be watched online www.sendungen.sf.tv/netz-natur/
All series are also available on DVD:
www.sendungen.sf.tv/netz-natur/Formulare/Kontakt-NETZ-NATUR-SF-1

HEINZ ECKERT is a freelance journalist in Basel; he was the Editor-in-Chief of "Swiss Review" until 2010.