

HOW A NATIONAL NUISANCE HELPED SHAPE AUSTRALIA AND ITS PEOPLE

THE GREAT

AUSTRALIAN

FLY

PRESS KIT

Producer SALLY INGLETON | Writer & Director TOSCA LOOBY  
Narrator JOHN DOYLE



1 x 55 MIN  
DOCUMENTARY

## **CONTACTS**

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Producer

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## **TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

Production Format: HD

Release Formats: HD CAM

Sound Configuration: Stereo

Year of Production: 2014

Duration: 55 mins

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### ONE LINE

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY looks at how a national nuisance helped shape Australia and its people.

### ONE PARAGRAPH

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY looks at how a national nuisance has shaped Australia and its people, confounding our scientists, influencing our lifestyle and defining the way we speak. But is its value misunderstood? The one-hour documentary explores how this much-maligned spoiler of the Australian summer is in fact a crime solver, healer, pollinator and street sweeper. We'd miss them if they were gone, yet we put huge amounts of energy into wiping them out. Is it time to call a truce? Directed by Tosca Looby and produced by Sally Ingleton, the amusing and intriguing film pays homage to a much-maligned invertebrate and the influence it has had on our world. Part social history, part scientific study, THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY introduces the people who devote their lives to flies through science, criminology, medicine, as breeders and for love. And it explains why we might need to stop swatting and start embracing the fly, because, like it or not, this pesky little insect looms large in our past, our present and our future.

### ONE PAGE

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY looks at how a national nuisance has shaped Australia and its people, confounding scientists, influencing our architecture and even the way we speak. But is its value misunderstood?

The one-hour documentary explores how this much-maligned spoiler of the Australian summer is in fact a crime solver, healer, pollinator and street sweeper. We'd miss them if they were gone, yet we put huge amounts of energy into wiping them out.

Directed by Tosca Looby and produced by Sally Ingleton of 360 Degree Films, the amusing and intriguing documentary pays homage to the much-maligned invertebrate and the influence it has had on our world.

Part social history, part scientific study and woven with humour, THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY introduces the people who devote their lives to flies through science, criminology, as breeders and for love.

They include Australia's only professional maggot farmer, **Dave Sheldon**, who has turned waste into a viable business, providing a reliable supply of maggots for use in fisheries and even crop pollination.

There is Queensland Museum's curator of entomology and avid bug catcher **Dr Christine Lambkin**, who is leading a charge to identify and name some of the thousands of endemic fly species still to be classified.



We meet **Associate Professor James Wallman** from University of Wollongong who's studying the amazing sex lives of flies.

**Claire Carter's** leg is so badly ulcerated surgeons have called amputation the only option. Enter clinical nurse **Catherine Brennan** whose medical maggots can save Claire from the knife.

The director of the University of WA's Centre for Forensic Science, **Professor Ian Dadour**, teaches the next generation of forensic entomologists how to read the story of murder as told by a maggot. That's when he's not picking maggots off dead bodies himself.

It also tells the story of immigrant entomologist, the late **George Bornemissza**, and his friend and colleague, **John Feehan**, who spearheaded the Australian Dung Beetle Project. By using dung beetles to break down cow pats – a breeding ground for flies – the program has reduced bush flies around the country and is credited with reviving outdoor dining in Australia.

And of course there's an enduring Aussie advertising icon: created in 1957 by ad men **Bryce Courtnay** and **Geoff Pike**, '**Louie the Fly**' is still going strong.

But despite Louie's claim to be "bad, mean and mighty unclean", is it possible the humble Australian fly – 30,000 species strong – could really do more good than bad?

Above all, THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY explains why we might need to stop swatting and start embracing the fly because, like it or not, this pesky little insect looms large in our past, our present and our future.





## *PRODUCTION STORY*

Flies. Many of us hate them. Some of us love them. But few of us know anything about them.

So when the subject of making a film about flies arose in a conversation with the ABC, award-winning documentary maker Sally Ingleton knew she had to be involved.

