

After *THE VELVET QUEEN*



WHISPERS IN THE WOODS

THE NEW FILM BY VINCENT MUNIER

PAPRIKA FILMS & KOBALANN PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT

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A FILM BY VINCENT MUNIER

2025 – FRANCE – 1H33 – 5.1 – SCOPE



Synopsis

Delving deep into the woodland realms, where lynxes, bears, deer, owls, capercaillies, and other river creatures roam, Munier not only seeks to pay tribute once again to the visual splendor of nature but also to capture the forest's poetic sounds. The whispers of the woods are echoing the whispers passed from Munier's father to himself, and now to his own son. This becomes a heartfelt declaration of Munier's love for his father, intertwining familial bonds with the untamed beauty of the natural world.

Interview with Vincent Munier



Vincent, after the epic journey that found you running after *THE VELVET QUEEN*, we see you in this new film, once again looking for wildlife, but this time in a much more intimate setting. What is the film about?

WHISPERS IN THE WOODS is effectively a more intimate film. This time, there's no expedition to a faraway place or any exoticism, but rather a journey into the forest that made me who I am.

The approach is more immersive, and the camera itself is like an almost animal presence that melts into its environment rather than dominating it. We aim to observe the wildlife, but it continually observes us, too. What interests me is this mirror image: not filming from a position of strength, but from a position of weakness, with attention.

In what way is the film more intimate?

It's intimate because it touches on a bond between three generations: my father, Michel, my son, Simon, and me. I grew up near the forest with parents who taught me to observe the trees, the birds, and the wind, the way you look at a treasure. It's a rare privilege, and I felt it was time to share that in a film.

There's family intimacy, of course, with the trio that the three of us form, but there's also a sensorial intimacy. That can be felt in the way we lie in wait, together, in silence, hoping for something to appear. That intimacy comes when you accept making yourself minuscule, so that you can fully experience what surrounds you.

The way your trio is presented is almost like a story tale.

Yes, very early on, the film started to look like a vigil or a story tale. The cabin became a focal point, like a hearth you gather around, where stories come to life and are passed from one generation to the next. But the story isn't just about a family; it's also a way of saying that the forest itself is telling a story.

What "whisper" does the film's title refer to?

That was the film's main challenge: letting the forest speak for itself. It has its own voice, its own song that is subtle, discreet, and sometimes so powerful. Sound, with all its intricacies, is of capital importance.

For around ten years, I've been integrating sound into my overall approach. It has become as essential as images, sometimes even more so. It leaves room for useful fantasy.

I would like the film's viewers to feel as though they themselves were lying in wait, in the darkness, with all of their senses alert. On the lookout, hearing before seeing, whether it's a tawny owl, eagle-owl, deer, crane, or, of course, a western capercaillie.

At night, in particular, the sounds denote presences. The sounds of breathing, crackling noises, or the rustling of wings that you can almost make out in the shadows. We tried to keep our voices to a murmur, to whisper rather than talk out loud. It's a way of living within the forest. Very few sound effects have been added. The noises are all natural, recorded on the spot by placing battery-run microphones in strategic locations just a few days in advance. We did the same thing for the visuals: nothing artificial, no special effects, only the language of the woods: cries, yowling, living silence.

How often did you film?

Every morning and every evening, I head out around my farm in the Vosges, surrounded by forest, in search of something new. It's become an obsession. I have to film a lot in order to have any hope of capturing such moments, and then spend months logging all the footage so that I only keep what's essential. My tenet, if I have one, would be patience - both in the field and behind the editing table when I'm selecting the images and creating the narrative.

Were all of these visuals only shot around your home?

Most of them, yes. Some of them were shot in the Jura. Those are the forests I grew up in. Where I learned to observe wildlife. I was always convinced that there was no need to travel around the world to experience intense moments. A fox passing through a clearing, in the morning or evening light, can bring you just as many emotions as you can feel when you observe a panther in the Himalaya. That proximity was important for me. I wanted to show that there's enchantment to be found right here, close by, in the most familiar landscapes, if you just accept to immerse yourself in them. The film is anchored in this territory, but it's also open to other landscapes. We also filmed in Norway during an initiatory journey for Simon to see the western capercaillie.

How many months of shooting and nights on the lookout did it take?

