
DOK Leipzig
International
Competition
Documentary Film
2025
THE INHERITORS
A FILM BY
SERGE-OLIVIER RONDEAU
WITH THE RING-BILLED GULL COLONY OF DESLAURIERS ISLAND

2025 · DOCUMENTARY · 79 MINUTES · 5.1 · CANADA

By centring the voice of a colony of ring-billed gulls, *The Inheritors* disrupts the usual perspective of wildlife documentary and explores new ways of living and dying on a planet haunted by mass consumption and pollution.

LES HÉRITIERS (ORIGINAL TITLE) · FRENCH · ENGLISH & FRENCH SUBTITLES





SYNOPSIS

As we stand at the brink of a sixth extinction caused by human activity, countless species are adapting swiftly, thriving in our shadow and foretelling the ecologies of the future. *The Inheritors* is guided by one such species, the ring-billed gull, in an exploration of our shared world.

Each spring, tens of thousands of these gulls migrate to a small island in the Saint Lawrence River near Montreal to nest alongside Canada's largest landfill, an essential source of food for their young. Tracing a full reproductive season, the film offers an arrestingly intimate observation of the colony's social organization, emotional life and daily rituals in an increasingly inhospitable ecosystem. Alternating between the perspectives of prey and predator, we follow the gulls as they become the targets of invasive data collection, then of harsh deterrence measures using the age-old art of falconry. For these unwanted creatures, threats arrive from both land and air in the form of flesh, feather and metal.

With a soundtrack that lets the voices of the birds speak for themselves and cinematography that prioritizes their gaze, *The Inheritors* is a sensory experience which invites us to contemplate new ways of living and dying on a planet haunted by mass consumption and pollution.

“A film that succeeds in conjuring deep empathy for a species that we usually think of as a pest – without voice over, music or any other classic devices. This is bold, courageous filmmaking.”

MATSALU NATURE FILM FESTIVAL
★ GRAND PRIX ★

“It’s wild, dynamic and thrilling. Rarely does a nature or wildlife documentary manage to distance itself so completely from the human perspective and create such a sense of closeness to these magnificent beings.”

TESTKAMMER · DOREEN KALTENECKER

“The film confronts us with its raw, pervasive sensory power [...]. It awakens us to the intimate relationship we share with the living world, evoking it without ever explaining it to us.”

SÉQUENCES · JONATHAN QUESNEL

“Through a rigorous and distinctive cinematic language, the director lends this world a ruthless, cynical aesthetic power, whose most disturbing quality lies in the tension between attraction and repulsion.”

FESTIVAL MENTE LOCALE – VISIONI SUL TERRITORIO
★ BEST DOCUMENTARY AWARD ★



FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Dok Leipzig · 2025
International Competition Documentary Film

Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal (RIDM) · 2025
Magnus Isaacson Competition

Vues sur Mer · 2026
Official Selection

Dokumentarfilmwoche Hamburg · 2026
Official Selection — Closing Film

Festival international Jean Rouch · 2026
Cap sur l'environnement Competition
★ SPECIAL MENTION — GAÏA JURY
★ IMAGES EN BIBLIOTHÈQUES PRIZE

Arkipel Jakarta International Documentary and Experimental Film Festival · 2026
International Competition

Festival du Cinéma Documentaire du Grand Bivouac · 2026
International Competition

Prague Science Film Fest · 2026
International Competition

DokuBaku International Documentary Film Festival · 2026
International Competition

Matsalu Nature Film Festival · 2026
International Competition
★ GRAND PRIX

Andares Contemporary Film Festival · 2026
Official Selection — Opening Film

Science New Wave Festival · 2026
Official Selection

Festival Mente Locale – Visioni sul territorio · 2026
International Competition
★ BEST DOCUMENTARY

WATCH DOCS. Human Rights in Film International Film Festival · 2026
Green Dog Competition

Festival du Film de Masuku Nature et Environnement · 2026
International Competition

FAYOUM International Film Festival for Environmental Films & Contemporary Arts · 2026
International Competition



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Today, animal species are going extinct at 10,000 times the natural rate. In Canada, where I live, one in five species is considered endangered. The root cause of these extinctions, one way or another, is the presence of human beings and our economic activities. In a context where radical change in our way of life and our economy are unlikely in the short term, *The Inheritors* arises from a reflection on the possibilities for life in the ecosystems we have disturbed. Who will inherit the world we're transforming?

