

Three MSU grads receive Emmy awards

BY CAROL SCHMIDT

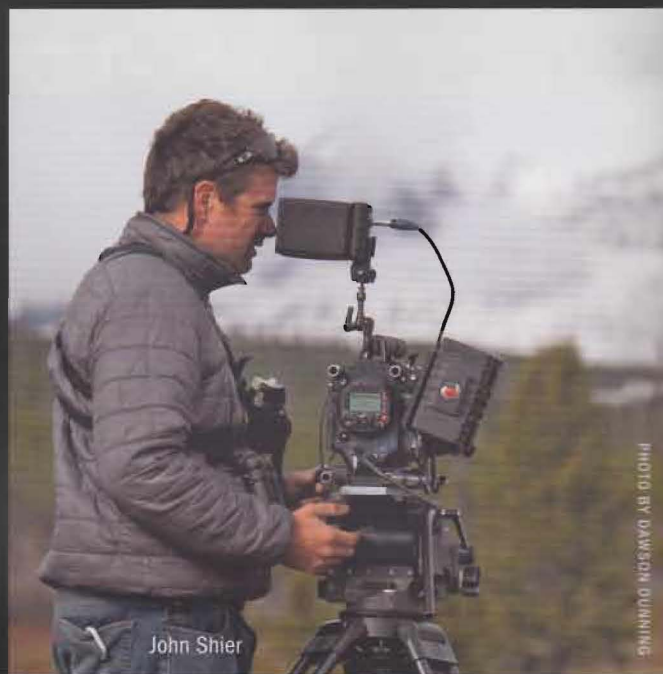


PHOTO BY DAWSON DUNNING

Untamed Americas is a four-episode nature miniseries narrated by actor Josh Brolin that examines wildlife in four ecological areas of the Americas: mountains, coasts, deserts and forests. Shier contributed cinematography of a grizzly in Yellowstone, wild horses in Utah, desert scenics, spirit bears in British Columbia and pumas in Patagonia. In addition to the grizzly in Yellowstone, Dunning also filmed bison in South Dakota. Pardo contributed cinematography of spider monkeys in Ecuador.

John Shier '05, Dawson Dunning '12 and Federico Pardo '11, graduates of Montana State University's Master's of Fine Arts in Science and Natural History Filmmaking program, have won Emmy awards for their contributions to National Geographic Channel's miniseries, *Untamed Americas*.

Shier and Pardo were among 19 directors of photography cited on the Emmy from the National Academy of Arts and Sciences for Outstanding Cinematography: Documentary and Long Form category. Dunning was one of nine cameramen cited on the Emmy.

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Shier, who was in the first class of the MFA program in science and natural history filmmaking at MSU, teamed for a remarkable sequence of a Yellowstone Park

grizzly chasing, and ultimately killing, an elk calf that was one of the highlights of the series. The shoot was also the subject of a magazine article, "There Will Be Blood" by Matthew Power, that appeared in the Dec. 1, 2011 edition of *Men's Journal* magazine.

"We basically knew where the bear was, and we knew that she was really good at finding elk calves," Shier said of the research that enabled his team to get the extraordinary footage.

"We were really lucky," Dunning added. "Something like that is incredibly hard to film because you have to keep track of the bears day in and out. Sometimes, you just don't get to see them that often."

Shier's persistence and years of familiarity with Yellowstone made the shoot possible. He and his wife, **Sara Shier** '06, a fellow filmmaker whom he met in the MFA program, and their two small daughters, live in Livingston, Mont. He has filmed Yellowstone wildlife since he first came to MSU from his native Wisconsin in 2001. A graduate of Marquette University with an undergraduate degree in electrical and computer engineering, Shier decided he needed to go another direction after a stint as an engineer.