It's very hard to say precisely. You could say ten years, at the very least, because the film also uses images filmed a long time ago during my time spent on the lookout in the Vosges. I spent thousands of hours, often without spotting anything, but those hours prepared me for the rare moments when I was blessed with an encounter.



On top of those images come concentrated periods of filming, over a year, depending on the weather and the availability of Simon and my father.

We didn't purchase any images, nor are there any reconstitutions. The film is the fruit of daily commitment. And for that, everything depends on attention, patience, and above all discretion during filming. Often, for the landscape and animal scenes, I was alone, and for the scenes shot at the cabin and in Norway, I had a very small crew. Two cameraman friends, Antoine Lavorel and Laurent Joffrion, assisted me. I had no sound engineer or technician. I had no cranes or drones, tracking shots or artificial mist, and of course, there were no tame animals. Just a camera designed for discretion.

Another major character is the practically legendary bird.

Yes, in the film, the western capercaillie is much more than just a bird. It's a character in its own right. It shaped my father's life, then mine, and for us, it was a master of being on the lookout. It's thanks to that bird that we learned to wait, listen, and remain motionless for hours at a time in the silence of the forest. My father spent over one thousand nights beneath a fir tree, every year in early spring, learning more about it.

Its disappearance from the Vosges is also a painful symbol. After decades of striving, and despite all the energy expended by my father and many other naturalists, the species declined and, finally, disappeared from the Vosges mountain range. There are three reasons for that: global warming, more industrialised forest management, and increased human disturbance.

Yet, the western capercaillie's departure doesn't just represent a loss. Its disappearance is also a message. It reminds us that the forest is an ecosystem, and that it can return, if we give it the chance. Other species, such as the eagle-owl, the Eurasian pygmy owl, and the black stork, prove that such a return is possible. The western capercaillie, albeit absent, continues to teach us something: to what extent each being counts in the natural balance of wildlife.

Why is it urgent to rethink our relationship to the forest and all living beings?

It's urgent that we realise that the forest isn't just a setting or a reservoir of resources but a complex, living environment. A fertile forest is a forest in which there is a multitude of varieties of trees of different ages, where there's deadwood left on the ground, and dead trees left standing. It's that variety that makes the forest more resilient in the face of climate change.

I also want to recall that we are a part of that environment. Still today, we talk too often about animals as "pests", "game", or things that cause "damage", as if everything should be judged according to our direct interests. That attitude portrays a vision centred on people, in which all other living things are treated as of lower priority. Yet, in the forest, there is no hierarchy. Every single being, from the smallest to the largest, counts in the overall balance.

Aldo Leopold wrote that we should learn to "think like a mountain". Today, I'd like us to learn to think like a forest. To understand who lives here and how. It's no longer enough to simply say that nature is beautiful. You must remember that this beauty isn't a luxury but an essential condition for our survival.

Is that a lack of situational awareness?

Definitely! We become used to mediocrity and sometimes to things that are quite simply unacceptable: polluted or canalised rivers, saturated air, forests cut down and replanted, and homogenised landscapes. And what saddens me is that so few of us are shocked or upset by all of this. It's as if our capacity to feel delight had been extinguished.

I also think that men are particularly affected by this lack of awareness. We've always been taught to value performance, domination, and possession. We're encouraged to hide our weaknesses and not show our emotions. Yet, those weaknesses are precious. They form an asset that is conducive to coexistence.

It makes me furious to realise that so few of us care about the damage we cause to non-human life forms. But I want to keep on hoping that a more mindful and more poetic approach to nature could transform us. We must relearn how to become creatures among creatures, neither superior nor separate.



You're in a good position to know...

Yes. My own life changed radically when I was twelve years old, which is how old Simon was when we were shooting the film, when I came face to face with a deer. Physically, it was a fleeting encounter. Yet, it was sufficient to have an impact on my entire life. Sometimes, it doesn't take much to influence a child's destiny. An encounter, an emotion, or a moment of grace can be all that's needed.

After that, the real challenge is to maintain that intensity as the years go by, despite the weight of your habits and the way society shapes you. You have to remain eternally filled with wonder. That is what I am trying to share with this film: "rekindle the embers of life", as the philosopher, Baptiste Morizot said, so that this fragile flame doesn't go out.

Could it not be a little difficult for Simon to have these two so very passionate, strong characters, these two tutelary figures that have opened the way and left their tracks in the snow before him?

