April 29, 2015

BY AIR MAIL AND ONLINE FORM

Ofcom Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Re: Offensive and Harmful Killing of Endangered Crocodile on Channel 4’s “The Island with Bear Grylls”

To Whom It May Concern at Ofcom:

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, I am writing to submit a formal complaint against Channel 4’s “The Island with Bear Grylls,” which last week aired a highly harmful and offensive episode where contestants, who are dropped on the island and challenged to survive, killed and ate an endangered American crocodile. The Center is an American nonprofit conservation organization with more than 825,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

During the April 22, 2015 episode, contestants cornered the endangered crocodile and clamped its jaws shut with rope. Then three men jumped on its back, pinned the helpless croc to the ground and stabbed a knife into the back of its head, whooping and cheering as it died. The scene where the contestants kill the crocodile is available here: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3053336/Pictured-controversial-moment-contestants-Bear-Grylls-survival-Island-killed-protected-American-crocodile.html. The full episode can be downloaded here: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-island-with-bear-grylls/on-demand/59958-005.

Not only is the killing of any animal for entertainment harmful and offensive, the killing of this endangered animal is a clear violation of wildlife protection laws that apply to Panama, where the series is filmed. The American crocodile is protected under the Endangered Species Act of the United States, 50 C.F.R. § 17.11; see U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, American crocodile (Crocodylus acutus), at http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=C02J. Under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, the American crocodile is listed as threatened in Florida and endangered in the rest of its range, which extends through the Caribbean and Central America into South America. Moreover, Panama prohibits the hunting of crocodiles, as do nearly all countries with crocodiles.
A spokesman for Channel 4, which produces the show, claimed to be unaware that the endangered animals live on the Panamanian island where the show is filmed. They called the killing “a genuine and regrettable error” and acquired a license to “replace” the animal. Of course, that endangered crocodile is irreplaceable, and featuring its brutal death as entertainment is unconscionable.

These prehistoric-looking creatures were driven to near extinction by overexploitation for their hides. Illegal hunting, as well as habitat degradation from coastal development, continues to threaten their survival. With the extinction crisis facing crocodiles and other rare reptiles, it is necessary that broadcasters portray understanding and compassion to these creatures -- not promote the idea that rare wildlife can be needlessly and illegally butchered for entertainment.

As such, Channel 4’s airing of an episode featuring the brutal and illegal killing of an endangered animal violates Section 2 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which provides that “[g]enerally accepted standards must be applied to the contents of television and radio services so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material.”

We ask that Ofcom exercise its regulatory responsibilities and prosecute Channel 4’s violation of the regulatory rules. Please inform me of the outcome of your investigation and do not hesitate to conduct me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Collette L. Adkins
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