"I had a vague notion that I wanted to be outside and work in wilderness," he said. He saw a poster for the inaugural MSU Sci-



PHOTO BY ERIC BENNICK

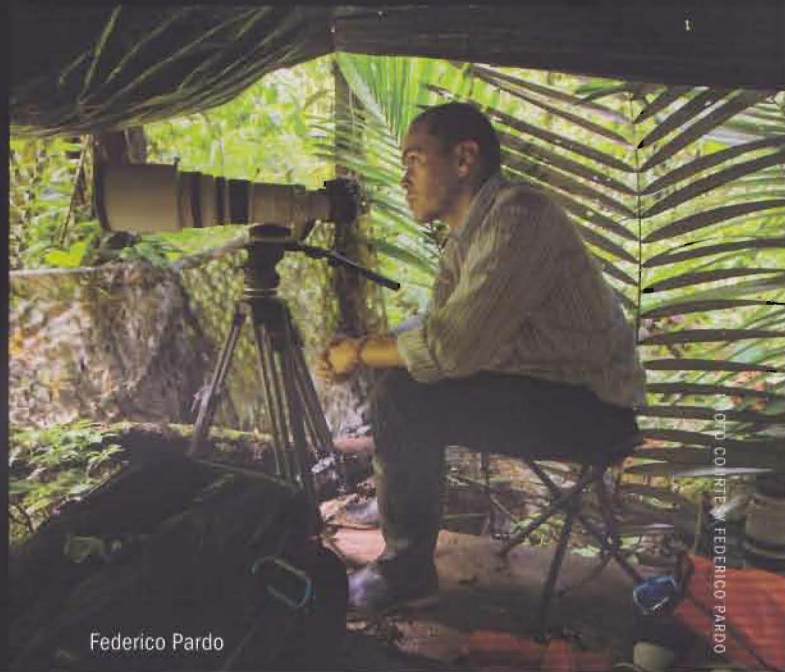


PHOTO COURTESY OF FEDERICO PARDO

Federico Pardo

ence and Natural History Filmmaking class and “something clicked.”

Shier received several awards from wildlife film festivals and a great deal of attention for his work on his wife’s MSU thesis film, which was shot in Yellowstone. That led to an offer from the British Broadcast Corporation for Shier to work on the BBC’s *Yellowstone* series. The series won a British Academy Film and Television Arts award, the UK’s version of an Emmy.

Dunning said Shier has become known as one of the world’s top wildlife cinematographers.

“(Shier’s) skill set is unparalleled in producing great behavior sequences, great time lapse work and really beautiful camera movement in his shots,” Dunning said.

A native of Otter, Mont., Dunning came to MSU with a prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship that he received after graduating with a wildlife biology degree from the University of Montana. While at MSU, he also won a Fulbright Scholarship to New Zealand where he studied and filmed conservation practices on New Zealand’s offshore islands.

“Right now, there is a strong market for wildlife films,” said Dunning, who also lives in Livingston and makes his living shooting for such companies as the BBC, National Geographic and PBS.

“I think I have the best job in the world,” Dunning said. “You get to go to the most remarkable places on earth to make these films. But this wouldn’t have been possible without going through the film program at MSU. It would have been such a hard route to make the necessary connections that I made there.”

—Dawson Dunning

Pardo, who is an independent documentary filmmaker and photographer in his native Colombia, interned at National Geographic’s natural history unit in Washington, D.C., after he graduated from MSU. His research on the rare behavior of spider monkeys that descend from the Ecuadorian tree canopy to the forest floor to drink water and eat from clay licks, or collpas, led to his involvement in the show. Pardo learned that primatologists had documented the unusual behavior in Tiputini, a remote area of the Ecuadorian Amazon, so the producer asked him to help with the shoot.

“Every day I would walk 1.5 miles to get to the blind that I built so I could film the monkeys without being seen,” Pardo said.

Pardo credits the MSU program as an essential step in his early success.

“As a Colombian, I feel that the three years that I invested in the MFA (at MSU) helped me get to where I wanted to be in a shorter time than if I hadn’t done it,” he said. “Thanks to the process of getting a master’s at MSU, I see myself well prepared to face new challenges and keep moving forward in my field.”

Dunning concurred that attending MSU was a “fast track” to getting started in the competitive industry.

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