“Most people don’t know anything about flies, they see them buzzing around and the first thing they think is how do I get rid of the flies,” Ingleton said.

“I think there is also a fear of flies – they are seen to be dirty and to spread disease – and I thought it would be interesting to explore the subject. Are flies really as bad as people believe? We decided to tell a chronological history story, woven through with stories of the people who work with flies; who study them, draw them, catch them and breed them.”

No stranger to natural-history filmmaking, Ingleton is interested in the way our wildlife intersects with people and the impact humans have had on its behaviour and survival.

She has made documentaries about Little Penguins (PENGUIN ISLAND), kangaroos (KANGAROO MOB) and Tasmanian devils (DEVIL ISLAND).

Recently she completed POSSUM WARS, which lifts the lid on the private world of an unpopular Australian marsupial and its fight for survival in the city.

While filming POSSUM WARS, Ingleton found that the more people learnt about possums – and their battle to survive – the more they felt sympathy for possums’ plight. Would they feel the same about the great Australian fly?

Ingleton began to research the subject and soon found there was a lot more to the fly than she realised.

“Once we started contacting entomologists, we started to learn that flies do a lot of good. Maggots are incredibly fast at getting rid of carcasses and they also play a role in helping to solve crimes. It was obvious it was a really rich subject so the next challenge was to find a way to make it amusing to keep people watching.”

For director Tosca Looby, keeping the film fast and funny was key.

“The biggest challenge is to create a film about flies that people want to watch,” Looby said. “Flies are very instinctive creatures and have very few neurons, but sometimes they do things that are almost human. We hope viewers can appreciate the inherent comedy in flies as well as learn about some of their interesting aspects.”

It also was important to stop people switching off; fly behaviour is not always for the faint of heart.

Once, while flying back from a film shoot, Looby was transcribing rushes when the passenger beside her – transfixed by revolting scenes of a maggot ball in the mouth of a decomposing possum – leaned in to ask what she was watching.

“My threshold is quite high – you lose a sense of it yourself – but decomposition is not really appealing to most people, so we left some of those scenes out and we have used time-lapse photography to make it less confronting,” she said. “It also had to be a human story. We were interested in why these people were interested in flies.”

Comedian **Frank Woodley** appears throughout the film, adding wit and humour.

But much of the humour comes from the experts, who combine to tell the story of the fly: the entomologists who devote their lives to identifying and documenting new species; the bug catchers who stalk them with nets; the maggot farmer who breeds them; and the animators whose creation, *'Louie the Fly,'* has earned a place in Australian advertising folklore.

“One of the scientists we meet is studying the courting behaviour of flies – he’s just so full of enthusiasm and it is strangely infectious and also quite funny,” Looby said.

Finding people to be involved has proved surprisingly easy.

“It’s actually a very small field so you find one person and they say ‘you’ve got to talk to this person and you’ve got to talk to that person’,” Ingleton said. “Many of them were over the moon that we were doing the film; that there was someone else who appreciated flies.”

The flies, naturally, are central to the film and Looby, and macro cinematographers Peter Nearhos and Peter Coleman, used the latest technology to capture them in all their glory.

“Flies have evolved over so many years that they are perfectly engineered to do what they do,” Looby said. “They can really duck and weave. They can move backwards and their whole body turns to avoid a collision. They are amazing flying machines.”

High-speed photography – up to 200 frames per second – allowed them to capture every movement.

“We did a lot of macro work using a probe lens that allowed us to get inside a possum’s corpse and film the lifecycle in detail,” she said.



“We also used a drone to collect footage – putting a Go Pro (a tiny, high-quality camera) up in the air and flying it on a drone so we could capture a fly’s point of view. We even put them into the maggot beds so we could film fish heads being eaten by maggots.”

One of the greatest challenges was caused by a delay in financing the film – something common to many Australian projects.

“Unfortunately we didn’t have all the money in place over summer when flies are at their peak,” Ingleton said.