That's a question I often ask myself. My father and I have both left very deep tracks, and that could effectively be very intimidating for Simon. But he's already found his own passions: architecture, theatre, scenery, and costumes. He's not weighed down by our paths; he's following his own.

My view of transmission isn't that it's an injunction to walk in our steps. It's more of an outstretched hand, an opening. As my father says, "we are all a little in what is disappearing". But each person has to choose their own path and leave their own tracks.

When did you really become aware of the treasure your father had handed down to you by giving you the wildlife photography bug?

Very early on. As a teenager, I was immediately gripped by a passion for lying in wait, on the lookout, for images. There was no guarantee that it would become my profession, but the impetus was there.

I rapidly expressed my gratitude to my father. He was a pacific warrior, one of those ecologists from the 1970s-80s who were often caricatured but who fought for every cause they could: defending a stream, protecting a forest that was threatened by a ski lift, opposing destructive projects. His struggles left their mark on me.

The idea of filming came later. I always liked composing pictures, and I wanted to put that expertise to use in the service of his struggles. This film is also a tribute to him, his life force, and all the others who fight, associations, volunteers, and discreet campaigners. Without them, the attrition of life on Earth would have been much more brutal.

Are you also fighting those battles?

Yes, but a little differently. This film is my way of continuing his commitment. I don't consider myself an activist in the traditional sense of the word, but rather someone who conveys emotions. I believe that you can raise awareness through beauty, poetry, and wonder. That's the gateway to action.



Do you sometimes get the urge to give up?

Yes. Sometimes, I want to protect myself from this mayhem, to hide away in my farm, create a Garden of Eden for the animals, and live far away from the restrictions imposed on me.

But when I go into a school to meet children and see the look in their eyes after they've seen a film or a photo, I understand why I carry on. Lots of them tell me that their lives changed after watching a film, or reading a book or an article. That feedback, particularly from the young, is precious. They give me the strength to go on.

After everything *THE VELVET QUEEN* generated, all the agitation, the success, the media exposure, this new film, as intimate a film as it may be, is it also intended to help you refocus?

Not really. You could consider it a return to my roots, but in reality, I never really left them. The Vosges is my anchor point; it brings me balance. My long journeys are just digressions.

THE VELVET QUEEN widened my circle. By inviting a writer who wasn't a naturalist and by reaching an audience that didn't necessarily have a bond with nature, the Velvet Queen brought together two worlds that were unaware of each other.

ABOUT Vincent Munier

Vincent Munier was born in Épinal, in the Vosges, in 1976. He spent his childhood building hides, bivouacking in the forest, canoeing down rivers, and climbing mountains. His father, Michel, an early supporter of ecology, showed him the handy tips he needed to camp in the wild and passed on his visceral need to “enter the forest on the tips of his toes”. Vincent was 12 years old when, hidden beneath a camouflage sheet and trembling with emotion, he took his first photograph of a deer. Upon graduation from high school, he first travelled to the East to see bears, lynx, and wolves, and then to Scandinavia to follow the migratory journey of a flock of common cranes. In 1999, he published his first book, *LE BALLET DES GRUES*.

He did odd jobs as a horticultural worker, mason, and photojournalist to finance the purchase of his photographic equipment. Encouraged by his success in the “Wildlife Photographer of the Year” competition organised by the BBC and the Natural History Museum in London, in 2000, he decided to devote himself entirely to wildlife photography. Thanks to a grant, he spent three months on the island of Hokkaido photographing red-crowned cranes and whooper swans in the snow. The photographs formed the basis for his book *TANCHO* (2004), a personal, poetic work.

Vincent has become renowned for his unique photographic style, inspired by Japanese woodblock prints and Minimalist art: mist, rain, snow, and blizzards adorn landscapes and animals, of which we sometimes only make out the outlines. His pictures came from increasingly distant journeys and were the fruit of lengthy

patience as he aimed to go unnoticed by the natural environment's legitimate inhabitants, such as Ethiopian wolves, Kamchatka brown bears, Arctic wolves and muskoxen, and emperor penguins, etc.

He loves travelling alone, mingling adventure, his love of nature, and photography, developing his own expeditions, with the constant goal of never being intrusive. In 2013, he spent a month alone with no assistance on the frozen island of Ellesmere, in the Canadian Arctic, at a latitude of 80° north. He had an encounter with a pack of nine Arctic wolves. These “phantoms of the tundra” would form the basis of his photo book, *ARCTIQUE* (2015).

