

Wil Wheaton Says Discovery Channel Has “Betrayed Its Audience”

By Chris Kirk

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An artist's rendition of the extinct *C. megalodon* Karen Carr/Wikipedia

The now-extinct 60-foot monster shark *C. megalodon* was real, but Discovery Channel's Shark Week documentary about it was entirely fake, and Wil Wheaton is outraged about it. The former *Star Trek: The Next Generation* star and geek icon rebuked Discovery Channel's producers for [neglecting the channel's stated mission](#) and betraying the 4.8 million people who watched *Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives* on Sunday:

Discovery Channel inspired an entire generation to “explore your world,” and it is *trusted to be truthful*. Discovery Channel says its mission is to satisfy curiosity and make a difference in people's lives by providing the highest quality content, services and products that entertain, engage and enlighten. There is

nothing high quality or enlightening about deliberately misleading your audience during what is historically an informative and awesome week of programming.

This isn't the first time Discovery Communications, the media company that runs the Discovery Channel, has broadcasted dubious documentaries, and judging from the ratings it won't be the last. The company also runs Animal Planet, which aired two pseudo-documentaries claiming to show scientific evidence of mermaids. The second documentary attracted 3.6 million viewers, [unprecedented for the network](#).

These faux documentaries, which can best be described as *anti*-educational, seem to have grown more common on in recent years. The Disney-owned History channel, for example, has earned criticism for airing pseudoscience programs like *Ancient Aliens*, *UFO Files*, and the *Nostradamus Effect* instead of programs about, you know, history.

If these programs offer any signs that they are fictional, they are [brief and inadequate](#) signs. Unsurprisingly, then, many viewers buy into the false claims these documentaries peddle. Shortly after Discovery's documentaries aired, for example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association found it necessary to assure the public that “[no evidence of aquatic humanoids has ever been found](#).”

As marine biologist David Shiffman wrote in **Slate**, [public misinformation about the ocean harms the effort to protect real aquatic life](#). “If you are so ignorant about what is really happening in the ocean that you believe that there are organisms that are half human and half fish, you're almost certainly unaware of the important problems, much less how to solve them,” he wrote. And fake shark documentaries aren't helping.

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