

Winter Taiga

A family of reindeer herders in Mongolia

A documentary by Dominique Snyers
with an original music from Marco Rosano

www.wintertaiga.com — ©2024

Short Synopsis

Magsar and Ankhaa raise their children and reindeer in a remote valley in northern Mongolia. How do they cope with the onslaught of winter in the high taiga? Chloé and Dominique want to find out. The kindness that emanates from their symbiotic relationship with the animals is matched only by the warmth with which they welcome their first winter visitors.

Synopsis

Chloe rescues and trains wild horses in New Zealand. In her quest to understand and document traditional husbandry practices, she has developed a close relationship with a family of Mongolian reindeer herders from the Dukha ethnic group. She has visited them many times, but never in winter, when temperatures drop so low that the family has to split up. The mother, Ankhaa, stays in the valley so the children can go to school. The father, Magsar, takes the reindeer to higher altitudes where they can still feed on lichen, almost safe from wolves.

This year, Ankhaa and Magsar insisted that Chloe spend part of the winter with them. Accompanied by Dominique, a film-maker friend, she arrived at the winter camp on the back of a reindeer. Huddled around the stove in the camp's only tent, two different visions of the world collide. On the one hand, there is the fascination and unease of Westerners witnessing this disappearing nomadic way of life. On the other hand, there are the herders. Tied to modernity with satellite phones, solar panels and chainsaws, they are baffled by the infernal circus of tourists who visit them.

But in winter, stereotypes quickly dissolve into the gestures of common survival. Melting snow, eating and sleeping in a crowded teepee at -30°C, washing dishes in the snow, and so on. In the face of winter and the threat of wolves, only the essential remains: the affection of parents for their children and the universal bond between animal and human societies as they merge their destinies in an unforgiving environment.

Magsar and Ankhaa are working hard to secure a future for their family's future. Thanks to them, the children now have a choice: stay on the Great White Steppe, or leave for an uncertain future elsewhere - most likely in the city. From now on, the choice is theirs. Magsar and Ankhaa know this and will respect their individual decisions.

Trailer : vimeo.com/942061107



Director Biography - Dominique Snyers



For over 30 years, I've been introducing generations of young adventurers into the great outdoors, teaching them how to mitigate and embrace the risks that come with it.

More recently, as an extension of my passion for sharing, I've started making documentaries about the discoveries that these adventures bring. My film "Loic and the Flolopapys" won the *Best Climbing Film* award at the Kendal Mountain Film Festival in 2020.

With a Master's degree from Stanford University and a PhD from the University of Caen, I've also been a researcher in collective intelligence, a professor in engineering schools and the founder of several start-ups.

Dominique Snyers' film portfolio : www.agilebirds.com

Director Statement

The reindeer herders of Mongolia - the Dukhas - are usually filmed in the summer with many clichés that reflect our own exotic and nostalgic visions more than their actual conditions. They are portrayed as the last of the nomads, even though they have houses in the nearest town to send their children to school; as close to nature, even though smartphones and satellite phones clutter their pockets; as living in harmony with their animals, even though they struggle to keep them alive in increasingly hot summers and cold winters due to climate change, which is already affecting the Siberian regions.

Our film is not meant to be an ethnographic study, but a real film with a raw perspective on the reality of pastoralism today and all the challenges these populations face. We will focus on transmission and the universal relationship between parents and children. What will Magsar and Ankhaa pass on to their children? Dawaadorj, the youngest, is outgoing, while Sumya, the eldest, is more reserved. What do they want to do with their lives compared to their parents' dreams? What will be left for future generations?

We follow this Dukha family through the winter, something that has rarely been done before. We follow their reindeer transhumance, which is also a first. Entering their habitat, sharing their lives, their questions, their worries: witnessing first-hand the relationship between parents and children, with the reindeer "in the middle".

We engage with them through our camera because we know them and respect them. We film on a human level, without effects, in a dynamic and close-up way, with only a few aerial shots to project these relationships into the immensity of the taiga. We observe each other from the same common human condition.

With the participation of

Driver
Interpreter
Mother
Father
Eldest son
Younger son
Uncle
Horse trainer
Chloe's mother
Expedition leader
Film maker

Unenburen Yundenbat
Tuguldur Chuluunbaatar
Ankhaa Bayaraa Tsagaandari
Magsar Batbayar
Sumya Batbayar
Davaadorj Batbayar
Lukas Bayaraa
Chloe Philips-Harris
Suzanne Philips
Régis Defurnaux
Dominique Snyers

Original Soundtrack by Marco Rosano

Winter Taiga
A film by Dominique Snyers

1. River Drops (5:14)
2. Voyage (2:45)
3. Circle Of Life (4:09)
4. Beyond The Silence (3:27)
5. Field of Vision (5:41)
6. Roads To Wonder (4:02)
7. Wolf Attack (4:41)
8. A New Day (3:36)
9. White Infinity (5:54)

