

Executive Summary

Film Title

Chicken

Tag Line

Out of the jungle, into the frying pan

Format

Feature-length theatrical documentary Film, plus interactive website and hardcover monograph

Subject Synopsis

Everyone in the world thinks they know about the chicken, but almost nobody realizes how crucial it is to our very survival. Chickens have shaped human history and now the wild ancestor of this ubiquitous livestock species, direct descendant of the dinosaurs, is in peril. Deforestation and habitat destruction for agricultural use is part of the problem, so is global over-population. The solution is less obvious: does it lie in the wild junglefowl who still hide out in pockets of Asian jungle, or in a paradigm shift in our relations with this feathered foodstuff? The consequences of ignorance and inaction could be catastrophic. Through the tropical forests of Southeast Asia to a traditional family farm in China; ultra-modern mechanized farms in Brazil; a private tour of Prince Charles' own generations-old family flock; Dr. Akishino Fumihito's genetic decoding of the history of the species' domestication; a wing-eating contest in a packed arena in Philadelphia, *Chicken* tells you the story.

Schedule

Preproduction:	March to July, 2011
Production:	July to December, 2011
Postproduction:	January to July 2012
Delivery:	August, 2012

Team

Writer and Executive Producer:	<u>Kermit Blackwood</u>
Producer:	<u>Nick de Pencier</u>
Directors:	<u>Jennifer Baichwal</u> , <u>Nick de Pencier</u>

Distribution

Major Festivals
International All-Rights Deals (Theatrical, TV, DVD, Educational/Institutional)
Interactive Website
Exhibition-format Monograph

Production Company:		<u>Kicking Thorn Productions</u>	Telluride, CO
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CHICKEN

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Treatment

Education of the worldwide public through media exposure to the evolutionary history, origins, domestication of and multi-cultural relationship with *Gallus domesticus* from time immemorial is our goal. We bring attention to the primary importance of the chicken in feeding global populations and its role in immunization and medical breakthroughs. This project explores scientific milestones in selective breeding and husbandry: the results of which produce billions of chickens and many tens of billions of eggs each year. Extreme genetic homogeneity of carefully selected commercial strains contrasts with the diverse history of regional breeds and races derived independently and refined by respective cultures around the world for at least ten thousand years.

The fascinating history begins as direct ancestors of the chicken emerge 150 million years ago during the height of the age of the dinosaurs. Later, visiting pristine wildlife parks with intact forest biomes, we draw attention to the natural history and plight of the chicken's wild ancestor, the *Junglefowl*. Global focus is needed, as dwindling populations of Junglefowl are critically endangered due to habitat misuse and wide scale deforestation.

Moving forward, we map centers of dispersal of the world's first domestic fowl, tracing the routes by which chickens were carried from continent to continent. Investigation of recent molecular evidence pointing to pre-Columbian trade between Polynesia, South America, China, and Central America add an intriguing narrative, which underscores the significance of this species in the migration of Neolithic cultures around the world.

The female Sri Lanka Junglefowl appears, fraying shards of both bark and flower from a wild cinnamon tree. Her cryptic plumage appears to be in the process of being disassembled, drawn back into fertile earth; her glowing eyes fastened to the slightest motion near and far away. Viewers are drawn to her immaculate form and grace; her infinite striations and starry breast, painted and stenciled in the scheme of nature's own hand. Ever-vigilant, her mate sounds off his provocation song close by. Kermit Blackwood introduces us to this wild species, one of five progenitive species of the modern domestic chicken. We learn about the significance of Sri Lankan cinnamon during 14th century BCE, and how the Sri Lanka Junglefowl arrived in Egypt with this invaluable medicinal spice. We learn of humankind's earliest relationships with this creature and how that partnership served and deeply affected both over thousands of years.

Using creative graphics we explore the contributions chickens made in Neolithic revolutions around the globe, learning the importance of egg-enriched doughs and pastas in the expansion of the Roman Empire. Moving forward in history, we sail the seas with the Dutch East Indies Company, circa 17th century AD, gaining a vantage point on the enormous impact of Dutch colonialism and how this nation came to carry unusual races of domestic fowl from Indonesia to the Netherlands and Japan, forming the basis of a renaissance in poultry-keeping and selective breeding throughout Europe.

We learn how boom-towns throughout the American West depended on the innovation of Chinese migrant workers to provide much needed nutrition. Supported by Tantoo Cardinal's narration, images of those pioneers —of famished settlers and gold-panners— underscore a message: chicken and eggs featured prominently in the survival of these laborers and the subsequent completion of the Trans-Continental Railroad.

The significance of chickens and poultry products for many different socio-economic groups is described with film footage/images of Dayak longhouses deep in the jungles of Borneo; subsistence farming villages of Chile; small-scale egg-vendors in suburban India selling to burgeoning middle-class consumers; Hong Kong poultry markets selling chickens and eggs to an enormous city; chickens as pets in upscale Manhattan and chickens as prize-winners in a gallinaceous version of a kennel club. We are also introduced to King Tutankhamen's pet Sri Lanka Junglefowl rooster as an example of the chicken aficionado in antiquity.

An integral story is clarified: chickens, being as admirably adaptable as they are, are products of their environment, and that environment is intimately connected with humans. We see domestic fowl in widely disparate ecosystems, from the harsh deserts of South America to the steaming primeval rainforests of Indonesia. We explore just how it is that chickens survive in very different climatic regions throughout the world, learning about the foraging strategies accrued from their ancient ancestors, those bird-like dinosaurs of the Cretaceous.

The inherent relationship between insect pests of humankind and the needs of domestic fowl are explored with emphasis on the enigmatic case of the chickens of Easter Island, which survived almost exclusively on flies, mice and grass seeds under the constant bluster of frigid Antarctic winds.

This feature-length documentary film will draw attention —in a manner accessible, entertaining and compelling— to the need for collaborative conservation efforts and the benefits of promoting genetic diversity within global agricultural poultry production. We will delve into science and then reach beyond it to culture, taking a journey through the religious, sociological, medicinal, culinary, and political influence of the chicken. By using an artistic and entertaining presentation of the critical role this species plays in the history of humankind, we will deeply engage the audience. And through the research portion of the film, a better understanding of those pivotal first steps in domestication can be explored and shared.

Chicken has the potential to reach a wide variety of ages, nationalities, cultures and communities. By both celebrating and deconstructing the world's most important and misunderstood livestock species, we will inspire greater respect, further research and conservation. Ultimately, we hope to further global comprehension of the complex relationship we humans, throughout history, have shared with this astonishing bird.