“That meant we had to film in winter when the flies were dormant and that meant sourcing the flies from a maggot breeder, hatching them in an incubator and then working out ways to film them on tiny sets.

“We have some pretty funny tales about trying to keep these flies alive and trying to keep them at the right temperature for hatching – the fridge at work was full of fly pupae.

“Even when we did breed them successfully, they were dying really quickly. They’d only live for a day because it was just too cold. We kept losing our cast!”

The team also had alerts out to wildlife carers for dead possums that could be used for the purposes of filming time lapses of maggots devouring the carcass; dead possums also filled the freezer in the production office.

Fortunately the filmmakers had more luck sourcing historical footage – including of the infamous Louie – and amusing snippets of tourists posting their fly-blown experiences on YouTube.

Looby hopes viewers will leave the film with a renewed sense of respect for the humble Aussie fly.

“Making this film has made me look at flies more closely and when you see them close up, you have a very different experience,” she said.

“There’s so much more diversity than I could have possibly imagined and they can be so beautiful. There are some really gorgeous flies and I certainly wouldn’t have said that or imagined that before doing this film – it’s surprising how diverse and enchanting they can be.”



# KEY CONTRIBUTOR BIO'S



## **Dr Christine Lambkin**

Christine is the Curator of Entomology responsible for the Queensland Museum's collections of Diptera (flies), Coleoptera (beetles), Orthoptera (grasshoppers), Hemiptera (bugs), Phasmatodea (stick insects), and a number of smaller insect orders. Christine is fascinated by the evolution of flies and has discovered many new species amongst Australia's thousands of flies. Her passion led her to partner entomologist Dr Noel Starick. Together they have scoured the Australian bush searching for new species.



## **Associate Professor James Wallman**

Dr James Wallman works in the School of Biological Sciences in the Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health at the University of Wollongong. Since 1990 he has studied the biology of flies that infest both living and dead animals (including humans), with a special focus on their application to forensic science. A recent topic of investigation in his lab, with the assistance of researcher Stephanie Jones, has been the elaborate courtship behaviour of a common carrion-breeding species, the small hairy maggot blowfly.



## **David Sheldon**

Dave's family run business, Sheldon's Bait, is Australia's largest supplier of maggots. Originally the business bred the humble maggot for use in fishing, but over the years the business has expanded and their maggots now also play an important role in crop pollination. Dave loves his work and is happiest surrounded by millions of flies.

## **Geoff Pike & Cam Ford**

Geoff and Cam both worked in advertising in the 50's and 60's and were animators on the original '*Louie The Fly*' ads for Mortein.



## **Frank Woodley**

Frank Woodley is an Australian comedian who is best known for his work alongside Colin Lane as part of the comedic duo, Lano and Woodley. Frank performed his hilarious fly songs on ABC TV popular music quiz show SPICKS & SPECKS.

"Flies are covered in germs, which of themselves could potentially be dangerous. But people have evolved, you know have developed, over time a resistance to germs.

A fly's sex life is very little different from our own in fact. You know, Mr Fly is interested in finding a partner... his urge to reproduce is very great as is hers because flies don't live very long and so they have to make hay while the sun shines...

Their reproductive capability is staggering. Mr and Mrs Fly – if they're able to reproduce such that all of their offspring are then able to survive and uh produce offspring themselves, and so on, and so on, without any of those offspring dying, uh, within a year you would have a bundle of maggots the size of the earth."

*ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JAMES WALLMAN,  
ENTOMOLOGIST, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG*

“

"If we were without flies we would be covered in refuse, rotting vegetation would be everywhere... we would be in no end of trouble and the place would smell a lot worse than it does now.

We know 95% of the mammals on the planet...but for the spiders, the centipedes, the millipedes and the insects there's just so much more to be done... There are 7,800 species of fly in Australia described. We estimate that's only a quarter of what's out there.

