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March of the Penguins tells the remarkable story of emperor penguins who each year journey for hundreds of miles across the ice of Antarctica to reach their traditional breeding ground. After laying a single egg, the females return to the ocean for fish, leaving the males behind to guard the eggs, which they balance on top of their feet, even during snowstorms. After two months, during which the males eat nothing, the eggs begin to hatch. But if the mothers are late returning from the ocean with food, the chicks will die. French director Luc Jacquet spoke to us about the challenges of making *March of the Penguins*.

Your background is as a biologist. How did you become interested in penguins?

In 1992, I spent fourteen months at the French scientific centre in Antarctica doing research. In my career, I have also worked as a cameraman. I helped to shoot another film, *The Congress of the Penguins*, in 1995. I was also inspired by the sheer beauty of Antarctica, and I felt this was a great story for the movies. It has all the elements of great drama – love, life, death.

In the film, the narration comes from the penguins' perspective – we hear their thoughts. Why did you choose this storytelling technique?

I wanted to get away from the documentary genre and to write a story that made the viewer feel like he or she was really right there with the penguins.

How did you approach the penguins?

It was easy to get near them. They have never experienced any form of colonisation, so they're not scared of humans. They are also easy to work with because it's possible to anticipate everything they do – the route they will take, or how they will act in any given situation.

How would you describe the overall theme of the movie?

I wanted to tell things as I felt them, rather than as a scientist. It's about the struggle between life and death. The penguins have learned to live where no other creature can. This is what struck me the most. How do they do that? How do they manage?

The penguins are bad walkers. How did nature allow them to make this terrible trek across the ice?

That's a good question, and I haven't found an answer for it. But I think if you gave the penguins the option of spending all their lives underwater, they would take it.