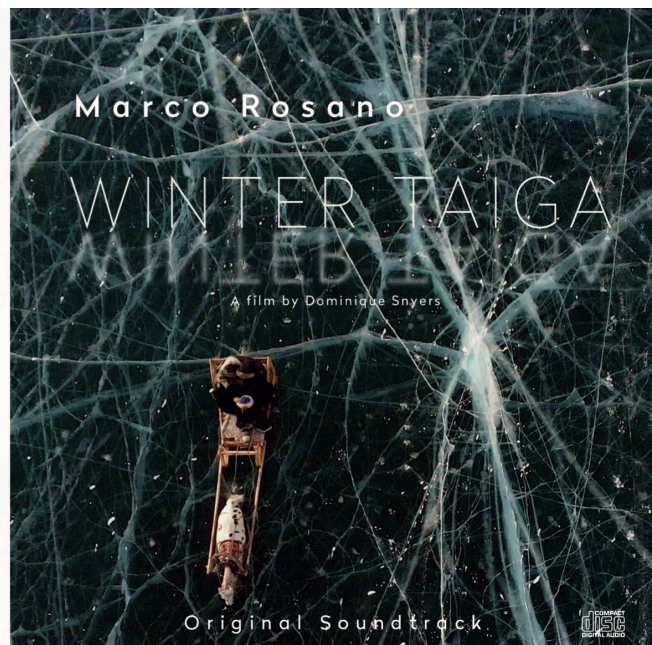
Musicians

Vocals	Nabila Trindade
Double Bass	Alessandro Saccone
Drums and Percussions	Gianluca Donati
Piano and Keyboards	Marco Rosano

All the songs were composed by Marco Rosano for the movie "Winter Taiga", except "White Infinity" which was written by Alessandro Saccone.

www.wintertaiga.com

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The Dukhas: the last reindeer herders of Mongolia

« The Dukha are reindeer herders. They are from a minority group living in forests and mountains between Mongolia and Russia. Their ancient nomadism was stopped in 1944 when the Russian-Mongolian border closed, separating many families. Their territory cut off – north of Lake Khövsgöl in Mongolia and south of Lake Baikal in Russia – is nevertheless made of the same landscapes of ice and snow, the same red bays and singing streams, wolves and bears, blinding lights, frozen fingers and burning fires. There is magic in their territories, there is a mix of freedom and vulnerability. It's not a romantic world but it's genuine and therefore wild. The course of the sun, the subterranean voices of the shamans and life with the herds are alike. But on one side of the border, the reindeer remained partners; on the other, they became winter boots sold all over neighbour countries. Oscillating between disappearance and transformation, this reindeer culture split between two countries is precipitated at great costs in the blind mechanisms of globalisation.

Dukha (whose exonym is Tsaatan for Mongolians) are part of the "Tuvan" ethnic group. This is the last furthest East Turkish-speaking group which makes them unique and isolated linguistically. Being animists, they underwent assimilation policies before becoming one of Mongolia's tourist attraction pole. While they survive on subsidies to stem the rural exodus, recently deprived of the right to hunt and facing extravagant appetites from tourists, they nevertheless retain a relationship of partner with their reindeers. Endearing creatures, Christmas icons, these reindeer have an ancient symbiotic relationship with the nomads, even when they become sedentary. During the winter, the women stay in wooden houses in the nearest villages (like Tsagan Nuur) so children can attend school. The men stay in the high valleys and care for the animals in the isolation of winter.

These reindeer herders are hyper connected, directly concerned by the challenges of Mongolian society like the future of rurality, and affected by climate change which does not spare the taïga – in the summer 2019 and 2020, it was on fire. While they migrate their reindeers at every season, they are facing lots of challenges and issues affecting their identities and their daily lives. It's about nature, social changes, incomes, transition and education. It's about climate change steadily burning their animals and where they belong. It's about staying themselves while suffering globalised consequences from another way of life. »

(From **Where we belong** also published in **The New York Times** and **GEO Magazine** by **Regis Defurnaux**.)

Film Crew

Video	Dominique Snyers Chloe Philips Harris Lorentz Snyers
Editing	Dominique Snyers
Sound	Pierre Bruyns - Bleu Nuit
Graphic design	Vincent Hanrion Simon Maurissen
Post-production	Dominique Snyers
Mongolian translation	Tuguldur Chuluunbaatar
Director of photography	Régis Defurnaux
Production	Agile Birds sprl

Agile Birds Production

Winter Taiga is produced by Agile Bird SPRL in co-production with Bat-Erdene Batsure Production 54, Mongolia.

Agile Birds produces documentary films about human adventures that reveal the universal bonds between people, animals and their environment. These films highlight the power of cooperation and friendship to weather natural and personal storms.

Specification

Project Type:	Documentary
Genres:	Travel, Mountain lifestyles, Adventure Ethnography
Runtime:	48 minutes 43 seconds
Completion Date:	June 22, 2024
Country of Origin:	Belgium
Country of Filming:	Mongolia
Languages:	English, Mongolia
Subtitles:	English, French
Aspect Ratio:	16:9
Codec:	DCP, MP4, ProRes

Publications

- [On the Move With Mongolia's Nomadic Reindeer Herders](#), New York Times, August 23, 2021.
- [Mongolie : voyage avec les Dukha, éleveurs de rennes semi-nomades](#), Geo Magazine, n°519-May 2022.
- [A Face of History](#), Sony Image Focus.