One of the good things about studying flies is that we don't have animal ethics issues. It's considered amongst most scientists that insects don't feel. We use cyanide... so by the time I can get them home and they haven't got hard and crisp and I can pin them."

*CHRISTINE LAMBKIN, CURATOR OF ENTOMOLOGY,  
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM*

“There are some similarities between flies and humans when it comes to courtship behaviour. They signal to the female by raising their ornamented forelegs it’s like a salute almost. Like hello. I’m over here.”

*STEPHANIE JONES, RESEARCH ASSISTANT, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG*

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“We know from research that within half an hour of you being dead, you’re going to have flies visiting you ... at least in um Australia.”

*IAN DADOUR, FORENSIC ENTOMOLOGIST,  
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA*

“Insects are the food of the future... We don’t know what’s around the corner. Things are changing. And yeah, I could be like Coles or Foodland (laughs) with a truckload of maggots...”

*DAVID SHELDON, FLY & MAGGOT FARMER*

# AMAZING FLY FACTS

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- The fly's wings beat 200 times a second – fast as a formula one engine travelling at top speed.
- In one second, the fly can travel 300 times the length of its own body - turning faster than a fighter jet.
- Bush flies descend on humans and animals to dine on protein from sweat, tears and saliva.
- Their other main source of protein is dung, which doubles as a nursery for the maggot, or baby fly.
- In less than a week, one cowpat can grow 2000 new flies.
- Legend has it that Australians have adapted to speak with their mouths half shut to avoid swallowing flies.
- Flies have taste buds on their feet, savouring as they go. If something's good under foot, they release their feeding tube, or proboscis. At the end is a pad that works like a sponge, sopping up liquid.
- Flies are fastidious. Their bodies are covered in hairs sensitive to touch, taste and smell. The smallest fragment of gunk can block their fine-tuning. When a fly rubs its legs together it's cleaning.



## PUBLICITY ANGLES

- Interview with producer Sally Ingleton about the inspiration for THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY and her experience with flies.
- Interview with director Tosca Looby about the logistics of filming flies.
- Interview with Sally Ingleton and/or Tosca Looby about how their perception of flies has changed during the making of THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN FLY.
- Science story: The science behind the film. What research is being done into flies? Why do we need to know the mating rituals of flies? Why does it matter if climate change wipes out thousands of species? Interview with the researchers.
- How flies help solve crimes: Interview with forensic entomologist.

# WEBSITES

## **CSIRO Dung Beetle**

<http://www.csiro.au/Outcomes/Food-and-Agriculture/DungBeetles/History-of-dung-beetle-introductions-to-Australia.aspx>

## **Queensland Museum**

<http://www.csiro.au/Outcomes/Food-and-Agriculture/DungBeetles/History-of-dung-beetle-introductions-to-Australia.aspx>

## **James Wallman**

<https://smah.uow.edu.au/biol/contacts/UOW059402.html>

## **Sheldon's Bait**

<http://www.sheldonsbait.com.au/>

## **Louis The Fly Facebook site**

<https://www.facebook.com/louiethefly>

# PRODUCTION BIO'S

## **TOSCA LOOBY Writer and Director**

Tosca Looby is a writer and director with considerable experience across natural history, contemporary and magazine format television. She trained in the UK where she worked at ITV and Partridge Films before returning to Australia to take up a position as producer with the ABC Natural History Unit. In 2000 she moved to Perth and worked as a freelance director, producer and series producer for the ABC, Electric Pictures and Artemis Films.

In the past few years she has been writing and developing projects with Electric Pictures and 360 Degree Films and in 2012 worked at ABCTV as a development producer.

Her credits include HELLO BIRDY (ABC, 6X30), CAN WE HELP (ABC), TUG OF LOVE (SBS), which was nominated for a Logie, EYE OF THE TIGER (Discovery) and UNTIL DEATH DO US PART (SBS).

## **SALLY INGLETON Producer**

Sally Ingleton has been producing and directing award-winning documentaries for the past 30 years.