With this question in mind, I grew interested in the category of species biologists sometimes call "invasive" or "nuisances"; those animals who, caught in the teeth of the crises we've caused, find ways to exploit new ecological opportunities to thrive. These animals are, for one reason or another, often maligned and considered unwanted. One such reason is that, rather than flee before us as most animals do, these species have undertaken to live among us, interacting with our environments in ways we hadn't anticipated or desired. Since we are the most invasive species of all, one that's flourishing across the world, there is undoubtedly no better evolutionary strategy than to use us to help themselves prosper.

When I discovered that one of North America's largest colonies of ring-billed gulls migrates from the Gulf of Mexico every year to Montreal, a journey of over 3000 kilometres, to nest beside the busiest landfill in Canada and use it as their food source, I knew at once that I'd found the unwanted creature I was looking for. Through this animal, I could explore the landscapes of desolation we humans create and the new and sometimes surprising ways of living that they bring into existence. In these troubled times, known as the Anthropocene, we have little choice but to seek out life in our ruins and take hope from it. We may even have something to learn from the creatures who manage to turn our disruptions to their advantage.



Decentering the human gaze

Like my last two films, *Grand National* and *Resources*, *The Inheritors* offers a narrative that intertwines human realities with those of non-humans. This time, however, I wanted to put the animals front and centre, experimenting with a narrative carried by the perspectives and voices of the birds rather than relying on human presence, dialogue or music. The film provides a glimpse into the largely unknown daily life of gulls, the various stages of their reproductive cycle and the interactions they have with the new "predators" of their disrupted ecosystem. First, scientists collect organs from the colony; then, a wildlife officer and her falcon try to control the gulls' presence at the landfill. Even as these perspectives intertwine, the animal experience is given precedence especially that of the gulls. Humans, their motivations, and their objectives are relegated to the periphery, allowing us to decenter our own gaze. *The Inheritors* departs from traditional wildlife documentaries in several ways: we follow a familiar animal through landscapes that are in no way exotic; humans continually intrude, yet they do not shape the story; and no off-screen voice is given the power to explain what we're seeing. Instead, the film invites us to reconnect with an embodied, animal experience of the world, to see it from a new perspective: with the eyes of a bird. Part observational cinema, part experimental ethnography, my approach creates space to cultivate the art of seeing and listening, as a way of making ourselves sensitive to the living beings we're evolving alongside.

Birds as film subjects

It took me two years of fieldwork to establish the gulls as main characters and allow viewers to imagine the world from their perspective. I built an observation blind in the colony before the birds arrived in early spring For several days a week across two breeding seasons, I'd settle into the blind at dawn and remain there until nightfall. I spent up to twelve hours at a time inside that little shelter of scarcely six feet tall and wide, never stepping foot outside to minimize disturbance to the colony.

When I started filming, it was hard to see anything but an amorphous mass of gulls behaving chaotically through the blind's three small openings only big enough for my camera lens. Even though I'd prepared by studying their behaviour in scientific articles and had the help of biologists, it was only after several weeks of observation that I began to perceive the individuals within this mass of birds, to comprehend their personalities, their actions and motivations. I had the odd sense that I was getting closer to their point of view, their way of thinking, which allowed me to anticipate their actions and reactions. I even came to recognize the voices of certain individuals, and each call started making sense to me. This process resembles the one described by J.A. Baker in *The Peregrine*, in which one's human subjectivity gradually blends into that of the animal being observed so intensely, allowing one to grasp their own perspective. And so with time, my camera became much more precise. It began to move with the gulls, giving an initial interpretation of their behaviour and offering an immersion in their world. →

The sound of the colony was entirely reconstructed in postproduction, using recordings I made with microphones I placed near the nests, to match the sense of proximity in the image. Since a colony of gulls is extremely noisy, the recordings stretched on for several hours to isolate sounds during the brief periods of calm. This enabled me to collect a range of calls that do not exist in the main sound banks of gull calls. In sound editing, we created our own bank from these recordings and a lexicon of the "language" of the gulls, to ensure we resynchronized them to the footage in a way that respected their intentions.