THE VELVET QUEEN, another elusive predator that he would photograph for the first time in the spring of 2016 on the Tibetan plateau, would provide the basis for two other books in 2018, including *TIBET, MINERAL ANIMAL* with texts by traveller and writer Sylvain Tesson. 2021 saw the release of the film *THE VELVET QUEEN*, which he co-directed with Marie Amiguet.

Today, Vincent exhibits his photographs in art galleries throughout Europe and the United States, and he publishes his works in the international press. He is the author of a dozen books, founded the Kobalann publishing firm in 2010, and supports several associations for the protection of wildlife. His base camp is still in his homeland in the Vosges, where his son Simon was born in 2011.



ABOUT Michel Munier

Born in 1947, Michel Munier is a fervent defender of the ancient forests of the Vosges. In the 1970s, he travelled around the massif in all weather and had a decisive encounter with the western capercaillie, with its discreet and mysterious behaviour. He spent eight hundred nights lying in wait to experience these moments of grace and beauty. A naturalist, ecologist, and photographer, he has devoted his life to sharing his passion and raising awareness of the need to protect the wildlife and natural habitats of his native Vosges.

With his son, Vincent Munier, he authored the photo books *Clair de brume* (Hesse, 2007) and *Au fil des songes* (Kobalann, 2010). He is also the author of *L'oiseau-forêt* (Kobalann, 2022), an intimate narrative, love song, and cry of distress, in which he invites us to greater sobriety and a more respectful approach to the natural environments around us.

Bestiary

WESTERN CAPERCAILLIE

The ghostly bird of the frozen dawn. A relic of the ice age, it flees as soon as it is disturbed. To get anywhere near it, you have to become invisible. Its disappearance rings out like a sombre lesson, reminding us of the fragility of the balance of nature.

EURASIAN PYGMY OWL

A miniature owl that is impossible to find when silent. It reveals its location with its cry, a tenuous dialogue with the lucky few. An apparition at dusk, curious and persevering. A discreet spring-time messenger.