Her company, 360 Degree Films, works across many genres, including wildlife, environment, science, history, arts and people-based stories. Sally has produced more than 40 hours of quality documentary programming for broadcasters all over the world including the BBC, National Geographic Television, PBS in the US and ABC in Australia.

In 2013, Sally produced the six-part nature series DEVIL ISLAND for ABC, ITV, FRANCE TV; THE TALENTED MR STONE for ABC Arts; POSSUM WARS for ABC, Arte France and SVT and the nature/science documentary ACID OCEAN for PBS NOVA, SBS, ARTE FRANCE, ZDF Germany and SVT Sweden.

John Doyle is one of Australia's finest writers for stage and screen. John started life as a jobbing actor in 1980 appearing in several productions before creating the character of Roy Slaven in 1985, for ABC radio Triple J. Since 1986, Roy has appeared alongside HG Nelson on various television series including CLUB BUGGERY, THE DREAM, THE DREAM IN ATHENS and on the long running Sunday afternoon radio sports program THIS SPORTING LIFE on Triple J.

John has been honoured by the Australian Writers Guild for comedy on eight occasions and for both his mini-series, CHANGI and MARKING TIME. He has also won 3 Logies, an AFI Award for Best Screenplay in Television and the 2004 NSW Premier's Literary Award for Script Writing.

Since 2006 John has teamed up four times with Dr Tim Flannery for the documentary series TWO MEN IN A TINNIE, TWO IN THE TOP END, TWO ON THE GREAT DIVIDE and most recently TWO MEN IN CHINA.

**ANTONY PARTOS & DAVID McCORMACK Composers**

Antony Partos is one of Australia's most awarded film composers. His passion lies in creating innovative scores that morph acoustic with an eclectic mix of bespoke elements. His feature film credits include the Sundance Festival winning film, ANIMAL KINGDOM (starring Guy Pearce and Oscar nominee Jacki Weaver), THE HOME SONG STORIES (starring AFI winner Joan Chen), DISGRACE (starring Oscar nominee John Malkovich) and David's Michod's THE ROVER (starring Robert Patterson and Guy Pearce). ANIMAL KINGDOM, THE HOME SONG STORIES and UNFINISHED SKY have all won Best Original Score at Australia's AFI awards.

Others credits include: THE SLAP (Winner APRA-AGSC 2012 Screen Music Awards Best Television Theme and Best Soundtrack Album), MABO (Winner APRA-AGSC 2012 Screen Music Award Best Music for a Mini-Series or Telemovie), RAKE (Winner 2013 APRA Screen Music Award and 2011 AGSC Award for Best Music for a Television Series), REDFERN NOW Series 1 and 2 (2014 AACTA Award for Best Original Music Score in Television and 2013 APRA Screen Award for Best Original Song Composed for Screen).

His most recent projects include Channel Nine's hit TV drama series LOVE CHILD, ABC's JACK IRISH AND JANET KING.

ARIA award winning composer David McCormack has spent the last 25 years performing, writing and scoring his way across the globe.

As the lead singer/songwriter of Custard, David toured the world throughout the 90s.

David's feature film credits include ALEX PROYA'S GARAGE DAYS, WEST and BEING VENICE.

David's other credits include the TV series RAKE (series 1 and 2), WILD BOYS, REDFERN NOW, THE TALL MAN and HOUSE HUSBANDS.

**TONY STEVENS Editor**

Tony Stevens is one of Australia's most sought-after editors with more than 30 years experience cutting music clips, short films, TV drama, documentary and features. He has just completed series editing on DEVIL ISLAND. Other documentary credits include THEN THE WIND CHANGED, DR SARMAST'S MUSIC SCHOOL, KANGAROO MOB, PENGUIN ISLAND, SEED HUNTER, EYE FOR ARCHITECTURE, REVEALING GALLIPOLI, HUNT ANGELS, TIBET: MURDER IN THE SNOW, ALIEN UNDERWORLD and many more.