To capture the falcon's experience, we developed a helmet equipped with a camera for the bird to wear. This helmet, created in collaboration with the falconers, had to be light enough for flight speeds that sometimes exceeded 150 km per hour. The falcon received a year and a half of training to develop the physical fitness necessary to fly with this added weight, which represented about 8% of its total mass. This camera let us see what the falcon was looking at during its brief periods of unobstructed sight when it took to the sky, and to encounter its own subjectivity, since it was the one directing the camera.

Learning from the gulls

By letting ourselves be guided by the gulls, with their remarkable ability to adapt, survive and even prosper in the devastated landscapes that now make up our shared world, *The Inheritors* invites us to reevaluate our understanding of nature. These unwanted creatures confound the idea that nature is full of creatures fundamentally different from us, that we alone possess consciousness and the ability to shape the world; they help dispel the myth of human exceptionalism, which has led us into climate crisis and mass extinction. The gulls offer us a lesson in humility. The living world is not a static, passive inheritance but one in a constant state of change, driven by a vital force of creation. These birds open our eyes to a biological world that, though weakened by humanity's endless affronts, remains ever powerful. In borrowing their perspective, we see that we're just one species among many, and that it's our uncertain relationships with one another that form the planet's history and foretell the ecologies of the future—relationships we have little control over, and in which no place is guaranteed. It is my hope that this shift in perspective can open new ways of considering the political issues of coexistence between humans and non-humans, in both old and newly emerging forms, with greater sensitivity and respect.



CREW

Written and directed by
Serge-Olivier Rondeau

Produced by
Serge-Olivier Rondeau · Les Films de l'Autre

Cinematography and Sound Recording
Serge-Olivier Rondeau

Additional Sound Recording
Félix Lamarche

Editing
Anouk Deschênes

Sound Design
Samuel Gagnon-Thibodeau

Colour Grading
Sylvain Cossette

Sound Mixing
Jean Paul Vialard





DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Serge-Olivier Rondeau is a filmmaker whose work intersects media arts and experimental ethnography. His films and installations explore the relationships between humans and non-humans—particularly animals, plants and technology. His work has appeared in numerous exhibits and festivals across Canada and internationally, including as a member of the group Épopée and co-founder of the After Faceb00k collective. *Fractures*, an installation featuring the films *Ruptures* and *Insurgence* and focusing on the Quebec student strikes of 2012, was featured at Manif d'Art 7. As part of the Mois de la Photo à Montréal, the McCord Museum exhibited *In Loving Memory <3* an immersive nine-screen video dedicated to Facebook users who live on after death on the site's servers. In 2021, he co-directed his first feature-length documentary *Ressources* with Hubert Caron-Guay, which made its premiere at IDFA. The film examines the modes of existence of animals, humans and landscapes caught up in the industrial meat production chain. *The Inheritors*, his second documentary feature, launched at Dok Leipzig.

FILMOGRAPHY & VIDEO INSTALLATIONS

The Inheritors, 2025, 79 min, documentary
Resources, 2021, 99 min, documentary
Grand National, 2021, 21 min, documentary & video installation
In Loving Memory <3, 2016, 45 min, video installation
Fractures, 2014, 287 min, video installation



LES FILMS DE L'AUTRE

F3M

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DISTRIBUTOR

Sylvain Lavigne
Les Films du 3 Mars
distribution@f3m.ca
+1 514-523-8530

MEDIA RELATIONS

Caroline Rompré
pixelleX communications
caroline@pixellex.ca
+1 514-778-9294