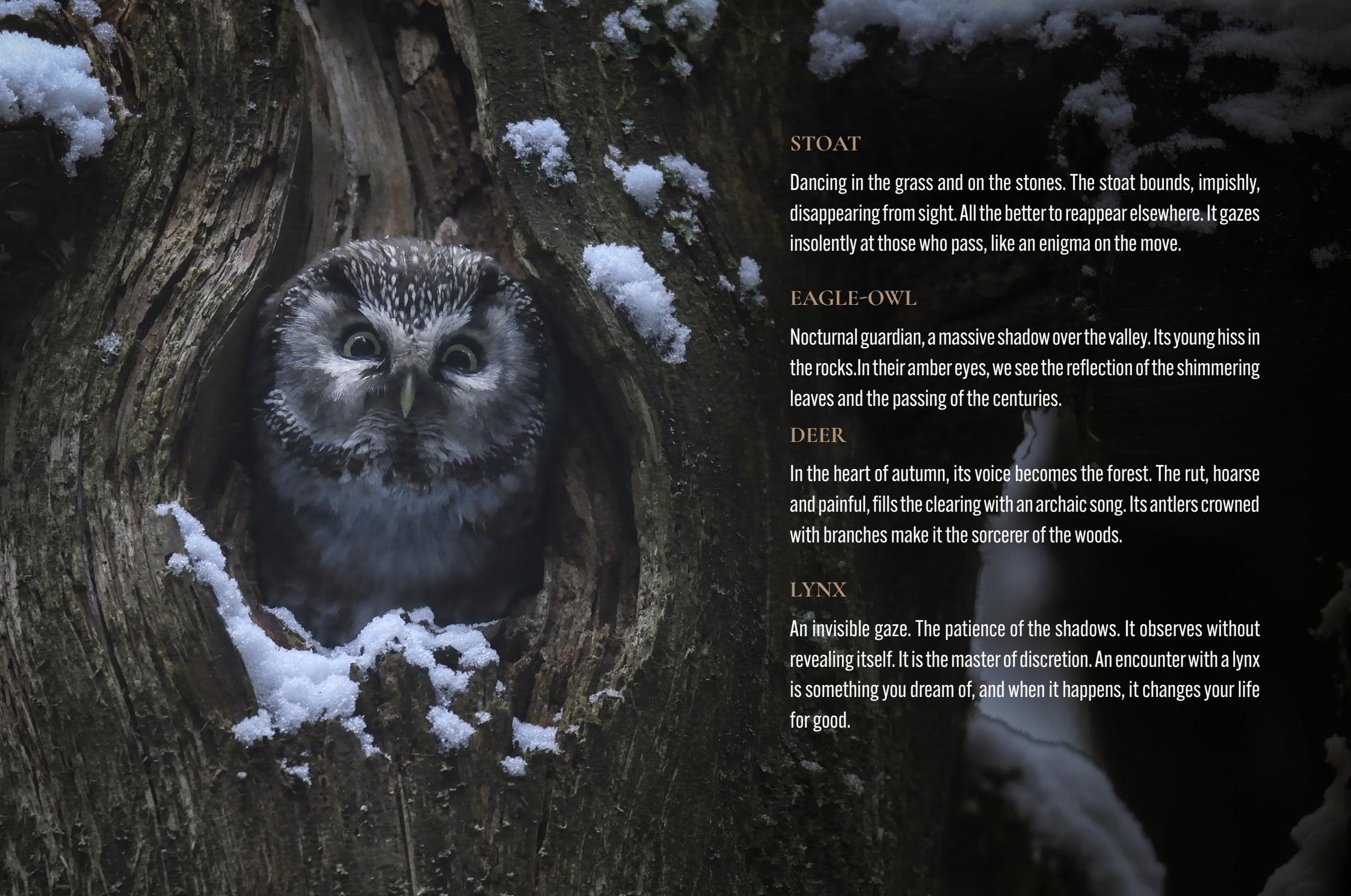
EUROPEAN WILD CAT

A furtive silhouette on the edges of the snowy forests. Its tracks can be confused with those of domestic cats, but lead to secret burrows and lairs in the rocks. You believe that you are on the lookout for it, whereas in fact, it is the one on the lookout for man.

RED FOX

The red fox is cunning incarnate. A courageous mother who will stand up to humans to defend her young, yelping at the slightest danger. In the snow, her cry tears through the silence as a reminder that courage is concealed in the thickets.





STOAT

Dancing in the grass and on the stones. The stoat bounds, impishly, disappearing from sight. All the better to reappear elsewhere. It gazes insolently at those who pass, like an enigma on the move.

EAGLE-OWL

Nocturnal guardian, a massive shadow over the valley. Its young hiss in the rocks. In their amber eyes, we see the reflection of the shimmering leaves and the passing of the centuries.

DEER

In the heart of autumn, its voice becomes the forest. The rut, hoarse and painful, fills the clearing with an archaic song. Its antlers crowned with branches make it the sorcerer of the woods.

LYNX

An invisible gaze. The patience of the shadows. It observes without revealing itself. It is the master of discretion. An encounter with a lynx is something you dream of, and when it happens, it changes your life for good.

Technical crew

Producers

PAPRIKA FILMS - PIERRE-EMMANUEL FLEURANTIN and LAURENT BAUJARD
KOBALANN PRODUCTIONS - VINCENT MUNIER

Coproducers

FRANCE 3 CINEMA - LE BUREAU - BERTRAND FAIVRE
CINÉ+ OCS - LA RÉGION GRAND-EST

With the backing of

and LE CONSEIL DÉPARTEMENTAL DES VOSGES (RÉSEAU PLATO)

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LE CNC - LE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS - L'OFFICE NATIONAL DES FORÊTS
LE CONSERVATOIRE D'ESPACES NATURELS DE LORRAINE
THE BUREAU SALES - LA FONDATION VISIO

Camera

VINCENT MUNIER - ANTOINE LAVOREL - LAURENT JOFFRION

Sound

VINCENT MUNIER - ANTOINE LAVOREL - LAURENT JOFFRION - LÉO-POL JACQUOT

Nature Sound Archives

MARC NAMBLARD - VINCENT MUNIER

Editing

LAURENT JOFFRION - VINCENT SCHMITT

Original Music

WARREN ELLIS - DOM LA NENA and ROSEMARY STANDLEY

Assistant Director

LÉO-POL JACQUOT

Sound Editing

OLIVIER TOUCHE

Nature Sounds Editing

MARC NAMBLARD

Direct Sound Editing

ROMAIN CADILHAC

Sound Effects

NICOLAS FIORASO

Sound Mix

OLIVIER GOINARD

Color grading

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